

Scripture Reading: Acts 11:22-23

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

When Jack and I began reading the Bible in 1990, Barnabas was one of the first persons we met. Immediately, I aspired to become an exhorter, an encourager like Barnabas. Several encouragers have affected my life in lasting ways in the decades since. Their encouragement has reinforced my belief in the importance of bolstering others and my desire to be alert to every opportunity to be a Barnabas.

In 2013, when I climbed Kilimanjaro five months after recovering from fulminating staphylococcal pneumonia that involved eight days on a ventilator, it was my personal porter, Daniel, who urged, encouraged, and prayed for me up that mountain to the 19,341-foot summit. He would say, "Bibi (grandmother in Swahili), you can do this from the first hour. You are strong like a lion." He did not know of the recent illness, but he asked about a slight wheeze he heard as we began the ascent. He did not decide that I was a little old lady with a big dream and little breath for the climb. I can't imagine how often each of the nine days Daniel would repeat softly, "Bibi, you can do this. You are strong like a lion." He would often add, "It is my privilege to help you reach your goal." Never did he say it was his job.

In the ensuing years, there have been friends, clergy, bicycle, and ski guides who have spoken encouraging words that have motivated me through demanding adventures and grueling months of rehab. My beloved husband, Jack, and our children always have had my back with a "Go for It!" or an attaboy. How many years did Jack Jeter cheer me in the kayak *across* the lake as I trained for the Dam-to-Dam swim and *down* the lake for the 2-1/4 mile Labor Day event?

Recently, two women have encouraged me differently but in equally significant ways. One sent me inspirational texts every single morning. Some days it is a Scripture verse, sometimes it is a cute cartoon with an

uplifting message, sometimes she adds a beautiful picture of a breathtaking bouquet of flowers. She hasn't missed a morning in over three months. A few weeks after receiving Nancy's texts, I saved and sent them to others. Oh, the notes of appreciation I receive. I love seeing how wide the circle of Nancy's ministry has become.

In a different scenario, just two weeks ago, I was whining to our young financial advisor that it was difficult to gather all the "stuff" the CPA needs to prepare our tax return. I told her, "I am so disorganized." She responded, "You are not disorganized; you are one of the most organized people of any age I have ever known."

Buoyed and encouraged, I returned home to attack my desk and its folders with the power and purpose of one of our Toxaway bears on a full garbage can. Beth transformed doubt and uncertainty into confidence and capability in one affirming sentence. I finished the task in hours instead of weeks.

For years I have dreaded the pall of Lent and the rigors of disciplining myself by giving up something "to get stronger in the faith." Not this year. Never again. Tonight, five days before Ash Wednesday, I have begun counting the ways I can be Barnabas to friends, neighbors, family, and total strangers.

When we return to LTUMC in July, I hope you will ask me about my 2022 Lenten resolve to become a Barnabas.

Prayer: Gracious God, This Lent I love; this Lent, let me not put my head on the pillow at night until I have expressed Your love with an encouraging text to at least five people that day. Amen.

~Submitted by Katherine F. Jeter for the Seventh Reading of Lent