



7TH JUNE 2018 – COLLEGE OF ST BARNABAS

(I bring greetings from Father Howard Such, who is now in our care in the diocese of Canterbury and comes from time to time to sing the office for us. He has been ever present since I went to Canterbury 17 years ago because two of his sons became our Virgers and then one of them married a Virger there, Sally, so we have a whole Virger family of Such's with three little boys growing up and helping out and I think we shall never be without that encouragement and influence).

Encouragement is what we're about today. The old translation which we used in the hymn for St Barnabas, 'The Son of Consolation,' is more normally nowadays translated 'The Son of Encouragement' and both words are of great comfort. Encouragement is one of St Benedict's most wonderful words that he used in his Rule to help and to make people realise that in community encouragement is one of the best gifts that we have to offer each other. We come this afternoon in our music to encourage each other. I'm encouraged by seeing so many clerical brothers and sisters around us and also to see a Doctor of Civil Law of the University of Kent sitting in front of me this afternoon. Thank you for being encouraging in the front row.

When we, as children, used to come home from church on a Sunday evening in the summer, our parents would say 'Let's take the long way home.' This was in south Gloucestershire, and the long way home meant climbing a large, but very attractive hill and at this time of year it was covered in white moon daisies and the flowers of the meadow, but the hill was steep. And when we finally got to the top there was standing there an object that I was reminded of in the

news about a month or two ago, when a significant anniversary was reached. We generally call them in England 'trig points' and there they are, set up by the Ordnance Survey back in 1938 I think, on each of the high points throughout England. Recently they celebrated an anniversary but at the time it was thought that England needed to be better mapped, more accurately mapped and therefore in England and right across the United Kingdom the trig points were set up. You can still, if you're so-minded, google the photographs associated with the anniversary from a couple of months ago. It showed people at different trig points. It showed one of the people having made it actually standing on a mountain top with snow around, with his little tin mug of hot water shaving on the trig point, looking out on to the landscape. But they were there for accuracy's sake. For us, when we climbed the hill on Sunday evening and supper seemed still a little way off, they were signs of encouragement. When I looked up trig points I found the correct word was triangulation and it was a point that didn't simply stand for encouragement all by itself, but actually took accuracy from the triangulation with other trig points around. I say that this afternoon because holy places like our two communities, Canterbury Cathedral and the College of St Barnabas, are actually trig points for the church. One can go from village to village, to the churches that are lovingly kept there. One can go from Cathedral to Cathedral, very often like Lincoln standing on a high place or like Salisbury standing in the vale but with its magnificent spire pointing to the heavens and giving you the sense not just of accuracy of location but a sense of triangulation with things spiritual as well as accuracy. One can go right across the world doing it, as I as Dean of the Mother Church of the Anglican Communion often do. You can go to a great Cathedral like Washington National Cathedral, modelled on Canterbury and standing high, or you can go to the great granite Cathedral in Harare, or you can go to what is now the ruin of Christ Church Cathedral in New Zealand and know with what love that building is held and with what care what will happen to it in the future is being planned.

Right across the world are trig points. But also right across our Christian calendar from saint to saint to saint, men and women grace the calendar as trig points and from them, I've already mentioned St Benedict and St Barnabas, from them we can take a triangulation. We can think of the gifts that each saint represents when one reaches his or her day and this whole season of St Barnabas, which you will keep as a patronal festival and the rest of the church will keep around you when we come to St Barnabas's Day, St Barnabas becomes that 'Son of Encouragement' who is very much a point of reference in our human behaviour and also in the way in which we realise effectively the love of God in the life of the church. Barnabas makes us feel glad because he's the one at the beginning who lays his money from the sale of the land at the feet of the Apostles. He's the one who, when everyone else is being a bit scared of St Paul, steps forward and gives him his hand and introduces him to the rest. There's a trig point for you in Barnabas, because people would say 'We know he is accurate. We must be right in this. If he takes Paul's hand we're in the right place.' And they begin to welcome Paul, or Saul as he has been called until then. Despite his past Barnabas was ready to be encouraging. But more than that, one can go on into the story of John Mark, his nephew. Now here you can do a little bit of triangulation of your own in the Greek gospels and testaments because you can then find and make assumptions, some of them guesswork, about how Barnabas fitted in to families which knew Jesus and were in Jerusalem for it was to John Mark's mother, Mary, her house that Peter went when the angel released him from prison and it was John Mark that Barnabas chose to go with him and Paul on the missionary journey. And John Mark's heart failed and halfway through he didn't feel himself brave enough to go on.

'The Christian life doesn't let you down,' says one of those lovely postcards that say 'Fail once, fail again, fail better' and here we are at the point when St Paul says, they're going on their third mission 'Let's go again' and Barnabas says 'Let's give John Mark another chance' and St Paul says 'No.' Barnabas

wants to take John Mark, St Paul says 'We can't have anyone with us who lets us down.' So, in a kindly way, Barnabas sets off on a journey with John Mark all by himself. And sails out of the Acts of the Apostles. But we can triangulate and see exactly how that story goes on and today I think we're glad of that sense of forgiving encouragement which Barnabas gives as we read about him in the Acts of the Apostles.

Trig points, however many of us are sitting or standing here today then there's that many trig points in this room for people, particularly when we are wearing the uniform of the Church of Christ, and also when we proclaim ourselves to be Christians, people look round at us, not necessarily those who are following the way themselves. They look round at us and see exactly how we are governing our lives. How we ourselves can be role models of encouragement. We've come to a Patronal Festival to do more than simply sing hymns and to sing canticles and to hear wonderful psalms of creation's encouragement which our psalm gave us this afternoon. We've come to re-dedicate ourselves and also to take reference, not only from this holy place, but from one another. We've come to a particular point and from there we shall go on and Barnabas is one of those who is important to us. But so, too, is the person that you can almost touch on each side of you as a point of reference and then we have to embrace the fact that we're that to them. How we behave, how we worship, how we relate in our own communities and then how we study and how we, in our minds and our hearts, triangulate what we've been told, so that accurately we go forward with God's will for us. All of that becomes crucial at a Patronal Festival because it's a time of re-dedication.

Afterwards we'll take refreshments together but first we have an opportunity to say our prayers in thanksgiving for God's gift of encouragement, in thanksgiving for this holy place which gives refuge and also a chance to think and reflect and triangulate ourselves with past experience in mind. All of that we've come to do but chief of all we've come to give thanks to God for the gift

of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who came to bring us forgiveness and heaven's encouragement every step of our human way.

Amen