

Charles L. Matthews
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In the book of Acts we read about a fellow named Barnabas. His name shows up a half-dozen times in the New Testament. The first time we meet him he's helping Paul find a place among Jesus' followers. Paul needed someone on his side because not long before, he'd been persecuting those same followers. But Barnabas saw that Paul had changed. He put good faith in him and in God's ability to bring good things out in people. We know a few other things about Barnabas, too. He sold some of his personal property and gave the money to the church. He spent a couple of years of his life traveling as a missionary. His name means "son of encouragement."

Barnabas isn't one of the 'big names' of the Bible. He's not as well known as Moses or David or Peter. But it's clear that his life had a purpose; that God used him to touch the lives of some very special people. And that long after he was gone, people still remember the difference he made.

Barnabas reminds me a little of Charlie. He was an encourager – by his words, but more than that, by his actions. He spent his life taking care of the people he loved. He tried to live a life of integrity, so people knew he could be trusted. He was a man of his word. And through that he made a difference in the lives of everyone he met.

Charlie was raised in a town outside New York City. After his schooling he started working for IBM – the same company he would retire almost a half-century later. When Charlie was in his early 20s the United States was fighting in World War II. Because he was legally blind in one eye, he could have gotten an exception for military service. But he wanted to serve his country, so he pushed until he could enlist in the Army. He was proud to served stateside as a gunner repairman.

When Charlie worked for IBM in Philadelphia, for fun he liked to go to mixers, where single folks would get together to dance and socialize. At one of those mixers he met a fetching young woman named Cora. I don't know if it was love at first sight, but they did like to dance together. Eventually he asked her to marry him ... and he kept asking until she finally said yes. That dancing turned into almost 60 years of marriage.

In 1956 IBM was opening a new facility here in Rochester. Charlie was one of the first employees at that new plant. The Matthews bought a house over on 7th Ave. and settled into the community like so many young families did back in the 50s and 60s. Considering that Charlie worked for IBM it's ironic that Cora was the handyman around the house ... but he took pride in hanging all the Christmas lights on the big evergreen out front every year. Through the years there were costume parties and waterski trips out on the boat and family vacations. And there were lots and lots of friends to play bridge and socialize with.

Charles Matthews was an encourager like Barnabas. Encouragers build other people up. Charlie was easy to be around, always appreciating a joke or a good story. He had a positive spirit that drew people to him even as he got on in years. He took an interest in his grandkids and loved spending time with them. That's what folks like Barnabas do.

Encouragers are compassionate. After he retired, Charlie started driving for Meals on Wheels. He went out a couple of times a week, even on Christmas. And when he'd stop he always took a few extra minutes to visit. He knew how much it meant to spend time with someone who cared about you. That's what folks like Barnabas do.

Encouragers give freely of themselves. Charlie and Cora were extremely generous. Not because they had so much – like most people who lived through the

Great Depression, they clipped coupons and lived frugally – but they helped put their grandkids through college and would do just about anything for anybody. He valued being a good provider and taking care of his family. That’s what folks like Barnabas do.

Charlie Matthews was a Barnabas for so many people – and maybe he was able to do that because, like Barnabas, he trusted that God was taking care of him. After Cora died life got harder for Charlie. He didn’t have his life’s companion. He’d moved out of the family home that meant so much to him. He was getting older and his body was changing. But he kept his faith that there was something else in store for him. In the gospel of John we heard Jesus say, “In my father’s house there are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you there.” It sounds like he’s talking about heaven. Over the past years Charlie started thinking more about going to one of those rooms. And when his kids would tell him it wasn’t time for him to go, that it wasn’t ready for him, he’d say, “I’ll bring paint.” Like Barnabas, he knew that God has plans for each of us, and that he promises to never leave us. And we can trust that Jesus does prepare a place for us, that he loves us more than life itself, that because of his death on the cross he promises everlasting peace in his arms. How lucky for us that God, like Charlie, always keeps his word. Amen.