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That's about what I expected. Steve Jobs is the famous founder of Apple Computer, the brilliant and driven genius of design and marketing who led Apple into its position as one of the most profitable companies in the world.

For those of you who don't know the name Steve Wozniak, Wozniak was co-founder of Apple with Steve Jobs in 1976. Wozniak was the engineering whiz who single-handedly designed the Apple 1 and Apple 2 computers back in the late 1970s. Wozniak and Jobs were partners, each with important skill sets. There would have been no Apple computers without Wozniak the engineer, and Apple would not have become as successful as it is without Jobs the marketer. Yet, most people know only of Steve Jobs and have the impression that he started Apple all by himself. Wozniak left the company in 1987 and few are aware of the importance of his role in the Apple computer.

I use this example about Steve Wozniak because it is somewhat analogous to the situation Barnabas faces with Paul. Barnabas was part of the original Christian community. Early on he was recognized as a leader in the community, and for two reasons. First he was a leader because of his eloquence. The name "Barnabas" is actually a nickname that took the place of his given name, Joseph. Barnabas means "son of encouragement" and referred to his speaking ability in communicating the story of Jesus. Barnabas was also recognized as a leader because he backed up his words with his actions. He sold a field he owned and gave the money to the other apostles for the ministry of the church. Barnabas is the first example we have of Christian stewardship and sharing one's blessings with others. (Acts 4:36-37)

Several years went by with Barnabas being part of the leadership of the infant church community in Jerusalem. In the middle of those years, about 3 years after Jesus' resurrection, one of the most zealous persecutors of the disciples of Jesus, a Pharisee named Saul, received a dramatic revelation from Jesus and became a disciple himself. After living in Arabia and Damascus for three years, Saul (who we know better by his Greek name, Paul) went to Jerusalem to meet the leaders of the church community. He received a very cold welcome. People were understandably suspicious of him. His persecution of the followers of Jesus was well known and now he wanted to be part of the community. How could they be sure that Paul was not simply infiltrating their community to get the names of all those involved, and would then have everyone arrested and thrown in prison? It fell to Barnabas to talk to Paul and listen to his story. Barnabas sensed the genuineness of Paul's faith in Jesus and urged the church community to welcome him. They listened to and trusted their leader, Barnabas, and the history of the church changed because Barnabas advocated for Paul. (When you leave worship today, turn to your right and go look at the wood sculpture on the wall by the window. It is artist Ron Felt's depiction of Barnabas advocating for Paul before the church in Jerusalem.)

Fourteen years went by, with the fledgling church community now centered in two places: Jerusalem and Antioch (which is north near the site of Beirut, Lebanon). From Antioch, Barnabas and Paul were sent on a missionary journey that took them first to the island of Cyprus (which was where Barnabas was originally from) and then into the center of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). This is where Barnabas starts getting short-changed in church history. The folks who put the Narrative Lectionary together erroneously title this text for today "Paul's Mission." They follow the practice of referring to this trip as "Paul's First Missionary Journey", but if you take time to study the text, it's apparent that the journey should be called the "First Missionary Journey of Barnabas" or at least the "Journey of Barnabas and Paul" with Barnabas appropriately getting first billing.

There is plenty of evidence to indicate that at this time Barnabas was still considered by the church community to be the higher-ranking apostle and that Paul was his companion, rather than the other way around. We read today the story of Barnabas and Paul in Lystra, a pagan city, where they healed a man who had been crippled from birth. When the crowds saw it, they hailed Barnabas and Paul to be gods, acclaiming Barnabas to be Zeus and Paul to be Hermes. That is a telling distinction, for Zeus was understood to be the king of the

Greek gods and Hermes was a messenger. The crowd assumed that Barnabas was Zeus, apparently because he was seen to be the greater of the two.

Barnabas and Paul were later key players in the meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem in the year 49. This was a continuation of the debate we read about last week when Peter argued that the gospel was for all people, not just Jews like themselves. Now the debate went one step further. Yes, Gentiles can be Christian, but are they expected to obey the Jewish laws as a condition of being welcomed into the community? Barnabas and Paul convinced the other apostles that one did not have follow the Jewish law to be a Christian, and that changed the course of church history. That's why you and I are part of the church today.

As Barnabas and Paul prepared to go on a second missionary journey together, they had a sharp difference of opinion about who should accompany them. Barnabas wanted to take a young disciple named John Mark, but Paul thought John Mark to be unreliable and favored taking a man named Silas. They ended up going their separate ways, with Barnabas and John Mark going to Cyprus and Paul and Silas going to Asia Minor.

History has always portrayed Paul as being the primary missionary apostle, but that is not the full picture. In addition to Barnabas, we know that there was another influential missionary named Apollos, who apparently many considered to be a better preacher than Paul. (1 Corinthians 3:1-9) Paul's prominence might largely be attributed to the fact that he wrote letters that churches collected and over the next couple hundred years these letters came to be recognized as Holy Scripture. Barnabas and Apollos may have written similar letters, but no one kept them and they have been lost to us. Because of the letters, we are left with the impression that Paul was the more prominent missionary apostle and Barnabas was a secondary character.

If Barnabas were alive today and able to see how the story of the early church has been passed along, I wonder how he would feel about that. Might he be envious of Paul getting all the acclaim and the New Testament having only a handful of references to him?

We might find ourselves in a similar situation from time to time. We work and struggle and sweat for something – it might be at work or at school or at church – we come up with some great idea and along comes “the new person” who gets all the credit. We never even get a thank you. That's the way the world often is, isn't it? It's just not fair. Not to Barnabas. Not to you and me.

It's pure speculation on my part, but I don't think that not getting the credit would have bothered Barnabas much. When one falls into the hands of God, it doesn't matter much who plays first fiddle or who gets all the glory. When the original twelve disciples argued among themselves which of them was the most important, Jesus told them “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” In other words, don't bother trying to make distinctions, because rank does not matter in the kingdom of God. Jesus turned the world's understanding of greatness upside-down by saying “the greatest among you is a servant to all”. Barnabas knew these teachings of Jesus and tried to live his life accordingly. He knew that it doesn't matter if you are thanked for offering your self, your time, and your possessions. I would think that Barnabas was so caught up in Jesus that this transcended every question of who was first, who got credit, who got thanked.

Maybe we can allow that to happen to us, too – maybe we can get caught up out of our self interest and into our calling to be disciples. And what is that calling? That we are to love God and serve our neighbor, and that human distinctions of who's first and who's last don't matter. All that matters is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and that same God wants us to know his love and share it with others. Barnabas knew God's love and shared it with others. We, the members of a congregation who bear his name, are called to do the same.