

Sometimes in life we face uncertain situations, and that's often when we need our mothers to encourage us, as was the case with

A little who boy came running into the kitchen and hurriedly asked his mother if he could watch a wildlife special on the public television station. "Hurry, Mom! It's got lions and tigers and snakes and all kinds of wild animals. Please, Mom, can I watch it?"

"Well, sure, son," his mother answered. "You know it's all right to watch that station. And that sounds like a wonderful show for a brave little guy like you to watch."

"Will you come watch it with me?" the little boy asked.

"I'm sorry, but Mommy is kind of busy right now."

"But Mom, you've got to watch it with me—I'm too scared to watch it by myself."<sup>1</sup>

On Mother's Day, we pause to give thanks for our moms who have encouraged us to try new things, to step out of our comfort zones and take new adventures. Unfortunately, we also know that's not the case in all families, for sometimes mothers are absent from homes or neglect their children, leaving some children feeling alone and insecure.

Whether one has wonderful parents or one experiences neglectful parents, we all face times of uncertainty in our lives, times of struggle when the world seems in chaos. It's in those times we long for a word of hope, which is what Jesus' followers tried to offer after Jesus died. They had experienced the trauma of his crucifixion, but the resurrection offered so much hope that Jesus' followers began traveling around the countryside telling others what they had experienced. Some received the news with joy and formed house churches and met for regular worship, while others responded with violence by hurling stones at Jesus' followers or throwing them in prison for disturbing the peace.

It was on one of these such journeys that two of Jesus' followers, Paul and Barnabas, came to the village of Lystra, a place we know very little about today except that it was located in what we today call the country of Turkey.

Here they encountered a man who had never been able to walk since birth due to complications with his feet. As the man listened to Paul and

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Barnabas speaking about Jesus, he began trusting in the wonderful news he was hearing. Paul somehow sensed the faith in this man, so he told the man, “Up on your feet.” The man jumped up and began walking around, which amazed the crowd that had gathered. Maybe he needed words of encouragement—a challenge to motivate him to face his greatest obstacle and overcome it.

Somehow God’s presence in that place, the words from Paul and Barnabas, and the faith of this man all came together to create a healing that’s hard for us to explain. Those observing the situation thought they knew exactly what was going on, for they had plenty of names for the pantheon of gods they commonly heard about. They thought these two men must be one of those gods, for they exclaimed, “The gods have turned into humans and have come down to us!” In that day people believed from Greek mythology that many different gods controlled the world, from the weather to hunting to fertility.

They thought Barnabas was Zeus, who they believed controlled the heavens and was especially known as the god of thunder (*sound 1, thunder*). Since many people believed that the world was divided into different regions, they believed another god controlled the oceans and seas, who they called Poseidon (*sound 2, ocean*).

In addition, Apollo was the solar god who was also the god of song and the ancient harp called a lyre (*sound 3, harp*).

If you prayed to a god for fertility and the birth of a child, you would pray to Aphrodite, the goddess of love (*sound 4, love song*).

It’s in this setting that Paul began speaking to the crowd, so they assumed he was the spokesperson for the gods, the messenger known as Hermes, and the one who controlled the roadways and traffic, which might sound a bit different in today’s world<sup>2</sup> (*sound 5, traffic*).

Thinking these were gods that had come to them, the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, who protested and exclaimed, “We

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are humans just like you. Please give up all this foolishness. Turn to the living God, who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 14:15, CEB).

The people had heard stories how these many Roman and Greek gods argued and fought with one another. What Paul offered them in their fragmented view of the world was wholeness. Rather than keeping track of worshipping many different gods who they believed controlled various parts of their lives, Paul and Barnabas proclaimed that there is only one God,

- the God who entered the world at the beginning by creating the heavens and the earth,
- the God who entered the world by blessing Abraham and Sarah and promising that many people would come from them,
- the God who entered the world through Moses and led the oppressed people to freedom,
- the God who spoke through the prophets about caring for widows and orphans,

- and the same God who enter into the world through a humble birth in a manger and lived among us through Jesus, and when Jesus was killed, God brought him back to life and offers healing and wholeness. It’s this One God who invites us to get up on our feet.

Although we no longer believe in many different Roman or Greek gods controlling our lives, we still live a divided life, controlled by many other forces. The force of consumerism tells us we need to buy more stuff in order to be happy. The force of politics divides our nation into red and blue, stopping us from hearing one another. The god of power convinces us to take advantage of others in order to gain control. The god of individualism says we should take care of ourselves and those who can’t should be ignored.

We often try to do the right thing, but the forces around us tempt us in other directions. Writer Parker Palmer expressed this dividedness when he wrote,

I yearn to be whole, but dividedness often seems the easier choice.... I keep silent on an

issue I should address...I deny my inner darkness, giving it more power over me, or I project it onto other people, creating “enemies” where none exist.

I pay a steep price when I live a divided life—feeling fraudulent, anxious about being found out, and depressed by the fact that I am denying my own selfhood. The people around me pay a price as well, for they walk on ground made unstable by my dividedness.... A fault line runs down the middle of my life, and whenever it cracks open...things around me get shaky and start to fall apart.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than denying the brokenness inside each of us, Palmer suggests that we embrace that part of ourselves; we admit that we’re not perfect. In doing so, we begin to find wholeness, or as he calls it “a seedbed for new life.”

That sounds like what Jesus was all about—a chance to begin again, a resurrection, a new start. In the midst of the divided lives that people

experienced 2000 years ago, they had many different sounds and forces that tried to impact their lives (*sound 6, composite*).

Paul and Barnabas offered something else as they reached out to the man who could not walk—they offered him wholeness when they exclaimed, “Up on your feet.”

As Disciples of Christ, our identity statement offers the same vision of wholeness:

*We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the One Body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.*

Whenever you feel down, as though you can’t get past an obstacle in your life, may you hear the words of wholeness echoing over time to reach to you: Up on your feet. New life is possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Hodgin, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 1787-1793). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #185.

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<sup>2</sup> For more background on various gods, see [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/religions.html)

<sup>3</sup> Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, 4-5.