

*And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And the man sprang up and began to walk. Acts 14:9,10*

Paul and Barnabas were on a journey to tell Jews and Gentiles about the victory we receive when we accept the life of Christ into our lives. They were traveling to Iconium, a larger city, that once converted to Christianity, to influence and assist the ministry in the surrounding areas. By many, the good news was well received; and by others, not so much. For the disciples, their lives were in danger and so they had to travel carefully and strategically.

Through Paul and the other disciples, the Lord worked His miracles. It brought many to faith. In this passage, Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for some of the pagan gods that some believed in. Paul made it very clear, they were preaching, teaching and living out their faith in our triune God, and not of any false gods or vexing mysteries. In some ways, it was easier to preach and bring to faith the Jews who knew the Old Testament teachings on the coming of the Messiah. For the Gentiles, it was a whole new ball game. But the church was growing!

In Lystra, Paul came upon a man who was crippled from birth. The man had the faith, trust and expectation that God could heal him. Paul said to this man, Stand upright on your feet. This man stood up and walked for the first time in his life. Miracles like these helped convert non-believers and also fueled the anger in those who were against Christianity. In Lystra, Paul was stoned and many thought he was killed, even the disciples. But the Lord wasn't finished with Paul yet. And there was a strong church established in Lystra.

Through difficult and dangerous times, the disciples and other followers of Jesus, pressed on. God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas and the rest of the disciples stepped out in faith to bring to the community of Christ many more believers, in spite of the resistance. It took extraordinary means. The Old Testament taught the LAW and the coming of the Savior. And in these stories we witness the LOVE of the New Testament... this love that was lived and preached by the followers of Jesus, which went way beyond what any law could require. That is the beauty of the New Testament and the gift and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Loving God, we thank you for the grace and providence you have so freely given. We ask you for the endurance, the strength and wisdom to reach out to others who have yet to know you. May the Holy Spirit empower us to be channels of your love, wisdom, strength and grace. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.*

*The writer:* Mary Conlin is now in her 19th year of service at Bethel Lutheran. She works with Bethel PrimeTimers, Bethel XYZ and other groups, as well as Blessed Bethel Volunteers. Mary has recently adopted two puppies, a Lab named "Tank" and a Cockapoo "Synie". (She spends her free time at home training these two, or they may be training her.)

