

“WHAT’S A PERSON TO DO?”  
I Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21, Acts 17:22-31  
May 13 & 14, 2023

I want to start this morning with an account given by a Hospice of Metro Denver physician. He says, “I was driving home from a meeting this evening about 5, stuck in traffic on Colorado Blvd., and the car started to choke and sputter and die - I barely managed to coast, cursing, into a gas station, glad only that I would not be blocking traffic and would have a somewhat warm spot to wait for the tow truck. It wouldn’t even turn over.

“Before I could make the call, however, I saw a woman walking out of the ‘quickie mart’ building, and it looked like she slipped on some ice and fell into a gas pump, so I got out to see if she was okay.

“When I got there, it looked more like she had been overcome by sobs than that she had fallen; she was a young woman who looked really haggard with dark circles under her eyes. She dropped something as I helped her up, and I picked it up to give it to her. It was a nickel.

“At that moment, everything came into focus for me: the crying woman, the ancient Suburban crammed full of stuff with 3 kids in the back (1 in a car seat), and the gas pump reading \$4.05. I asked her if she was okay and if she needed help, and she just kept saying ‘I don’t want my kids to see me crying,’ so we stood on the other side of the pump from her car.

“She said she was driving to California and that things were very hard for her right now. So I asked, ‘And you were praying?’ That made her back away from me a little, but I assured her I was not a crazy person and said, ‘He heard you, and He sent me.’

“I took out my card and swiped it through the card reader on the pump so she could fill up her car completely, and while it was fueling, walked to the next door McDonalds and bought 2 big bags of food, some gift certificates for more, and a big cup of coffee. She gave the food to the kids in the car, who attacked it like wolves, and we stood by the pump eating fries and talking a little.

“She told me her name, and that she lived in Kansas City. Her boyfriend left 2 months ago and

she had not been able to make ends meet. She knew she wouldn't have money to pay rent January 1, and finally in desperation had finally called her parents, with whom she had not spoken in about 5 years. They lived in California and said she could come live with them and try to get on her feet there. So she had packed up everything she owned in the car. She told the kids they were going to California for Christmas, but not that they were going to live there. I gave her my gloves, a little hug and said a quick prayer with her for safety on the road.

“As I was walking over to my car, she said, ‘So, are you like an angel or something?’ This definitely made me cry. I said, ‘Sweetie, at this time of year angels are really busy, so sometimes God uses regular people.’

“It was so incredible to be a part of someone else’s miracle. And of course, you guessed it, when I got in my car it started right away and got me home with no problem. I’ll put it in the shop tomorrow to check, but I suspect the mechanic won’t find anything wrong. Sometimes angels fly close enough to you that you can hear the flutter of their wings...”<sup>1</sup>

So what’s a person to do when things turn up-side-down? What do we do when problems seem to be at our side, every day, wherever we go? It doesn’t take us too long to see the craziness that is all around us, and it gets us questioning how we should live in the midst of it. And even if we do our best to endure it, many times things just fall apart underneath us, like the woman in this story. What are we to do?

I Peter 3:15-17 tells us, “*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against our good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*”

No matter what comes our way, we are to let Jesus Christ be Lord in our life so that He might

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<sup>1</sup> (From Jim Loefer in an email on January 5, 2006, while I was serving Forest Junction and Rural Brillion UMCs.)

use us as a witness to those around us of the love of God for us. As we let Jesus be an active part of our lives, He will guide us, direct us, and enable us to endure all sorts of trials and struggles. And when we pray to Him, He hears us and answers us in the most astounding ways that can blow our socks off.

The Apostle Peter invite us to live our faith in such a way as to demonstrate the difference that Jesus makes in us. While we may have to endure trials and struggles throughout our lives, while we may even feel attacked and persecuted for our faith, as we live each day with integrity and faith in Jesus, letting Him shine through us, there's no telling what we might be able to accomplish and who we might be able to help, both physically and spiritually.

Sometimes that happens through extreme circumstances and sometimes it happens in every day experiences, but how we present ourselves among others will shine the light of Jesus to those around us so that they might be encouraged, too. It may be that God can use us to touch the lives of those around us with gentleness and respect, especially during their difficult times.

“An old man was grocery shopping with his grandson. The toddler was crying and at times screaming at the top of his lungs. As the old gentleman walked up and down the aisles, people could hear him speaking in a soft voice, ‘We are almost done, Albert...Try not to cry, Albert...Life will get better, Albert.’

“As he approached the checkout stand, he carefully brushed the toddler’s tears from his eyes and said again, ‘Try not to cry, Albert...We will be home soon, Albert.’

“As he was paying the cashier, the toddler continued to cry. A young woman in line behind him said, ‘Sir, I think it is wonderful how sweet you are being to your little Albert.’

“The old gentleman blinked his eyes a couple of times before saying, ‘Miss, my grandson’s name is John....I’m Albert.’”<sup>2</sup>

When we keep our faith in the Lord Jesus, no matter what we are forced to endure, He guides us and enables us to encourage those around us. And Jesus assures us that when we love Him, keep His

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<sup>2</sup> (From Judy Loefer in an email on March 7, 2008 while I was serving Forest Junction and Rural Brillion UMCs.)

commandments and diligently live our lives for Him, that He *“will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you”* (John 14:16-17).

Our ways are not unknown to the Lord. He knows all that we face every day, and yet He invites us to put our dependence upon Him, so that we might, even in our own distress and trial, touch the life of one near us to bring hope and love to them. We are not alone in this journey of life here on the earth. When we let God be our Shepherd and Guide for us, we can do great things for Him.

So Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us so that no matter how tough our road gets, no matter how many disappointments, no matter how difficult things might get, He will be with us to lift us up, encourage us and assure us that we are not having to do everything on our own.

Now, this is Mother’s Day, a chance to recognize the dedication and love provided to us by our mothers. I realize that not everyone has had such a good experience with their mom’s, so I understand that this could be a difficult day for you. But if you open your hearts to let the Holy Spirit work in and through you, it may be a day that you might find something good about your mom.

But I have to tell you, “I had the meanest mother in the world! While other kids ate candy for breakfast, I had to have eggs, toast, and cereal. When others had Cokes and candy for lunch, I ate a sandwich and drank milk. As you can guess, my supper was different from that of other kids, too. But at least I wasn’t alone in my sufferings. My sister and three brothers had the same mean mother as I did.

“My mother insisted upon knowing where we were at all times. You’d think we were on a chain gang or remote tracking. She had to know who our friends were, and what we were doing. Sure, there were times when we were able to give her the slip, but it usually didn’t end well for us.

“She insisted that if we said we’d be gone for an hour, or less than an hour, we had to be home in an hour and not one minute more (especially on those Prom nights or Homecoming celebrations). I’m nearly ashamed to admit it, but she actually spanked us. Not once, but each time we did as we pleased.

Can you imagine someone actually spanking a child just because he or she disobeyed? I mean, really!

“Now you can begin to see how mean she really was. The worst is yet to come. We had to be in bed by nine o’clock each night and up early the next morning. We couldn’t sleep until noon like our friends. So while they slept, my mother actually had the nerve to break the labor law. She made us work. We had to wash dishes, make beds, learn to cook, work in the garden, cut the grass and all sorts of cruel things. I believe she stayed awake at night thinking up mean things for us to do.

“She always insisted upon our telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Even if it killed us, and it nearly did sometimes. But if we told a lie, just watch out - nothing doing in her home. By the time we were teenagers she was much, much wiser. Our life became more unbearable. None of this tooting the horn of a car for us to come running. She embarrassed us to no end by making our dates and friends come to the door and get us. I forgot to mention, while my friends were dating at the age of 12, I had to wait till I was 15, and then only to go to school functions, maybe twice a year.

“My mother was a complete failure. None of us has ever been arrested, or beaten his mate. Each of my brothers and sister worked their way through college to achieve a college education. Each are now gainfully employed and paying taxes. Whom do we blame for the terrible way we turned out?

“You are right, OUR MEAN MOTHER! We never got busted in a drug raid, nor took part in a riot, vandalized others people’s property, burned flags, or a million and one things that our friends did.

All I’ve got to say is, “I thank God He gave me the meanest mother in the whole world!”<sup>3</sup> Who knows what I’d have turned out to be without her?

But sadly, it isn’t easy for mothers to care for their families. Many spend their early mornings getting the kids ready for school, get them fed and out the door so that they can get dressed and go off to work themselves. They spend the whole day toiling at their careers, and then have to pick up the kids from school, get them to music lessons, or ball games, or dance classes, or 4-H, or drama club. Then they’re planning and preparing meals for everyone, and then maybe having to go back to the office for

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<sup>3</sup> (A Salute to Every Mean Mother in the World on Mother’s Day)

meetings at work, or school board. And then, it's getting the kids ready for bed, cleaning up the kitchen, and getting ready for the next day all over again.

On the weekends, there's house cleaning, shopping, gardening, and maybe a picnic or outing. And it starts all over again on Sunday, getting everyone up and ready to go to church, or to grandma's, maybe preparing a Sunday school lesson, or a dish to pass at the pot-luck after church. It's a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week, 365 days a year commitment.

But in evaluating what a mother does, "**Somebody said** it takes about six weeks to get back to normal after you have a baby...somebody doesn't know that once you're a mother, normal is history. **Somebody said** you learn how to be a mother by instinct...somebody never took a 3 year old shopping. **Somebody said** being a mother is boring...somebody never rode in a car driven by a teenager with a driver's permit. **Somebody said** if you're a good mother, your child will turn out good...somebody thinks a child comes with directions and a guarantee. **Somebody said** good mothers never raise their voices...somebody never came out the back door just in time to see her child hit a golf ball through the neighbor's kitchen window. **Somebody said** you don't need an education to be a mother...somebody never helped a fourth grader with his math. **Somebody said** you can't love the fifth child as much as you love the first...somebody doesn't have five children. **Somebody said** a mother can find all the answers to her child-rearing questions in books (or online)...somebody never had a child stuff beans up in her nose or in her ears. **Somebody said** the hardest part of being a mother is labor and delivery...somebody never watched her baby get on the bus for the first day of kindergarten...or on a plane headed for military boot camp. **Somebody said** a mother can do her job with her eyes closed and one hand tied behind her back...somebody never organized 7 giggling Brownies selling cookies. **Somebody said** a mother can stop worrying after her child gets married...somebody doesn't know what marriage and a new son or daughter-in-law does to a mother's heartstrings. **Somebody said** a mother's job is done when her last child leaves home...somebody never had grandchildren. And **somebody said**

your mother knows you love her, so you don't need to tell her...somebody isn't a mother!"<sup>4</sup>

Moms have a unique and challenging role in their families and about the time we have them figured out, something happens and we learn new things about Mom all over again. But the best thing about a Mother is her faith in Jesus Christ, that she can live as His servant each day, and share that faith with her family around her. And when she is active in living her faith, those around her are impacted so that it changes their lives and perspectives of who God is and what He has done for us. Though a mother can't force her children to come to faith in Jesus, she can live such an open Christian lifestyle that her children begin to see the difference that Jesus makes, allowing every struggle and trial become a testimony of dependence upon Jesus, as she trusts in Him through all things.

The Apostle Paul modeled this same kind of influence in living his faith in Jesus. Having put his trust and faith in Jesus Christ, he let that faith shine out from him in every situation. Having been imprisoned in Philippi, Paul and his fellow evangelistic travelers went to Thessalonica where they were met with hostility from some of the Jews. Then having been forced to leave there, they went to Berea, where some tested him in what he was saying, intent to see if what he said was true. Then, when the Jews caused chaos there, Paul went on to Athens, waiting for his friends to join him. But even there, he was open with his faith, telling many of Jesus. Listen to how he impacted the lives of those around him when he was in Athens, Greece. This is Acts 17:22-31. (READ Acts 17:22-31)

Paul took in all of his surroundings at the Areopagus, and then introduced the people to the one God they were missing - "*AN UNKNOWN GOD*" (Acts 17:23). He gently and patiently explained all that God has done for us so that the people might put their faith and trust in Him, rather than in idols of stone or wood or metal. Paul directed the hearts and minds of those in Athens to the living God who has given us life through His Son, Jesus Christ. And some of the people put their faith in Jesus.

So what's a person to do in days like today, when we have riots, and mass shootings, and abortion, and rising interest rates, and persecution, and war, and governmental overreach and

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<sup>4</sup> (Wonewoc, LaValle, Ironton UMC's *Newsletter*, May, 2004)

oppression? What are we to do with the struggles of health conditions, with massive illegal immigration, with the threats of wars, with storms and famines, and corruption, and attacks on our Christian beliefs?

Despite all of these challenges, look for the opportunities to live your faith. Let Jesus Christ be so important to you that you trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead you every step of the day. You do what is right in God's eyes, according to His ways, following His commandments, and let those around you see the difference that Jesus makes in you.

Don't become discouraged about the seemingly repressive conditions we live in. Don't become overwhelmed with the affluence of troubles facing us. You live your faith - in front of your children, in front of your fellow students, in front of your work mates, in front of your family members, in front of all those you encounter on a daily basis. Jesus will empower you to do the right thing at just the right time in order to help another come to faith in Him. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for calling each of us to grow so strong in our faith in Jesus that everything we do and say witnesses our dependence on You. We thank You for those in our lives that have lived their faith so that we could come to know Jesus by their witness. Thank You for the influence of our mothers, who for better or worse lived to influence us. Help us to look for ways that we might influence the lives of those around us as we strive to live for You. Lead us in the midst of our troubles, our trials and struggles, so that we might not lose heart, but rather stand strong in You. By Your Holy Spirit, grant us the stamina to endure all of the evils around us while at the same time shining the light of Jesus Christ. Help us not to be afraid to speak of Your goodness, but boldly share the wonders of Your love with those around us so that they, too, might come to faith in Jesus, and find eternal life through Him. Keep working on us Lord! Don't give up on us, but encourage us to stand strong for You, in order that You might receive honor and glory in all that we do. Thank You for Your promise to always be with us! This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.