

“THE RESURRECTION LIFE”

The Rev. Victor Kim

Acts 9:36-43

(05-08-22) Mother's Day

It was supposed to be a funeral. In the town of Joppa there lived a woman named Tabitha, whose Greek name was Dorcas. **She was a disciple. That's a pretty important detail to take note of.** She's probably not the first woman disciple and certainly not the only, **but she is called 'disciple,' and that's significant.** And her life was one of significance. Scripture tells us that she devoted her life to good works and acts of charity. But Tabitha became sick and she died. She was washed and her body was placed in an upstairs room. The other disciples who were with her, heard that Simon Peter was nearby in a town called Lydda and so they sent for him. **It was supposed to be a funeral.**

When Peter arrived in Joppa he went upstairs to where Tabitha's body was placed. The widows stood there with him in the room weeping. They showed him the tunics and the other clothes that Tabitha had made for them while she was still alive. It was like an ancient funeral power point presentation. People gathered around the deceased, sharing their stories and showing in visual form something about the dearly departed that meant so much to them. And now, here was Peter, the preacher for the funeral, brought in to say what needed to be said, to give thanks for a life well lived and to speak about hope for the future. **What else would you expect, it was supposed to be a funeral.** But Peter told those gathered to wait outside, then alone, he knelt down and prayed. And maybe as he prayed, he remembered something from his past. Maybe he remembered that day when Jesus took him, along with James and John, into a room where a young girl who had died was placed. There Jesus took her hand and called out, “Child, get up,” and she did. Peter prayed and then he turned to the body and called out, “Tabitha, get up,” and she did. She opened her eyes and she sat up, and Peter calling the others, showed Tabitha to be alive. As news of this miracle spread throughout Joppa, many came to believe in the Lord. **It was supposed to be a funeral, but it was nothing of the sort.**

Did you know that Tabitha means gazelle in Aramaic? Aramaic is the language that Jesus most likely spoke and was the common language of Jews living in Judea. **But note that Tabitha also had another name, Dorcas, which is a Greek translation of the Aramaic Tabitha.** Why should the gospel writer Luke, who is also the author of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, want to tell us about Tabitha's Greek name? As we read through the book of Acts, what we discover is that the reach of the gospel is ever expanding, **becoming ever more public in its witness.** Earlier in Acts 9 is the account of the conversion of Saul the Pharisee, who persecuted the early followers of Jesus. After his conversion, Saul becomes the Apostle Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, whose letters to the churches of the period have become part of the biblical witness. **There is a trajectory that is being traced, one in which the gospel of Jesus Christ makes its way to an ever broader audience, from its beginnings in the Jewish culture to the wider Greco-Roman world.**

Tabitha, or Dorcas, is that person who straddles the two cultures, the Jewish culture in which the gospel has been incubated and the Greco-Roman world into which the gospel would be propagated. That scripture would make mention of her two names **is an indication of the importance of those who serve as cultural hybrids to the transmission of the gospel.** (The term Cultural Hybrid is borrowed from Eric Barreto, Working Preacher, Luther Seminary)

Public ministry is about that transmission, about getting the good news from here to there, from one culture to the other, from the church to the world. **And for public ministry to be effective, it requires that people become cultural hybrids, those who are able to straddle multiple cultures, speak languages that are different, and I don't mean only linguistic languages.** What I mean is the ability to share the gospel without necessarily using church-speak, what I mean is the capacity to listen to conversations that are taking place

around us, conversations of business, art, science or philosophy, and to be able to engage in those conversations in ways that can still share the gospel message of God's love and care for all. Public ministry demands that a church that has long had a captive audience, but now finds that even if you build it, they won't come, **must find new ways of being faithful and imaginative in speaking the truth about God to people who either have lost interest in, or have never known, a relationship with the loving God of creation.**

Dorcas is a great example for us. **She had the unique gift of being alive at her own funeral.** When Peter raised her from death, she was able to see those around her, those who had gathered for her funeral, gathered with the tunics and other clothing she had made, gathered as a result of her good works and her acts of charity. Their tears were authentic, and those tears must have changed so quickly from tears of sorrow to tears of joy upon seeing her raised from the dead. You wonder what those gathered there were saying to Peter when he arrived, but you get the sense that they were praising Dorcas, that they were telling Peter how remarkable Dorcas was and how she impacted their lives in such profound ways. **You might wonder, why was Dorcas raised? Why her in particular?** Perhaps it had something to do with those who were at her funeral, all the widows who stood with Peter in the room where Dorcas' body was placed. Perhaps she needed to be raised because that vital ministry, the ministry to the widows which is emphasized in the scriptures so often, couldn't be left to die with her. **Sometimes as important as it is to engage in new ministries, it is just as important that other ministries that have been left to languish or even die, be resurrected, be renewed, be revitalized.** For a congregation that will be celebrating our 62nd anniversary next week, do you think that there might be a few things that could use renewal, revitalization, even resurrection around here?

It's obvious that Dorcas and her faithful witness had significant impact on the community of believers in Joppa, perhaps both Jewish and Gentile. But as significant as her life was, her resurrection points to something even beyond just Dorcas, to something much greater, **the reality of resurrection hope.** Peter did not raise Dorcas from the dead because the community needed her, as much as the fact that the community needed **resurrection hope. And it is this resurrection hope, the power and promise of a love that conquers even death, of a life that truly frees us to live without fear, to look for joy every day, that must be at the heart of our every proclamation.** Resurrection life is the invitation to be patient with ourselves and others. To take risks and be courageous and to say what we mean. To spend more time on what's important and less time on what's insignificant. The resurrection life means to love our friends, and, as much as we can, our enemies, to speak to strangers and to share what we have with the poor. It is to show grace to those who show no signs of knowing grace. It is to love the church, to pray fervently and to live every day passionately in the hope of God. (Brent Younger, McAfee School of Theology)

To live like this, and to know that God intends for us to live this way, this is resurrection life, and we don't have to die before we can live it. When Dorcas was alive, her life touched many, but when she was raised, when resurrection life came, when it became known in Joppa that Dorcas was miraculously alive again, when suddenly the fear of death and all the limitations that it brings was shattered, many more came to believe in the Lord. **The greater miracle is resurrection. Public ministry, the ministry of resurrection life, is not about a person, not about you or me or Dorcas or anyone whose life should be admired and respected. Its about a proclamation, that Christ is risen, that he is risen indeed.**

Whatever our public ministry is, whether its in the ministry of mission, hosting community meals, supporting refugees, donating to the food bank, whether it's in a pastoral care ministry that brings compassion, grace and love to those who hurt, those who grieve, those who give thanks, whether inside or outside the church, whether it's in through hybrid ministries that use technology such as live streaming that seek to reach out with new and innovative means to a culture that has closed its ears to the gospel, whether it is about resurrecting

ministries that have too long lain dormant or have died, whatever our public ministry is, **it must have at its core, the proclamation of resurrection life. And that life must always point to the one who alone is Lord, the one who is risen, risen indeed.**

Joppa was a town on the Mediterranean coast, along the trading path that would bring people from all over the known world through it, Romans, Greeks, Gentiles from every place. And they would have heard about the resurrection of Dorcas, they would have heard the good news of resurrection life. **This is where the story of Acts is headed, from the inside to the outside, from incubation to propagation,** from a story that is shared by a select few to a powerful witness that will change the world. **But for it to happen, that resurrection life needs embodying, in faithful people like Dorcas, like Peter, like Paul.**

And what of us? What of us living here 2000 years and half a world removed? There's not a lot that's changed in terms of human need, human fear and our hunger for hope. Ours is a culture that needs the proclamation of the good news of resurrection hope, a proclamation that must be lived out in how we serve, how we give, how we love. **Can we be the Dorcas's of our time, the cultural hybrids who straddle that precarious and pregnant place between the church and our culture, our world? Can we be witnesses to the resurrection life that Jesus offers?** Will we learn the languages we will need to share the gospel in this culture, to this people? Will we be open to listening to conversations that speak the language of science or art or business or popular culture and not hear them as threats to our way, but as opportunities for us to share and serve? Do you know anyone who is a cultural hybrid, someone who is able to proclaim Jesus in ways that speak to a non-Christian context?

I knew a man named Bill who was a Chartered Accountant. When Bill was a young man, he worked for a large, national accounting firm. He worked long hours and he worked hard. He was ethical and he was honest, always seeking his client's best interests. When his company began to adopt practices that prioritized company profits above their client's best interests, Bill struggled with what he should do. He prayed and came to the decision to leave the company and start his own accounting practice. It was a big decision and one that could have cost him his livelihood.

Because he was such a faithful employee, his boss said to Bill that he could have one hour to call all his clients and he could take with him all the clients he could convince to leave the big accounting firm to join him in his private practice. His boss was sure that few, if any, of his firm's clients would forego the familiarity of the big, nationally known accounting firm for the unknown private practice of a young accountant. Bill started to dial as fast as he could. When the hour had ended, every single one of his clients had chosen to follow him as clients of his new private practice, giving up the resources offered by the large accounting firm because they trusted his honesty, his ethics, the way he treated them, always seeking their best interests. Over the years this man's faith and the way he lived his life testified to the resurrection life in him to countless people. **He was a cultural hybrid, he was a disciple.**

Ours is a world that needs witnesses to the resurrection life. Ours is a world that longs for life, love and grace. **Could you function as a cultural hybrid? Could you live as a disciple whose life bears witness to that resurrection life?** The gospel is on the move, from Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, here to our city, to our community. Dorcas' story is our story. And the same God who brought life from death for Dorcas still brings life from death because God is about resurrection life, for me and for you, for us and for all. **May we faithfully bear witness to that life and love as disciples of Jesus!**

Thanks be to God, Amen.