

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, May 8, 2022 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**Gospel Reading: John 10:22-30, NT Reading: Revelation 7:9-17,  
Scripture for Message: Acts 9:36-43 “Get Up”**

This is a story of new life and hope, hope that a new life in Christ brings for those who society considers hopeless or for those considered dead. I think it is fitting that we discuss the role of women in the early church on this day where we celebrate the most important person in each of our lives – our Mothers. We don't know much about the woman Tabitha called Dorcas “the gazelle” only that this is the only time in the New Testament where the feminine form of the Greek word for *disciple* is used. That this woman was worthy enough and important enough in that culture to be called “Disciple” is a reason to sit up and pay attention to what this scripture says about her.

She is known by two names, one Hebrew Tabitha and the other Greek Dorcas which possibly indicates she was multi-ethnic. Was she married? We don't know but my guess is if she were surely that would be mentioned. She was probably someone who was good with her hands, sewing and creating the garments the widows showed Peter when he came. She may have used her talents to supply the income she needed to donate what she could to the poor or she may have had other financial means by which to help the community of widows. What we can be sure of is that this woman Dorcas or Tabitha gave sacrificially to others in her community. She made garments that clothed those less fortunate, she probably contributed in other ways as well. Needless to say, she took seriously Jesus' call to “Tend My Sheep” so much so that she was a beloved member of the community of poor widows. That love is shown by the care taken after her death.

She was such an important member of the community that upon her death the community came together to care for her and called for Peter to come and witness her contributions. Gathered in the upper room where they had laid her to rest were the mourning widows who received help from Tabitha's charity. One could say that she was the main contributor to the needs of the neediest people in Joppa. When Peter arrived, they showed him all the clothing that she had made for them, showing that her loss left a need unfulfilled in the community. What would they do now that she was gone, how could they survive without her?

I don't read anywhere in this passage where Peter is asked to restore her to life, maybe those who mourned her loss hoped for that but did not put it into words. We aren't told that healing her or resuscitating her was the reason they called on Peter. The community so loved her that they wanted to bear witness to

her life and good deeds, they wanted Peter to know what she meant to them – what a saint and good worker she was. That’s the purpose for holding a memorial, to share memories and bear witness to a life well lived.

Peter, however, as he listened to the stories and saw the weeping and mourning, may have realized what good works this woman had done and knew that there was more this woman could do for God. So, Peter sends the mourners away and kneels to pray at Dorcas’ bedside. He turns to the lifeless body and speaks, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes and sat up. She was dead, they prepared her body for burial – but she hears Peter’s voice and sits up! Peter takes her hand, helps her stand and then calls the saints and widows together to see she is indeed alive. This action not only restores Tabitha to life but also restores new life to the community of mourners. What was lost is now found – a new life and hope through the power of Christ.

This is a story of restoration and hope.

When the community of Joppa learned of what happened many believed in the Lord. The word of Tabitha’s life restored had a positive impact on the community. Lives are changed by the power present in the Word of Jesus Christ and through a relationship with God. What once was lost . . .

Sometimes we are too quick to count things as dead and too ready to carry them out for burial. That includes us, we think we cannot make a difference in another’s life, or that we are not effective any more. There are many things in our lives we mistakenly think are dead, and maybe we mourn the loss before it’s time. We often do not see where Christ’s power can restore us to new life, and we therefore lose hope. When we do lose hope along with it goes our joy and we become dry, living a barren existence. Dry barren land is never very productive, nothing grows, and dryness turns to dust that erodes away.

But, Jesus is the living water that restores life, God turns our deserts into streams of living water. Only through God’s power is new life restored, our relationship with God restores life and returns us to joy. I wonder, when Peter knelt at Tabitha’s bedside what was his prayer? He might have asked God to give him the power to restore Tabitha to life, or he might have asked God to give Tabitha the power to restore a community to life by living again and continuing her work.

When we pray in this church do we pray for a church to come to life or for a community to come to life by the work of this church? I wonder if the difference between the two can also be the difference in whether our worship is a dry barren existence or as rivers of living water through the desert. It makes me wonder too, all the widows mourned Tabitha’s death and they felt her loss uniquely, who will mourn this church? It is a question we have often asked

ourselves, if this church were to disappear, would this community miss us? Would the community gather and bear witness to all the good we had done? Would it matter to anyone if our electronic sign would suddenly go dark?

We know that God will defeat death once for all in eternity, we look forward to better lives when Jesus returns to set up that kingdom on earth. We know these things, so we live in the in-between, the already and the not yet. But what about those who need to receive help from God's goodness now, those who are naked and hungry, those who are living in extreme conditions or in fear of death from starvation or war. Those who are marginalized, hated and despised or abused by society. These are the ones who need Tabitha to get up, to continue her work for the neediest of the needy.

They too are the ones who need to feel the presence of the Body of Christ – the church. They are the ones who mourn when the church is not present or active in a community. They are the ones who feel the loss when a church dies. They are the people in this community who we help when we write vouchers for the bridge, they are the ones fed when we give food pantry contributions. The people who meet in our building on a daily basis are the people who will weep and bear witness to the work we have done for them. Where can they go, what will they do without our help?

Then there are the many ministries of the General expression of our church. Ministries that we contribute to through special offerings at Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Week of Compassion. The people who these ministries help are sometimes the neediest of the needy – they are the widows mourning and showing Peter all the good done for them. These are the people mourning the church's inactivity.

Church, get up – there is so much more you can do for God. Our work for God's kingdom is never really finished – there is so much more we can do. Get up, because what we expect to remain dead and buried is restored. Get up, because Jesus is risen and alive in the world, Jesus' resurrected power subverts the power in the world. Get up, because there is so much more work to do.

When we feel like we have been abandoned and are ready to rest in that upper room with Tabitha, God restores our souls through the body of Christ. The body of Christ continues to create new life in this world, streams of living water in the deserts of our culture. We want to renew and restore even those parts that have been dried up and counted as dead. The body of Christ brings new life to what the world has crushed down, made worthless, and buried. The body of Christ restores and renews those of us who feel tired and let down.

It's too easy to say, "I'm tired" or to blame old age. It's too easy to count ourselves done and say our work is completed and too easy to rest in an upper

room. Jesus knew and his disciples knew that what we see as dead God can restore to new life. When Peter turned to look at Dorcas, he knew that she could do more and maybe that was his prayer that God would restore this community to wholeness through the good work that she had started and could continue to do.

There are people right here in this sanctuary this morning who feel dried up, unloved, judged, and abandoned. What is this church – this expression of the body of Christ – doing to renew and restore each other? We are a church in covenant – many of you don't know what that means. The Preamble to the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is something that we are going to look at over these next few weeks leading up to Pentecost. Some of its wording can be our guide "In the Communion of the Holy Spirit we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ." Also, "In the bonds of Christian faith we yield ourselves to God that we may serve the One whose kingdom has no end." These are the ties that bind us, the promises we make to each other as we worship. We are joined together in the bonds of Christian faith – that means something doesn't it.

So, I look over this congregation today and hear Peter / Jesus saying – Get up! Pastor Get Up, Elders and Deacons Get up, Church Get Up and show your community you are alive! There is so much good we can do for ourselves and for others as we realize that our relationship with God restores life and returns us to joy.