

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday May 8, 2022

This is Mother's Day Weekend... which I have come to know in the ministry as a complicated weekend for many.

Sure, it can be straightforward and a great a joy to celebrate for some... simply go out buy a plant, come to church, go out for brunch, and share nice cards with mom.

It can also be a very complicated day for others... especially for those who are grieving the loss of their mother. Or for those who have struggled in the mother/child relationship. I know there are mothers out there experiencing cut-off from their children and long for that relationship to be repaired. I know of some women who are content not being married or a mother... and yet still face societal pressure around talk of marriage or children. I know other women who have longed to be a mother, but for a variety of reasons, couldn't have kids. I have even known some women to skip church this weekend because all this talk of mother's day leaves them out.

So today, yes, I want to give thanks for all moms out there. We wouldn't be here without you. But even more so, I more so want to lift up all the faithful women in our lives... the moms, grandmas, teachers, coaches, and mom figures who have shared their faith and witness with us. I want to highlight the story of Tabitha... also known as Dorcas... from our first lesson in Acts.

Who has two names anyway? An Aramaic name and a Greek name. This simple fact indicates that Tabitha/Dorcas was a woman of status, who transcends different communities.

Did you know that Luke, the writer of the Gospel, also wrote the book of Acts? In chapter 9, Luke tells the story of Tabitha (Dorcas) who devoted her life to good works and acts of charity. We had a Dorcas circle in our congregation for many years.

Luke was writing at a time when women were second-class citizens in the Roman Empire. Public leadership roles were all held by men. And truly, the story of the Raising of Tabitha is really about portraying Peter as a miracle worker more than lifting up Tabitha.

But I want to lift her up today. My faith is very much tied to the faithful women in my life.

Tabitha is an important person in the Christian community of Joppa (a port city on the Mediterranean sea... just north of Tel Aviv today). Tabitha's death affects the Christian Community so much that they send two men to bring Peter to her bedside. Tabitha is the only women identified as a disciple in the book of Acts, and the only occurrence of the feminine form of "disciple" in the New Testament. She is known for her good works... but without the title of Deacon in the church. Men who did the same work in Acts of caring for widows were called Deacons. Tabitha never was recognized by this title.

She is simply known for her good works and acts of charity to widows... literally almsgiving. Almsgiving suggested she was a woman of means. Almsgiving means giving out of your wealth to the poor. Her alms to the community of widows she served was that of making clothes.

Tabitha is valued as a philanthropist, a woman, and a probably a widow herself, who takes care of the needy in Joppa out of her own resources. She spends her own money to care for the widows. She is not funded by the church's offering... like the men.

When she dies, many whom she served are weeping. They all gathered around her body bringing clothing Tabitha made for them, and I am sure telling Tabitha stories.

Tabitha's service to the community of widows in Joppa is truly something to be valued as a model of discipleship... especially to the most marginalized in the community. Widows were considered to be the most marginalized community.

This text is an Easter text because Peter came to the place of Tabitha's death and raised her from the dead with a word. This text describes the victory of God and God's people over forces of death. This miracle led many to become believers. And Peter would soon see his mission being expanded to Gentiles. The Holy Spirit will lead the church into new territory.

As I thought about this text. I thought, I want to be a part of Tabitha's community. A community knows me and will weep for me when I die. They loved her so much. She didn't just throw money at people; she spent time with the widows; she used her gifts of sewing or weaving to bless others. She made them look good... she took her time and resources to care. In a culture where the wealthy often had a proclivity to hoard resources, Tabitha was guided by an ethic of care and compassion for others.