

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday May 11, 2025

“Remembering the Ministry of Tabitha(Dorcas) on Mother's Day”

On this Mother's Day Weekend, I want to give thanks for all the moms out there and for all the faithful women, past and present, who have impacted our lives. I give thanks for my mom and grandmas who tried to guide me in the way I should go... the operative word is tried.

The one story in our lessons today that highlights women is the story of Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, in our first lesson from Acts.

Tabitha had two names, An Aramaic name... Tabitha, and a Greek name Dorcas... which means Gazelle. This simple fact that she had two names indicates she was a woman of status, who transcended different communities and languages.

Tabitha (Dorcas) devoted her life to good works and acts of charity, primarily to widows. Many churches I have served had Dorcas circles that were devoted to good works and acts of charity.

Luke the writer of the Gospel of Luke and Acts 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/Dorcas is about portraying Peter as a miracle worker more than lifting up Tabitha's ministry.

But today, I want to lift her up and all the faithful women. Tabitha was 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 formal title of “Deacon” in the church. Men who did the same work were called Deacons. Tabitha was never recognized by this title.

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 her Christian Community greatly so much so that the many whom she served came to her home weeping. They all gathered around her body bringing clothing she made for them, and I

am sure told Tabitha stories. It reminds me of a wake at the funeral home.

Her ministry was known as the practice of almsgiving... giving money or food to the poor. Almsgiving suggested she was a woman of means. Her alms to the community of widows she served was that of providing food and giving away clothes she made.

Tabitha is valued for her philanthropy, and a probably was a widow herself, who took care of the needy in Joppa out of her own resources. She was not funded by the church's offering... like the men were.

Tabitha's service to the community of widows in Joppa is truly something to be valued as a model of discipleship today... especially to the most marginalized in the community. What gifts do you bring to the table. Maybe it is financial resources, or sewing, or plumbing, or carpentry, or whatever. God wants us to use our time and talents to give glory to God and raise people up.

Speaking of being raised up. The people of Joppa send two men to bring Peter, who just healed Aeneas in the town over, to Dorcas' bedside.

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. Tabitha Get up. It describes the victory of God and God's people over forces of death. This promise of resurrection is for us too after we die. But also today, God's word can raise us up. It tells us we are enough. That nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. That we always have a reason for hope by what Jesus did on the cross and in the resurrection. This miracle led many to become believers. And Peter would soon see his mission expanded to Gentiles in the next chapter.

As I thought about this text, I want this kind of faith community for all of us... where we truly get to know each other and the gifts we bring. I want people to grieve when we die and bring things you did or made that remind them of you. Dorcas made people feel comfortable and looking good.

Dear God, thank you for our moms. We wouldn't be here without them. And thank you for all the faithful women disciples who continue to serve you and your mission of love and justice in the world. May we all find a place to serve in your kingdom, no matter what season it is in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.