

An Unusual Disciple

[Psalm 23](#), [Acts 9:36-43](#)

Today's scripture lesson from Acts introduces us to a very different disciple. Here in the city of Joppa we meet Tabitha, a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ. This is the first time we have encountered Tabitha, or Dorcas as her name is called in Greek. Tabitha reminds me a bit of Mother Teresa who lived from 1910 – 1997. She was an Albanian Catholic nun with Indian citizenship who founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India in 1950. For over 45 years she ministered to the poor, sick, orphaned, and dying, while guiding the Missionaries of Charity's expansion, first throughout India and then in other countries. Following her death she was beatified by Pope John Paul II and given the title **Blessed Teresa of Calcutta**. By the 1970s, she was internationally famed as a humanitarian and advocate for the poor and helpless. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979

and India's highest civilian honor, the Bharat Ratna, in 1980 for her humanitarian work. Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity continued to expand, and at the time of her death it was operating 610 missions in 123 countries, including hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, soup kitchens, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages, and schools. Like Dorcas, Mother Teresa embodied servant leadership, reaching out to those in need wherever she went.

So we find a female disciple in a world where women were to tend the home and be virtually invisible in public. Dorcas saw her calling to the widows and the poor, opening her home to those in need and using her gift for making clothing. Dorcas was a follower of Christ, and saw to it that those in her community were cared for. She helped to meet their physical

needs of food, clothing and shelter while ministering to their spiritual needs by sharing Christ with all who crossed her path.

Dorcas was well known among the disciples. When word reached her group that Peter was nearby, they sent word to him. Why I wonder? By this time Dorcas was already dead. The company of widows had already prepared her body for burial. Perhaps they thought Peter would merely want to come and pay respects for this well-known disciple of Christ. Maybe they thought Peter could offer the widows some comfort and reassurance that even though Dorcas was gone, the rest of the disciples would find a way to take care of them now.

We begin to see a glimpse of the early church as we see community life and a genuine caring for each other. It is noted elsewhere in Acts that among those in the disciples' communities there was no one in need. In spite of hard times

and persecutions from the Romans, no one went hungry.

Orphans were cared for. Widows were brought into protected households. Food was distributed to all who needed it. Lands were sold and money pooled to help share the wealth among all disciples and followers of Christ.

It reminds me of the old story of stone soup. The story is told of a small village that was experiencing hard times. Each family didn't have enough to feed themselves. One person had the brilliant idea of getting a large pot of water and placing a group of stones in the bottom. As he is boiling the water, people would come around and ask him what he was cooking. "Stone soup" he would reply. To one he would say, "But it would sure taste better with a couple of carrots. This person would say, "I just so happen to have a couple if you will share your soup." And so the story went on as one person would contribute some

broth, and a few potatoes, and an onion, and some bits of beef. Suddenly the village went from each individual household not having enough to eat to an entire village being fed – and it all began with water and a few stones.

So we have Peter arriving at the house of Dorcas, after she had died. The widows were there, showing Peter all the things Dorcas had made for them and the care she had given out of her kindness and love. I'm sure they thought Peter was merely coming to pay his respects. But God had other plans. God was not ready for Dorcas to leave this world. So Peter does something against etiquette of the day. He sent everyone out of the room and was alone with Dorcas. Even though she was dead, this was not considered appropriate, yet it seems Peter is repeating an action of Jesus, when Jesus arrived at the home of Jarius after his daughter had died. Jesus also sent everyone out

of the room except for the girl's parents. At times perhaps we need to clear away the noise and distractions and pray with God.

The scripture tells us that Peter knelt down and prayed.

Once he had come into communion with God, he then turned to the task at hand. He turned to Dorcas, and calling her by name, told her simply to get up. She sat up, Peter helped her down and then called the widows and saints back into the room. Dorcas was once again with them. I can only imagine how fast the word spread that the gift of resurrecting the dead had been passed on from the Good Shepherd to one of his disciples.

Remember that Jesus had asked Peter three times if Peter loved him. When Peter responded with a hearty "yes," Jesus said, "feed my sheep." Peter was singled out for a very special ministry, and Peter was clearly given the gift of healing. Other accounts in Acts have people lining up their sick in the street so

that as Peter would pass by his shadow would fall on them and they would be healed. Peter kept his focus on Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord – of that there was never another doubt. Peter went from denying Jesus three times to leading the Christian movement in its earliest days. Peter still made mistakes, but he never lost sight of the goal.

So what do we make of this story? Why should this seem important to us in the 21st century? I think there are some points we can take away from this encounter with God. First, God will use any willing vessel. Dorcas was not your typical disciple. She was a woman and a follower of Jesus Christ. Christ does not put barriers up to prevent us from serving. We may use our various hindrances as excuses but God will not. If God is calling you, you don't need any other credentials. Second, miracles happen. Even today, miraculous things are happening

all around us. Our Good Shepherd is still leading us. When we focus on what God wants us to do, there are no issues we cannot overcome. And finally, know that hard times will come – hard times are here. We are not exempted from difficult times.

Dorcas was helping the poor because there were poor. We are not preaching prosperity gospel here. But when we keep our faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we shall overcome.

Don't be surprised if you are called to be the next unusual disciple! Amen.