

**Life Giving Life (Acts 9:36-43)**  
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**First Baptist Church, Jefferson City MO**  
**The Fourth Sunday of Easter (Psalm 23; John 10:22-30; Revelation 7:9-17)**  
**May 8, 2022**  
**WATCH/LISTEN: [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/dorcas](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/dorcas)**

Dorcas was a woman of great respect because her name has been handed down to the church. How many churches have had a Dorcas Class over the years? Usually, the members of the Dorcas class are living reminders of the quiet, noble heritage she left the church. Dorcas, or Tabitha as she's known in her Jewish name, is the exemplar and they likewise are good, hard-working women who aren't afraid to do the work of the church. These quiet women are the ones who make good things happen by their faithful and dedicated service. This great story in Acts 9 breaks out into two distinct lessons.

First and foremost, this story is about a dramatic resurrection from the dead. Dorcas died from some unmentioned cause and her body was prepared for burial. Peter, the apostle known for doing powerful things in the name of the Lord, was summoned. When Dorcas died, the whole community of women turned out in true grief because she had spent her quiet life caring for those whom no one else would care for, making them clothes, and doing other acts of kindness. Peter was not too far away when the word of her death came. But when he arrived, he was swamped by the widows who brought him things she had made and told him one after another about this wonderful woman: *"Look at this dress; Dorcas made it for me for my son's bar mitzvah because she knew I couldn't afford any of the usual things from the market."* *"Look at this shawl; Dorcas made it for me because she knew my blood was thin and I shivered all the time."* *"Look at this cloak; Dorcas made it for me because I didn't have anything nice to wear to Synagogue and had quit going."*

With no one else to protect them, to see to their needs, what would happen to these poor, vulnerable women? Dorcas, their protector, their advocate in poverty, was dead and perhaps they felt as good as dead themselves.

In some ways, Dorcas' story has been told every day for the two thousand years since she died by poor people who don't have access to adequate health care, or by people who are trapped by their poverty in an endless cycle of frustration and futility know the same feelings of loss these poor widows knew when Dorcas died.

Peter ordered them all to leave him alone with dead Dorcas. And then he said to her lifeless body, *"Tabitha, get up!"* In some ways, her rising resembled the other resurrection stories Peter remembered. There was Jairus' daughter. Jesus said almost the same words to her, *"Talitha, koum."* *"Little girl, get up!"* Something similar happened with dear old Lazarus. Peter knew something from his own experience of walking with Jesus about how these things were

done.

The second lesson of this story is *the ordinariness* of her life and ministry among the believers in the sea coastal city of Joppa. Since no husband is mentioned here, some have assumed she was unmarried. Dorcas had a wide ministry in the city with widows and others who were alone. And she used her seamstress talents to see they had clothing and blankets to keep them warm.

I grew up under the loving attention of a Dorcas. I spent the weekdays in my preschool years under the care of my maternal grandmother. There were three of us grandkids in her care and we were quite a handful but she always won in our assertions of freedom because ultimately, she was tougher and smarter than all of us ... always staying a step ahead of our preschool antics.

We grew up but we never outgrew our need to be cared for by her even when we had children of our own. Over the years, she loved us in simple ways. She absorbed our divorces and our mistakes in life with a steady love that understood forgiveness as a powerful medicine.

In the last years of her life, she lived in a nursing home not far from where she grew up in the farm country north of Dallas. Even though she lived to the age of 96, she found a way to maintain her lifelong commitment to be a positive gift to the world wherever she was. In the last decade of her life, she busied herself making lap quilts made of scraps of cloth she collected. These were small enough for someone like her to put over her lap to keep her legs warm when the weather was cooler. One day I asked her why she made them and she mentioned she gave them “to the old folks” who lived in her nursing home so all her neighbors could enjoy them and stay warm as well. Isn’t that the spirit of Dorcas at work?

Lest you think I’m affirming this work as merely feminine work, let me remind you that this kind of service is gender free in nature. Remember our leader Jesus, *“knowing the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself”*<sup>1</sup> and washed the disciples’ feet.

When Wanda and I first bought our house in Leawood, there was not a stick of furniture to put in as she and the kids were still living in San Antonio. I, on the other hand, lived there for a few weeks surviving on my Boy Scout skills camped out in this empty house. After a few days, I heard a lawn mower suspiciously close to our yard, and who was it? Bill King, an 80-year-old retiree was out in our yard pushing a mower! He didn’t ask permission and he would have been happy if I didn’t know it was him.

That’s why when I preached Bill King’s funeral nearly a decade later, I chose Dorcas as an

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<sup>1</sup> John 13:3, NRSV

example of the kind of love and care Bill had left behind. Bill was a great example in our church of the kind of ministry Dorcas had in hers and we loved him in the same way by telling Bill King stories with one another.

Think of Dorcas as a symbol of things to come, a promissory note if you will, that one day our precious dead will be restored to us, or us to them, together in a place beyond pain. Those widow ladies did the only thing they could at the moment by grieving over her death.

Dorcas' story is a living testimony to the power of God to rule over death. But it's also a testimony to the miracle of her living. We "ooh" and "aah" about the miracle of Peter raising her from the dead and stand a chance of missing the biggest miracle of all ... the miracle of living a life of giving to those in need. The Bible doesn't deny death, doesn't cover over it, and doesn't claim to remove the sorrowful sting of death. In fact, in the Bible sorrow, suffering, and death become questions juxtaposed against all our claims about God ... God's goodness, God's righteousness, God's justice, and God's power.

At one level, our faith makes us suffer even deeper because we realize God has the power to prevent or end it. And so, in the Bible, God is questioned about this in the Psalms, in the prophets, in Job, even in the apocalyptic books. In John's mysterious apocalypse he describes the answer to the question of suffering and death. In the Bible, death is the enemy Christ has overcome for himself and one day will defeat for us as well:

*"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands ... And the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:9, 15-17, NRSV).

That's the answer we receive by faith: *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* Every tear, the tears of the mother who lost her child, the tears of the wife who lost her husband, the tears of grief anticipated by those who hear bad news in the waiting room of the hospital, the tears of parents who cannot feed their children, the tears of the abused, the tears of the disappointed, the tears of the lonely, lost, and forgotten.

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