

Sermon for April 17, 2016 "Who was Dorcas?"

Acts 9:36-43

"Brothers and Sisters in Christ we gather here this day to witness to our faith and celebrate the life of Dorcas. We come together in grief acknowledging our human loss but seeking help from God. May God search our hearts that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, and in death resurrection.

"Who was Dorcas? She was better known to her friends as Tabitha. To some she was just another good seamstress. She was someone who could skillfully weave thread into a useful or even beautiful cover for the human body. A talent that undoubtedly put her in contact with many influential people.

"But to her brothers and sisters of Christ she was more. She was one who openly gave of herself to help the other widows in the church. She was one on whom you could call day and night. She was tireless in her acts of mercy and charity and diligent in her witness to all. To us who were one with her in Christ she was not just a person who provided garments for the body. She was one who helped others obtain robes of righteousness for the soul.

"Before Jesus died he promised us that he would go to prepare a place for us. So we are sure that there is laid up for Dorcas a crown of righteousness. We may mourn her now but we will see one another again.

"Earth to earth, Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Henceforth, says the spirit, they rest from their labors and their deeds follow them. Amen."

These are the kinds of words that Tabitha's friends expected to hear from Peter when he came to them. When she died some of her friends realized that Peter the Apostle was nearby. Here was one who had seen the Lord. Peter had broken bread with Jesus and had been given the keys to the Kingdom. Here was one who personally knew the Lord that she had served in her life.

So they sent for him to come immediately. When he arrived they told him all about her and her loving service to God and her neighbor. The widows showed him the lovely garments she had made and probably given to them. These were physical demonstrations of her willingness to serve like Jesus.

They expected Peter to offer them some word of comfort. They wanted him to speak a word of grace to heal their broken hearts. They wanted him to give a fitting summary of her life in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They wanted him to put into words their admiration of this woman and the way she had inspired them. This is what they expected from their pastor Peter: a fitting eulogy and funeral service for a Christian saint.

So what did Peter say? He said, "Tabitha, cum." "Tabitha, arise." They were expecting a funeral and Peter gave them a resurrection! My mind can't help but to go back to the Gospels and Jesus raising the daughter of Jarius. You remember the story? Jesus is called to heal the dying daughter of a leader in the synagogue named

Jarius. He is delayed and in the meantime the girl dies. When Jesus gets there the people say he is too late. But Jesus said, "She is only sleeping." Then he takes just the parents and Peter, James, and John, and then he says, "Child arise," which the Bible tells us in Aramaic is "Talitha, cum."

"Talitha, cum" - Child, arise. "Tabitha, cum" - Tabitha, arise. Is it just a coincidence that Peter's words at raising Tabitha are so much like Jesus' words at raising Jarius' daughter? Is it also a coincidence that someone went to get Peter just as someone had gone to get Jesus? Is it just a coincidence that Jesus put them all out of the room except a few when he raised Jarius' daughter and likewise Peter put them out of the room when he raised Tabitha? Of course Peter had seen Jesus raise Jarius' daughter, but there is more to it. There is an economy of words in the Bible. The Bible uses just enough words and no more to make its point. Every word has meaning and a purpose.

These similarities between the raising of Jarius' daughter and the raising of Tabitha are no coincidence. These similarities were recorded to show us that while Peter was saying the words, it was Jesus who was speaking through him telling Tabitha to arise. In Peter, God's servant, the life giving power of Jesus was still present. Yes, Jesus had raised Jarius' daughter and Lazarus and others, but Jesus had ascended into heaven. This story demonstrated that even after Jesus had gone to heaven his power was still at work in and through those who believed in him.

So, who was Dorcas? She was a first century Christian who made her living by sewing. She served the Lord well, and sometime around 35-40 AD she died. A few days later Jesus, at work through Peter, brought her back to life. But Dorcas is more than an historical figure. She is a symbol of new life. She shows us that in this age Christ is still amongst us giving new life.

Jesus said to Jarius' daughter, "Talitha, cum" - "Child, arise," and she came to life. Through Peter Jesus said to Dorcas, "Tabitha, cum" - "Tabitha, arise," and she came to life. And so Jesus is saying to you today, "Talitha, cum" - "Child, arise." The same life giving power present in Christ and in Peter is present here today. We have all sinned and the wages of sin is death. Jesus is here to bring new life, not only to our bodies at the resurrection, but to the deadness of our souls here and now. To speak a word of resurrection to sin dead souls. To speak a word of life to those in hopeless situations. To say arise to those who have fallen morally and spiritually.

Surrender yourself to the power of God at work in Christ. Ask Jesus to come into you and to resurrect the deadness of your life. Confess your need for him and repent from your attempts to save yourself. Allow him to enter your heart and bring new life into you and make you alive again. Allow yourself to hear Jesus' voice saying to you "Child arise!"

Then go forth and speak words of new life to the world. To those who are down in the dumps go and say, "Child arise." To those who are oppressed go and say, "Child arise." To those who are in darkness say, "Child arise." Let Christ's power of new life be spoken through you! Talitha cum, child arise!