

Tabitha

Acts 9:36-42

“Tabitha, get up.” The Apostle Peter spoke these words over the lifeless body of a woman who fell ill and died in the town of Lydda. Tabitha, called Dorcas in Greek, was known for her good works and acts of charity. She was a generous person who sewed for others and gave to the needy. She was probably a widow. She was also called a disciple of Jesus, that is, a follower, one who learned from him, part of the inner circle in the early church. The feminine form of the word *disciple* in Greek is used only once in the New Testament, and seldom elsewhere. It is used here to identify Tabitha.

When Tabitha died, others in her company sent for Peter who was visiting in a neighboring town. He came immediately. He asked the widows and other friends to leave the room where they stood weeping around her deathbed. Peter knelt and prayed. Then he commanded Tabitha to get up. She opened her eyes and sat up. Peter called in the others back in to see that she was alive. The good news about what God had done in Tabitha spread through the region and many believed in the Lord.

We tell the story of Tabitha because it shows us the awesome power of life in Christ. Tabitha the disciple learned from Jesus a giving way of life. Tabitha had become one with the Lord she followed, and that union showed in how she lived, how she cared for others, how she directed her resources. Her life had already been transformed by Jesus. Her being raised from death was one more powerful sign of the presence of Christ in her. Whether she lived or died, she was in Christ and shared in his transforming and everlasting life.

It is easy for us to sell ourselves short. Women have a way of discounting what they do. It comes from long practice and millennia of reinforcement. Oh, I’m just a widow. I’m just a quilter. Oh, I don’t really have that much money to give. I read the Bible and I like to talk with others about what it means, but I’m no great scholar. I’m not a theologian. I help where I can, but I don’t expect that the little I can do will really make a difference.

Tabitha inspires us to re-frame how we see ourselves and the impact we can have. Tabitha is not one of the stars of the New Testament. She is mentioned just once here in the ninth chapter of Acts. When the Apostle Peter arrives, he becomes the center of attention, telling people where to go, calling down the power of God, making a miracle. Long before Peter enters the story, however, Tabitha had a well-deserved reputation as an almsgiver, a philanthropist, someone whose generosity made a difference in Lydda. Her grieving friends were eager to show Peter the clothes she had created, things of beauty and utility that brightened the lives of those who received them. She also had a reputation as a disciple, someone who had learned and internalized and followed the teachings of Jesus. Someone whose life was in Christ. News that God had raised her from the dead traveled fast and had a huge impact. Through her witness, many believed in the Lord.

You too can be a philanthropist. You too can participate intimately in the life of Christ. You too can be a powerful witness. You too can make a difference.