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In the Spirit of Tabitha Acts 9:36-43

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas.^[h] She was devoted to **good works and acts of charity**.³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.”³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and **showing tunics and other clothing** that Dorcas had made while she was with them.⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, **“Tabitha, get up.”** Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many **believed** in the Lord.⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

What’s the **most amazing story** you’ve heard from our study of the Book of Acts? We’ve been studying this book for a month now. It’s a book of **power and transformation**, isn’t it? It is full of **healings, miracles, changed** hearts and minds, and **new life**, even after death—all by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is alive and at work in this book about the early church, and it gives us so much to think about in **our lives and our church** today!

Today’s story is no different.

It’s a **miracle story, a transformation story, a restoration** story.

It’s one of several healings by Peter....all of them highlighting that the power to heal comes from Jesus Christ alone.

That’s the point of this book—**Jesus Christ is alive and at work**.

The disciples are conduits of His power,
And instruments of the Holy Spirit.

This story begins in a place of **darkness and sorrow**—much like the women who came to the empty tomb on Easter, while it was still dark.

The story begins in a way that often reflects our lives.
 We are people who deal with *brokenness every day*, aren't we?
 We deal with death, illness, addiction, pain, lost relationships,
 Not to mention the separation and fear of COVID,
 The strain and stress of this political season,
 The social justice needs all around us!

In our own church we are confronted with great brokenness,
 And *great loss* just in 2020.
 We've lost 4 of the saints in these past several months:
Monica, Suella, Gynith and Charlie.

As believers we *long for hope and healing* in this world.
 And I guess most of us come to church looking for a word of hope
 Because we are so surrounded by so much pain and loss.

We are not much different from those that *gathered around Tabitha*
 after her death, mourning her *loss* and her *place* in the church.

We are not much different when we gather *to pray for healing*,
 And cry out to God when someone in our community is sick or dying.
 We send out word to pray, we gather together to pray,
 And we ask God—please heal this brother or sister in Christ.

And we know, that sometimes healing comes now,
 and other times healing comes with eternal life.

It is this *hope of healing that led the people of that church*
 to call for Peter to come right away.
 We don't know if they expected him to raise her back to life,
 but they surely hoped for something,
 and they wanted him to know who she was,
 and what she meant to their church!

Tabitha was a *matriarch* of the church, a pillar.
 She was also a *WOMAN*—which means she wouldn't have had much standing in
 that society, or much value in the eyes of the world.
 But in the eyes of her church—she was a *true treasure*.
 A saint.

The fact that we know both her *Aramaic name, Tabitha*, and the *Greek form of her name, Dorcas*, suggests that she was likely a bridge-builder, maybe someone who accepted people from different backgrounds and languages. Maybe she was a mother figure for all of the people.

We know she was a *devoted servant, a blessing* to her community. She was a *true DISCIPLE* of Jesus Christ.

In fact, she is referred to in Greek as a *mathetria*—the feminine form of the Greek word for disciple, mathetes. It is the *ONLY time in the New Testament* that this word is used, Which is a pretty big deal!

It reminds us that despite the fact that women were *largely property* at that time, That they had no social standing, Despite all the arguments *against women in ministry* or leadership in the early church, this author, *Luke, doesn't buy it!*

In the *Gospel of Luke* he describes several times, the women followers and supporters of Jesus, and he highlights the women who loved Jesus. And here, in *Acts*, he uses the *term disciple* to refer to Tabitha. The society may have not valued her, but the church sure did!

Look at what the widows who gathered to mourn were showing Peter when he arrived, they showed him *all the tunics and clothing* she had made for them. Think about that—these were gifts, handmade, with love.

So why would this *story be so important* for us today? We know Tabitha was a church leader who died, She was a servant, a treasure in her community. And we know that Peter came and raised her back to life.

It was *not a permanent resurrection* like Jesus, she died at a later date. This was a *new chance at life*, a resurrection like *Lazarus* in John 11. Kind of like the experience of someone whose heart stops, and then they are brought back to life.

But is the raising her from death, that miracle, the point of this story?
 What if it's that, and *even more*?
 We get all this information about her *impact* in the church.
 We get Luke referring to her as a *disciple*,
 and in a book about the *power* of the church!

What if this is a story about all of us--*living in her spirit*, today?
 Carrying on her legacy?

Tabitha is a disciple with the courage to *embody the kingdom of God*.
 She was working to transform the world, by *servicing* faithfully, *loving* everyone,
 And *giving* of what she had.

What can we learn from her?

What if *WE are supposed to work* toward the will of God,
 being done "*on earth as it is in heaven*"?

When Peter arrived, he saw the love that church had for her—
 As they brought their tunics and clothing she had made,
 he saw their grief and lament.
 It was clear to him that *her work, her ministry, and her witness*
 was *ESSENTIAL* in that church.

What if that's the *point* of her being raised back to life?
 What if she is *a model for our faith and life* today?
 The question then becomes,
are we following in her footsteps?
 Are we *honoring her legacy*? Her spirit?

Think for a moment--*Who are the Tabithas that you know?*

Every church has saints like this—
Men and women who live to serve and bless others.
 We've been blessed by so many in this church—they are far too many to name.
 There's a reason when we celebrate volunteers that we usually acknowledge over
 90 people in a church of 100!
 This community is a community of *servants, ministers, people who love and bless*.

Some of the saints have left us, far too soon.

But even those who have gone on to be with Christ,
their legacy lives on,
like with ***Phil Lutz***, and his brilliant plans for our Blessing Box.
Talk about a ***legacy of love!***

Tabitha's story can be ***OUR story***.
The story of this faithful witness can be ***our example*** in faith.

Friends, hear the ***Good News*** of the Gospel:
The ***legacy of Tabitha lives on***.
We have been called to ***follow*** in her footsteps.
To ***love, serve, and bless*** others, in whatever way we can,
In a world that so desperately needs such love right now.

May we follow the call of the Holy Spirit and live as she did.
And all God's people said, Amen.

