

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 12 May 2019 10am

Rev Peter Cornick

'Tabitha, get up.'

Acts 9:36-43

Remember Peter, the one who denied Jesus; remember Peter, the one who ran to the tomb – amazed – but didn't understand; remember Peter, the fisherman – who can't catch fish – until he meets with Jesus on the shore of Galilee. 'Do you love me Peter?' Yes Lord, you know that I love you. This is what we remember Peter for.

But this is a touching, gentle story, of Peter, full of sensitivity and concern. No longer the clumsy fisherman who fails to understand, but Peter; acting on behalf of Jesus; in the way of Jesus; in power of the Holy Spirit. Peter is almost unrecognisable, filled with the Holy Spirit compared to the Peter before.

Perhaps we could remember Peter like this, living in the light of the resurrection.

Tabitha lived in Joppa – modern day Tel-Aviv. What do we know about Tabitha? Or in Greek, Dorcas, 'the gazelle'? Not much. 'She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor.' She was obviously popular enough to attract a collection of widows, mourning her death. These widows wore the clothing, made for them by Tabitha. They were walking examples of Tabitha's charitable works. So all we know is: 'She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor.'

But critically, we also know this: she was, 'a disciple' – the word, usually in Greek is – Mathntes. But this is the only time in the NT, that this common Greek word for disciple, appears in the feminine version, Mathntria. Tabitha was – markedly – a female disciple. And if you go back to Luke 8, you find a number of named women helping Jesus: 'and many other women who used their own resources to help Jesus and the disciples.' Was Tabitha one of the many other women? Is this why Peter goes to her as soon as he's called. Tabitha is a disciple of Jesus.

But Tabitha has died. And this is where Peter returns to the story. Called for from nearby Lydda, Peter clears the room of the wailing widows. He prays. Tabitha, get up. She does, and Peter presents her alive.

Peter is acting in the exact way of Jesus, on behalf of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Why is this so important? As Peter begins to understand living in the light of the resurrection, he understands that he is to become Christ's body. The resurrection appearances are fleeting. A period of readjustment for the disciples. How will they cope without Jesus doing it for them? Peter copes – very well!

'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Teresa of Avila, a 16th Century Spanish mystic and disciple wrote:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,*

*no feet but yours,
yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion
is to look out to the earth,
yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good
and yours are the hands by which He is to bless us now.*

What is important, is for Peter to become as Jesus to Tabitha – and likewise, to live in the light of the resurrection.

We too have to become as Jesus to those we serve.

But as we hear the story, we are reminded, not of Peter, but of Jesus.
Creating space around Tabitha, praying, calling her by name.

‘Tabitha, get up.’

‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. (John 10: 27).’
