

## **BEING A DORCAS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD**

**Acts 9:36-45**

**Preached by Dr. Cahill**

**Babcock Presbyterian Church**

**Sunday, April 21, 2013**

Today's scripture is about a woman named Tabitha (also called Dorcas) who was raised from the dead by the Apostle Peter. Notice I used the term "the Apostle" and not "the Disciple" Peter. Peter and the others were still disciples, or followers of Jesus but then at Pentecost, which will be celebrated next month, they were given a new task, becoming apostles or ambassadors of Christ, empowered to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.

Last Sunday's sermon was based on the story from John's Gospel about Jesus' threefold question to Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" Peter, you remember, got increasingly agitated when Jesus kept pushing him, probably because he was still feeling guilty about his three denials on Good Friday. If he wasn't feeling so guilty, perhaps Peter would've heard Jesus saying three times, "feed my lambs, tend my sheep."

In due time Jesus' intentions became clear. First, by asking the same question, "Do you love me?" three times, Jesus was gently undoing Peter's three Good Friday denials. But Jesus was also passing the torch, giving Peter and the others the responsibility of being good shepherds to the Risen Christ's ever growing flock.

We see this happening in the story of Peter raising Dorcas from the dead. Far from being the impulsive braggart we knew in the Gospels, Peter became a new man, (living through Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost had a way of making him grow up fast). Now he had the same confidence and authority Jesus demonstrated in similar situations, in this case when Jesus raised up the daughter of Jarius, the head of a local synagogue. Jesus was asked to go to Jarius' house to heal his dying daughter only to learn the child had died. Jesus proceeded to clear the room, except for her parents, then taking her lifeless hand said, "Little girl, get up!"

Fast forward to the story of Peter resuscitating Dorcas. Almost the same scenario with the house filled with mourners and Dorcas' lifeless body lying on her bed. This time Peter, like Jesus, cleared the room, took hold of her hand and said, "Dorcas, get up!"

I think it's curious Peter cleared the room, before saying, "Dorcas, get up," probably because he didn't want anyone there just in case she didn't. But she did and news of her resuscitation started a chain reaction of conversions in the neighborhood.

You know that one of the charges in our weekly benediction, besides "bring health to the sick and touch the untouchables" is "raise the dead." Remember, this charge comes from Jesus' own instructions to the disciples so they could represent Christ to people, good people, who were otherwise lost and confused in their perceptions of God and his coming Kingdom so they could now know and enjoy God forever.

This story of Peter resuscitating Dorcas is important for two reasons. First, we're assured, through Christ, all things are possible. If God chooses to work through you to do something impossible, it will happen. Of course we need to understand God's timing and purpose for miracles may seem painfully sporadic, causing us to wonder, "Why this time and not other times?" Like it or not, this question must be filed under the category of "God's mysterious ways," which I know, is hard to hear. All the more reason to trust that "all things (eventually) work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose." (Romans: 28)

The second reason this story is important is Dorcas. Here was a woman who was loved by her neighbors for her unswerving devotion to being and making the difference in people's lives. Part of her charitable work was using her talent to sew clothing for the widows in her neighborhood. She's a spot on example of someone using her talents for others. Her generosity has inspired the founding of many Dorcas societies around the world whose primary mission is providing clothing and other physical needs to the poor.

One Dorcas Society, based in Buxton, Maine, is responsible for an ongoing outreach through donations to families in adversity, Christmas baskets to shut-ins, as well as supporting various faith based organizations in their neighborhood. Another society, based in Wisconsin, provides Christian fellowship opportunities for boys and girls, men and women that promote friendship with God and Christian community. They also support two missionary families overseas. I went online to get a sense of this congregation and by looking at the photos on their website I got the impression it's a church comparable to our own, in both numbers and personality.

Although Babcock Presbyterian doesn't have an official Dorcas Society, over the last few years we've been putting into place various outreach opportunities to our own neighborhood.

Here's a rundown. Once a year we provide 40-50 Thanksgiving baskets to struggling families and every Christmas many of our members have bought wonderful presents for the growing number of children at Pleasant Plains Elementary School whose families live close to or under the poverty line.

Then, four times a year Babcock members purchase and donate non perishable food items as well as designating the proceeds from our Fall Flea Market to the Towson Assistance Center.

We're also reaching out to the children and youth in our neighborhood. Our non-profit A+ Before and After School Program is a ministry that has a strong faith component that nurtures the children in our care. Campus Life ministry to middle schoolers in our neighborhood and Lost Change Found, Babcock's Youth Fellowship Ministry, welcomes those who come on Tuesday evening to join us on Sunday evenings.

Finally, more folks in the neighborhood are accepting our invitation to grow vegetables and flowers in our Community Garden. This year Campus Life members are already tending their own plot with the help of Cathy Lawson and the Boy Scouts are

proposing to build a tool shed and other appropriate additions to make our community garden even more user friendly.

Please understand, listing these recent outreach efforts isn't meant to be a self-congratulatory pat on the back. Yes, we're moving in the right direction, but there's so much more to do.

A temperance woman, whose life ambition was to ban alcohol, somehow gained an audience with Winston Churchill when he was the new Prime Minister during Britain's darkest days of World War II. In the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street she chided Winston for the bad example he set with his prodigious consumption of alcohol. "Prime Minister," she chirped, "one of my colleagues in the Temperance League estimated that the amount of brandy and champagne you've drunk in your lifetime would fill up to half of this room. Churchill was quiet for a moment and mentally took in the dimensions of the Cabinet Room where he met with his Majesty's ministers. He then spoke in a solemn tone, "So much accomplished. So much more yet to do." True, we can't do everything, but we can do something.

In the last few years we've done a lot to reach out and bring Christ's love and grace into our neighborhood, yet there's so much more yet to do.

Recently your session members have been attending a monthly breakfast on Saturday mornings to pray and discern what God wants us to do together, something ongoing and meaningful to increase the quality of life in our neighborhood. One of our ideas has been to partner with the Board of Directors of the Loch Raven Village Association and pinpoint one ongoing project our congregation and interested residents could do to build a sense of community so our neighborhood isn't just a zip code, where families live in isolation, but a neighborhood known for people of good will reaching out and helping one another.

If we discern through prayer and conversation this is what God's calling us to do, before this can happen, your support is necessary. Certainly not everyone can be expected to be involved, but we're praying God will raise up the right number of us to catch the vision and devise a plan to put into action the words you've been hearing at the end of every worship service over the past few years.

"Go to the lost, confused people in your neighborhood. Tell them the Kingdom is near. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables, kick out demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously." (Matthew 10 selected verses)

I pray the same love and passion demonstrated by Dorcas will take root in our hearts as we wait for the Spirit of Pentecost to descend and empower us to be not only followers, but also ambassadors of Christ.