

Stepping out in Faith

Acts 9: 36-43 (May 8, 2022)

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³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸Since 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." ³⁹So 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. ⁴⁰Peter 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. ⁴¹He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. ⁴²This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Historical Context

Dorcas is called a "female disciple," *mathetria* in Greek, the only time that term is used in the entire New Testament. Luke implies by that usage that Dorcas is fully the equivalent of the male disciples who are named with the masculine form of the noun in 9:38.

Theme: Stepping out in Faith

Tabitha was a highly regarded Christian in her community. Given that relations between men and women in the first century were unequal, this is another example of how in the new community that grew around Jesus, no one is staying in his or her place. Tabitha steps out in faith by putting her time, resources and energy into helping those who needed it the most. She was an instrument of God's love and care for widows and she gave of herself, her time, skill and money in such a generous way that she was loved and respected. She "*was devoted to good works and acts of charity.*" As followers of Jesus we're called to do the same. Charity is not just giving a small donation to a cause, but in Christian terms it involves esteem, affection, and caring that reflect God's agape (self-giving) love. Clearly the impact of Tabitha's kindness was that other people were helped and the kingdom of God grew as a result. Good works and charity aren't done only with money but with our words, our time, and our help to our family or neighbors. Tabitha stepped out in faith and impacted a whole community.

A song titled *The Way It Is* mentions a poor old lady like the ones helped by Tabitha being mocked by a man in a silk suit who says for fun, "Get a job." The refrain repeats in the song: *That's just the way it is Some things will never change That's just the way it is Ah, but don't you believe them.*

That is the Gospel message. People will always say *that's just the way it is, some things will never change.* Our task as followers of Christ is to say, that things can in fact change and be different. Widows and the poor don't have to be disregarded. Illness and death don't have to have the final word.