

Sermon for May 10, 2015 – Easter 6 / Mother’s Day

Acts 9:36-42 (NIV84)

Theme: Blessed Tabithas!

- 1) *God shows his saving love through you.*
- 2) *God reveals his saving power to you.*

<sup>36</sup> *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.* <sup>37</sup> *About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.* <sup>38</sup> *Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"* <sup>39</sup> *Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.* <sup>40</sup> *Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.* <sup>41</sup> *He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.* <sup>42</sup> *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*

Even though our society speaks highly of motherhood on a day like today, it actually sees little value in what many call the traditional roles for women. Young women are encouraged to pursue a career to make a name for themselves – to break the glass ceilings that a “patriarchal society” has placed over their potential. If a young woman expresses interest in simply getting married and starting a family, our society gasps. Sure, it will say that she should do whatever she wants to do; but then it will try to convince her that she is wasting her abilities and talent if she pursues such a dream. “You can always do that stuff later. It’s more important that you live to your full potential now!”

Now I want to be clear from the get go: I have no problem with a woman working outside the home or pursuing a career – if the Lord has given her such a calling. What I take issue with is how society belittles the traditional roles of women. Our world tells us that being a CEO is far more important than being a mom, making medicine more important than making dinner, and making money more important than making a home. But is this true? Not in the eyes of God! Every vocation is equally important to Him and should, therefore, be equally valued by us. Let us consider this truth under the theme: **Blessed Tabithas!** *1) God shows his saving love through you. 2) God reveals his saving power to you.*

Part One: God shows his saving love through you.

Our sermon text begins: *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.*

The names Tabitha and Dorcas both mean “gazelle” and were terms that were often associated with beauty.

In the eyes of the world, a beautiful woman spends a lot of time on her “self” – sparing no effort to look fashionable and attractive so that all eyes are naturally drawn to her.

Tabitha wasn’t like that at all. She, rather, seemed to possess the feminine beauty that God praises above all else, as the apostle Peter encouraged women: *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your*

*inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight<sup>5</sup> For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.<sup>i</sup>*

Tabitha may not have been a beautiful woman in the eyes of the world, but she was certainly beautiful to God! She was an unassuming and gentle spirit who exhibited a wonderful, feminine, heartfelt compassion towards all who were in need. Instead of pursuing her own interests, she pursued the interests of others. How? By using her time and talent to make clothing for those who could not afford it.

And do you know what? Her simple, unassuming love – expressed through her hands – was great in the eyes of God. Why? Because everything she did, she did out of love for her Savior – remembering Jesus' great love that took all her sins upon himself and died on the cross so that she might stand forgiven, righteous and holy before the LORD. Her Savior did not live for himself, but for her. In response to His great love, she lived for others – serving them in all the simple ways she could.

And even though she seemed to leave no impact on world history, her acts of kindness and works of love were just as important as any doctors', scientists', or world leaders'. Why do I say that? Because all the good works she did for Christ were actually works Christ performed through her – taking care of the people in her corner of the world and glorifying his name through this blessed Christian woman.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us be careful never to become like the world: considering things like taking care of the home and the people God places in our lives as unimportant work – something we should do only after making a name for ourselves. Caring for others is very important work that God values highly – especially when it is done out of reverence for Christ.

I know, we all like to dream big – thinking how great it would be if we could do something like cure cancer, be a great actor/actress, or invent a product that would impact the world. But here's the thing: whenever we faithfully fulfill our various vocations out of love for Christ, God is making an impact on the world. Changing diapers is not glamorous work and a Christian woman's family doesn't always value all the effort she makes in keeping her house clean and family fed, but God does. As we faithfully carry out our calling in life, the LORD works through us – feeding, caring, clothing, comforting and encouraging others through our hands and hearts. Every Christian, regardless of his or her vocation, should take comfort in this truth, and let it motivate them to remain faithful to their calling.

Yes, blessed are all the Tabithas: all the Christian women who clothe, clean and care for others out of love for Christ. Even if no one else notices, God does – and your faithful love is beautiful in His sight. Blessed are all you Tabithas: the world may see your work as menial, but know that the Lord sees it as great because He is caring for others through you. On the Last day you will understand this, when He says to you: *'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*<sup>iii</sup>

Part Two: *God reveals his saving power to you.*

The book of Revelation records a voice from heaven saying: *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."*<sup>iiii</sup> I can think of no better illustration of that saying than what Peter experienced when He walked into the room where Tabitha was laid.

We read that, when Peter arrived at the house and was taken to the upper room: *all the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.*

Tabitha's faithful labor for her Lord certainly followed her in death. The impact Christ had through her simple service could be seen in all the tears of the people she helped. No, Tabitha was not an apostle or evangelist in the strict sense of the word, but she most certainly shared the Gospel with her hands – and the LORD used that every bit as much as Peter's preaching to draw attention to His Son's forgiving love. Even in death her deeds continued to bring glory to Christ.

And now the time came for Christ to really glorify His name through her. We read that Peter, after all those gathered showed him the things Tabitha had done for them in life, *sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.*<sup>41</sup> *He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.*

God loved Tabitha so much, that He decided to make her an example of his saving power. Just think, of all the great and important Christians God could have raised from the dead: men like John the Baptist, Stephen, or the apostle James, the LORD chose Tabitha. Why? To make his gracious, saving power known – all to the glory of his name, as we read: *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*

The God Tabitha trusted and served is both faithful and powerful. He did not abandon his servant to the grave, but raised her up. And because He raised her from death, we can be confident that He will also raise us from the grave on the last day to grant every believer the everlasting life Jesus won for us through His cross.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ: in light of all the gracious things the LORD performed both through and for Tabitha, what kind of life should we encourage for our daughters? Should we encourage them to pursue politics like Hillary Clinton, business like Meg Whitman, and sports like Serena Williams? Should we encourage them to go as far as they can go for themselves – breaking all the glass ceilings they can? Or should we show them Tabitha, and tell them what true beauty is all about: namely, using the talents and abilities God has given you to serve others in love, all to the glory of Christ's forgiving love towards you?

Having three daughters of my own, I know how tempting it is to dream big dreams for them. But, when I think of things in the light of Scripture, I pray that my daughters (regardless of the vocation the Lord leads them to pursue) hold up Tabitha as the person they would most like to emulate. Why? Because even though the Megs, Hillarys and Sereras of the world have all the attention and adoration of mankind, the Tabithas are the ones blessed by God.

I also pray that all of us (men and women alike) learn from Tabitha's example. May the LORD lead us all find such joy in the salvation He won for us on His cross that we can't help but use whatever calling God has given us in life to reflect that love by helping others more than we help ourselves. To this blessed work God has called every Christian – all to the glory of His name. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 1Pe 3:3-5 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Mat 25:34-36,40 NIV84

<sup>iii</sup> Rev 14:13 NIV84