

**Fourth Sunday of Easter****Year C****RCL**

- [Acts 9:36-43](#)
- [Revelation 7:9-17](#)
- [John 10:22-30](#)
- [Psalm 23](#)

In the lesson from Acts today, the first descriptor about Tabitha, among the few we're given, is that she was a disciple. This is a huge deal for the word for female disciple is only used once in the New Testament and it's used in this passage in reference to Tabitha. We find out a little more about her life, and who she was, but we're not given much. Her story comes not with great fanfare, but rather a simple and straightforward telling: her life was built around service, and in that life and in her illness and death, we see how God interacts with the world. The story about Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, is a quiet story of restoration and return to wholeness in community. We don't know much specifics about her life beyond that she was a widow, and her devotion to good works and charity, but we can get an idea by those who showed up to grieve her death. Those who gathered to grieve her were named as widows. A group that was exploited, oppressed, and without voice. And they came bearing tunics and clothing she made for them.

In many ways though, it's not so simple, to make clothing, especially hand sewn ones. On one level, it's a skill that takes an inordinate time to master, and even with hours at the sewing machine (in our modern times) it takes an incredible amount of creativity, artistry, and intuition to work with patterns and different fabrics. Ask one of the many master seamstresses we have in our church. But that's just the practical level.

Those that make clothing, much like Tabitha, do more than make a garment to cover ones' body. This was evidenced by the women gathered around her. They weren't just showing her handiwork, her skill at making garments to wear, although she was skilled indeed. She did something deeper- she mended, repaired, bound together this beautiful community of belovedness and support.

I've just returned from spending time at our annual clergy retreat for the Episcopal Church in Colorado. The theme was Becoming Beloved Community. The hope for this program offered by the National Church is to dream and work to foster Beloved Communities where all people may experience dignity and abundant life and see themselves and others as beloved children of God.<sup>1</sup> We studied and prayed about how to take up the long-term commitments necessary to form loving, liberating and life-giving relationships with each other. How do we, as disciples, seek racial healing, reconciliation and justice? These are big and complex questions, with even bigger and intricate answers. What does it look like to be disciples who are reconcilers, justice-makers, and healers in the name of Christ? The answers to how one becomes a participant in the healing of the world often aren't linear, but circuitous. Tabitha showed us one of the many ways to do that as a disciple. She supported a community of the most vulnerable and the outcast in society. She sought to create a community where all knew they were beloved and worthy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community>

The miracle of bringing Tabitha back to life doesn't come from her good works, just as her value doesn't come in the fact that she did charity. From what we know, most people do not come back from the dead, regardless of how good of a person they were. Rather, her value was inherent in her personhood. The clothing she made symbolized her love of God, and that in that love each person around her was seen, heard and valued. By ministering to these women, she proclaimed God's love for them, she practiced the way of love, and became a repairer of the breach and great divide that forms so easily between us in our differences. Through her restoration to life, we see that her work was not quite done yet. How can we be inspired to be disciples in this way? How are we called to mend the places in our society that need repaired? We don't know what happened after she "got up" according to Peter's command. But we can imagine from what we know, that she went back to doing what she had always been doing. Creating an impact in the world one garment at a time.

There are many like her, not only in the past but living now, although sometimes they're hard to spot. In Canada, we find one of those people: due to Canada's geography and infrastructure, many communities are only able to be accessed by planes because of the ice in the winter. In one area, families must travel by plane around 400-500 miles to find a hospital to give birth. Peggy, who is currently in her 90s, lives in an area like this in Northern Canada. Over the years she has knitted baby hats for all the babies that were born in that hospital. She knitted about 500 hats a year. This means, that just about everyone in that region for multiple generations have been given baby hats knitted by

Peggy. It's a rare person who hasn't received one. In recent years, Peggy's no longer able to knit very much, and it now takes a group of knitters to keep up the number of baby hats Peggy gave to the hospital. She, like Tabitha, has created a beautiful legacy for some of the most vulnerable among us.<sup>2</sup>

We don't need to do ground breaking things to be disciples. Tabitha lived simply, yet in her living she sought to bring together those society deemed unworthy, and remind them of their worth. That's part of what the Easter Story is about- to proclaim to the world that everyone deserves to find healing and be celebrated regardless of what society says. To offer a place of sanctuary and solidarity to grieve, hope, celebrate, and ask the difficult questions together. Tabitha shared this gift to the world openly and generously. There are people in all times and places that do this difficult and important work. What would happen if each of us tried to do the same?

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<sup>2</sup> The Rev'd Erin McIntyre