

Sermon Notes May 12, 2019

Focus Good Shepherd Sunday with a focus on Acts 9 (Tabitha / Dorcas)

Lectionary Readings http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Easter/CEaster4_RCL.html

I am not going to focus on “Jesus the good shepherd” in preaching so much as I’m going to invite *us* to be good shepherds. Tabitha /Dorcas was a good shepherd both before she died and after she was raised in Acts chapter 9. Her resurrection story is an important evolution of Jesus’ role as shepherd. Resurrection and new life help us to be a shepherd.

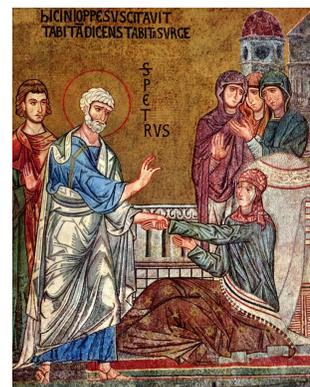
Sidenote I offer you a couple of links to some striking Good Shepherd art.

- *Asian artists* [Asian art of the Good Shepherd](#).
- *Global artists* [Global art of the Good Shepherd](#)

Resurrection stories beyond Jesus’s resurrection (Tabitha is one of them)

- **Widow of Nain’s son** (Luke 7:11-17). Jesus raised this young man literally in the middle of his funeral procession. The text says it’s her only son and she’s a widow. Jesus’ fame spreads widely because of this act of power and care. It might’ve spread too widely because his approach is much more private with Jairus’ daughter
- **Jairus’ daughter** (Luke 8:49-56). Jesus raised the synagogue leader’s daughter in the presence of the parents, Peter, James, and John in a separate room. Then, Jesus does this curious thing by insisting no one says anything. Maybe he just wants people to own the power of God themselves instead of offloading it all the time onto him?
- **Tabitha** (Tabitha is Aramaic. Dorcas is her Greek name) She falls ill and dies and then raised by God through Peter. I think Tabitha is a really great example of a person who embodies the good shepherd who is *not* Jesus. I’ll talk about her more in a second.
- **Eutychus** - Paul literally bored him to death (Acts 20:7-12). Paul preached so long that this young man nodded off, fell out of story window and died. Paul raised him (through God). You would think after Paul raised him he would’ve got the hint that he talked too long but he kept talking till daybreak.

The stories show how power begins to disperse among people like Peter and Paul, The good shepherd begins live and moves out through many people. Dorcas specifically is a great story because Peter is the one who gets to be involved with the resurrection. It’s not just Jesus doing everything in person. Do you remember how I said Jesus wanted the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter to stay under wraps? I think because



ultimately, Jesus wanted people like Peter to be agents of resurrection, and people like Tabatha to be good Shepherds. Jesus wants us to be same.

Tabatha story - a bi-cultural good shepherd

We know very little about her, but she was clearly loved by the community in Joppa and they felt her absence deeply. While we don't know much, it's safe to say that she was a shepherd of this community. Furthermore Luke gives her special priority. Luke does not throw the word disciple around lightly - but she is named as such. To be a disciple is high praise for Luke.

You don't have to know her biography, because you can see her impact in the lives of other people and the echoes she left in their hearts. They come to Peter crying, holding up all the clothing that she had made for them (widows of her community.) She was, as Acts says, "devoted to good works and acts of charity."

Multiculturalism faith is hard

Dorcas embodies acts of the apostles' call to live graciously in a multicultural world - Jesus binds *all* people together; however, we fight against that reality all the time.

- Acts chapter 2 - huge multicultural party at Pentecost.
- Acts chapter 9 - a bicultural figure dies (Dorcas), leaves a hole in the community, and is raised to patch up that hole. Things get even better because the whole community of Joppa heard and many would come to believe in the power of God.
- Acts chapter 10 - Peter is struggling with how to deal with multiple cultures that don't fit his Jewish culture upbringing. He reluctantly responds to God's call to visit an outsider - Cornelius's house. Cornelius' righteousness and faith completely change Peter's perspective on God, using multiple cultures for one community under God.
- Acts chapter 15 - being a multicultural community of faith (like the ideal in chapter 2) proves to be really hard. There are petty fights and even open tribalism. Everyone wants to retreat to their own comfort zone. It really comes to a head in Acts 15. There is so much hand wringing about how the early church welcomes, integrates believers, and lives with multiple cultures. The Jerusalem Council definitively decides that all people are welcome, no exceptions. All people can be good shepherds.

Being a good Shepherd - it's not just for Jesus anymore! (Never was)

Being and acting like Tabatha is the antidote for the tribalism that so easily creeps in. It crept in throughout the first 16 chapters of Acts and creeps into our own life. What if we take Tabatha's example as a model for how to be good shepherd in our worlds? It's all well and good to worship Jesus as the good shepherd, but if we are not becoming shepherds ourselves - it's hollow worship indeed...May you, through God's grace, devote yourself to good works and acts of charity. May you care for the people in your life, lift up the people in your life, and bless people like a good shepherd. **Todd**