

Pointing to Jesus

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In [Acts 9:36-43](#), we read again how the power that Jesus had has been imparted to the disciples. In Acts we've already read about the lame and sick and demon-possessed being healed by the disciples. They're doing amazing things. But in this story we read about Peter raising Tabitha from the dead.

This passage is very similar to the one about Jesus raising Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:40-56. In that encounter, Jesus allows only a few to accompany him into the room where the dead girl lay. He takes her by the hand, speaks to her, tells her to arise, and she gets up at once. The parallels with Tabitha's awakening from death are clear and intentional. This story is as much about saying that Peter and the apostles have the same power as Jesus as it is about the healing itself. And that's why it's so unbelievable.

I don't have a problem believing that Peter could raise the dead. That's remarkable, yes, but I don't doubt that part of the story. The part that I have trouble with is the fact that, in response to Peter's resuscitation of Tabitha, the people believe in Jesus—not Peter.

Preachers know that awkward encounter on the steps leading out of church when a parishioner comments on how wonderful a sermon was and it's her or his job to deflect the compliment and point people back to Jesus. "That's the Holy Spirit at work," I often say. Or I might remark, "Well, I could never have known how much that would mean to you. I'm glad the Spirit is speaking through me." The occasion calls for humility—sometimes genuine, sometimes manufactured—even though the performance might have been really special. Imagine, then, if the minister in your church wasn't just preaching a sermon but healing the sick, casting out demons, even raising the dead. How in the world would you remember to keep focused on Jesus? How would your minister remember that, too?

The more amazing the preacher, the harder that person must work to point people to Jesus. How did Peter do it? How did a man who raised a dead woman and gave

her back to a grief-stricken crowd manage to use that feat to point people to a power greater than he? How does anyone give his or her heart and soul and strength to the amazing work of the gospel yet at the same time get out of the way so that people can see where the real power is?

Don't let this story be read in isolation. Go back and read the rest of Acts 1–9, and I think you see where the answer is. Peter was a miracle worker, but he was also part of an intentional community. He practiced a faith of submission. All possessions were held in common. The people were united in prayer and worship. The Holy Spirit was moving through all of the disciples in an amazing way. Peter wasn't just a traveling resurrectionist. He was deeply rooted in a life that pointed people to Jesus. The miracles weren't the exception—they pointed to a rule of life that was based on Jesus.

As a clergy person, I must remember that my whole life should be grounded in the gospel community. A life of prayer, study, fellowship, stewardship, sacrifice—all of these should be hallmarks of my life. Then, my preaching and teaching and pastoral care all point to something bigger than me. If I'm getting compliments that I'm having difficulty receiving with grace, it's a sign that I'm not as well rooted in the Christian life as I need to be. As remarkable as the miracle was, Peter didn't have trouble pointing people to Jesus because that was just one more chapter in his life of faith. Might we say the same about the best sermon we'll ever preach—just one more day in a life grounded in the gospel?

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