

May 12, Easter 4C (Acts 9:36-43)

## **Tabitha is dead, but the evidence of her work still lives.**

by [Lisa D. Jenkins](#) in the [April 24, 2019](#) issue

The story of Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, is one of my favorites. Tabitha is a disciple who walks the walk. She has a distinct devotion to doing good works and performing acts of charity. She is committed to helping others—and not just at certain times, the way we might hit the homeless shelters around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Tabitha's devotion is consistent.

This consistent devotion makes an impact on the lives of those around her. When Tabitha dies, her community of believers is stricken by the void left in their world. But the widows of her congregation don't just cry out for her; they also display her good works. In death, her great love for serving God's people speaks for her. What a testimony! Even when we are rendered silent, God is able to speak through us. God's love is evident because we have answered the call to serve.

While the story appears to revolve around Tabitha, it's also a story about Peter. When Tabitha dies, the disciples send word to Peter that he should hurry to Joppa without delay. She is already dead, yet it's an urgent call. Is the call for Peter to come pay his respects and mourn with the people before they lay this faithful servant to rest? Or have the disciples heard about the other miracles which he has performed? Are they expecting a miracle?

We don't know, but it's clear that Peter's presence is important. Peter walked and talked with Jesus; he witnessed the miracles of the master. Peter is the one who addressed a multicultural crowd at Pentecost, and the word of God was spread throughout the land. So if the disciples were to call anyone during a grave and urgent moment, it would be Peter.

Peter gets up immediately and goes. Just as Jesus, before healing someone or performing a miracle, began by having compassion, Peter has compassion for those

impacted by Tabitha and her own compassionate works. She is dead, but the evidence of her work still lives—in the material goods shown by the widows, in the tears shed from their eyes.

Peter notices. He is a true disciple, both a student of Jesus and a follower in his footsteps. I imagine that in our Gospel reading, when Jesus spoke of the works he was performing in the name of his Father, Peter was nearby listening. So when the time comes for Peter to step up to the plate, he is ready. There are at least three details about Peter's actions that point to the fact that he is a follower of Jesus.

First, before he gets down to business, Peter has to put some people out of the room. This is exactly what Jesus does in Mark's telling of the raising of Jairus's daughter from the dead (5:40). In both cases, it's unclear why the people are told to get out. What is clear is that the people are not optimistic. They are weeping and wailing; in the Jairus story, some of them even laugh at Jesus. Peter is confident in the power of God through Jesus Christ, but I wonder if he also knows the value of having people around with the right attitude. The right attitude conveys that God is in control no matter what the situation looks like. We need to remember this—because the stakes are too high, the road is too long, and today and tomorrow are too important for us to allow a negative attitude to permeate God's atmosphere.

Second, Peter kneels down to pray. He doesn't take the typical prayer posture of his time, standing with arms and eyes raised to heaven. He kneels, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knelt and demonstrated his submission to God. Does Peter kneel as a way of following Jesus? Or perhaps it is for emphasis: that the work of God is not confined by traditional postures of any kind. Whatever the reason, Peter submits himself to the Lord with his petition through prayer. Peter kneels in submission to God, and Tabitha is raised by God!

Finally Peter spends the remainder of his time in Joppa with Simon, a tanner. This would not be the most relaxing or attractive place to stay. Imagine the dead animal skins, the odor. Imagine the type of work that must be done to what remains of the animals. But I'm sure Peter remembers that Jesus stayed in the most unlikely places. And it is here in the home of Simon the tanner that Peter will receive a vision that will greatly impact the body of Christ. God can show up in the most unusual places.

Being a disciple is not just about the miracles we see and experience. It's about seeing God in the ordinary places that might not look so attractive. It's about allowing God to work in our lives, no matter where we are or what's going on. God

can show up in the least likely places and perform wonders even in situations that appear dormant or dead. Being a disciple means knowing that God is still active in our lives and in our communities.