

4th Sunday of Easter
"Who Is Tabitha?"
Acts 9:36-43
4/21/13

Today I'm going to preach on the story we find in our 1st Reading from Acts, chapter 9, the story about Tabitha. But before I begin you might be asking, not only, "Who is Tabitha?" but, "Why is Pastor Marty preaching about Tabitha?"

So, first of all, "Who was she, and why was her story important?"

This is the kind of story that should make the Top 10 list of stories from the Bible.

But, I'm guessing that if we had taken a poll as you were arriving this morning, most of us would have drawn a blank, if we'd been asked "Who is Tabitha?"

Now, one reason why we may not be familiar with her story is simply the fact that this reading from Acts, chapter 9 is read just once every three years, in our series of Sunday readings. But, I think an even bigger reason we don't remember the story of Tabitha, is the fact that this is a story we don't quite know what to do with.

If you've ever read all the way through the book of Acts there are a lot of stories, not just this one, that fit into this same category of "hard to explain" or "hard to understand."

A lot of us have a hard time understanding how God acts directly in human events. We see it in Bible stories like this one, but we don't always see so clearly God acts in our own lives.

One of the reasons the Bible is sometimes hard to understand is because of the lens we use to read the Bible. Take for example, the lens of our culture. When it comes to stories, like this story of Peter and Tabitha, Our culture, or our modern way of thinking has conditioned us to doubt these stories.

How many of you, as this story was read, or as I've been talking about it have been sitting there thinking "I wonder if that really happened?"

Or maybe even, "I doubt that it really happened exactly the way it was recorded."

Maybe Tabitha wasn't completely dead.

Maybe she was just in a coma or had really low blood pressure.

You name it, we can come up with all kinds of theories to make this story more palatable to our modern ears. But, my point is that all of these modern explanations come from the way our culture has shaped us to think.

There are even some people who study the Bible for a living who spend their whole life taking the Bible apart trying to rationalize everything. Maybe you had a religion professor like that.

And maybe you were left with more questions than answers.

So let me ask you, “What do we do with our honest doubts and our questions?”
How do we reconcile the revealed Word of God with our own idea of what seems reasonable?

Because this passage in Acts, chapter 9 is clearly not presented as a parable. It’s not presented in poetic language. Certainly there are parts of Scripture that are parables and poems, and are not meant to be taken literally, but the Book of Acts, is recorded as History, as eye-witness testimony.

So, again, “What do we do with this story?”

I want to suggest to you this morning that we start, by taking this story at face value.
Instead of starting with our doubts let’s start with what we believe.
As Christians we believe that the Bible is God’s Word.

Part of believing does include asking questions, and at times having doubts.
And the Bible can certainly stand up to our questions and our doubts.

But one option we don’t have is to simply pick and choose which parts of the Bible we feel comfortable with and which parts we don’t. We can’t choose which parts we want to believe and which parts we don’t. We can’t have it both ways.

Either the Bible is God’s revealed word and it speaks truth, or else it’s just interesting fiction.
Just another best-selling novel.

But if we believe it’s God’s truth
that makes a tremendous difference in how we read it.

To be a life-long disciple of Jesus starts with believing that this is God’s Word for you.
that’s it’s not just another book...
that if we ignore it, and if you just put it up on your shelf after Confirmation Sunday,
you will be starving yourself, of God’s truth and God’s guidance for your life.

So, this morning let’s take the story of Tabitha and Peter at face value...as God’s truth
And let’s take the time to hear the story again on it’s own terms.

The story begins by telling us that there is a disciple by the name of Tabitha.
Did you catch that part? There was a disciple by the name of Tabitha.
How many of you knew that there was a disciple in the Bible named Tabitha?

So Luke, who also wrote the Book of Acts, is telling us that this is a very faithful person.
She was a follower of Jesus who was known for her uncommon devotion to the poor...
particularly to widows and those who had no one to care for them.

Luke tells us that Tabitha was “devoted to good works and acts of charity.”
Then, Tabitha becomes ill and dies.

When Peter arrives at the scene of her death, he is greeted by the weeping widows who show him the clothing that Tabitha made for them.

With no one left to protect them, to see to their needs, what will happen to them?
Tabitha, who was their protector is dead.

Then comes the big surprise... death doesn't have final word.
There isn't a bigger truth in the whole Bible, than the truth you just heard right now.

There will be times in your life...
times when you face the loss of a loved one, or a close friend
or maybe you'll lose your job...
or your husband or wife, will start talking about divorce,
or a good friend will turn their back on you.

And the world will tell you there's no hope. That you just need to face the hard realities of life,
that death, or loss, or the failure of a marriage or friendship... is the end.

But that's not what the Bible says.
In today's Gospel, Jesus says,
“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.
I will give them eternal life, and they will never perish.”

And in our First Reading,
Peter speaks a word of life...and it's Easter all over again.
Tabitha miraculously, comes back to life.

That's the reason this story is recorded in the Bible.

It's a powerful testimony to God's power over the forces of death.
It's a story that needs to be told and re-told...because it reminds us that God's victory over
death didn't just take place when Jesus rose from the dead.

The power of the Resurrection moves out into the life of the disciples and into your life and
mine.

The promise of Easter is for you and me.
The power of the Risen Christ is for you and me.
God's power over death is for you and me.

And here's the take home question: "Do you believe it?"

Do you believe that no matter what happens to you in your life, God is with you, that God will never fail you?

And my encouragement to you is this:

"Do not lose courage. Do not be afraid, because God is with you.

Do not lose hope, because just like He did with Tabitha, God will bring you new life.

That's true for all of us this morning.

Right where you need it the most, God will bring you life.

Jesus died and rose again...so that you and I might have life, and have it abundantly.

For in Christ you are a new creation...the old has gone, the new has come!

Thanks be to God. Amen