

Feb. 18, 2018

## Lesson 12: Faithful Disciples

Scripture: Acts 9: 36-43

### Context:

Today we jump back to the book of Acts in our lesson. As discussed before, the book of Acts is the history book of the church. Following closely as possible to the events after Jesus' death and resurrection, the book of Acts seeks to explain how the Spirit sustained and moved the early church.

The forefront of the book of Acts focuses on Peter and the apostles as they sought to equip and empower the other believers. Peter, the disciple whom Jesus told he would build his church upon, becomes one of the main leaders. He becomes known for his leadership, preaching, and performing miracles.

The passage opens in Joppa, near modern day Tel-Aviv. Joppa was a major seaport on the Mediterranean Sea, which would have people from all over the ancient world coming for trade. Even large ancient cities had issues including a wealth disparity between the rich and the poor. There is a woman named Tabitha who lives in the city and becomes known for her good works and compassionate acts for those in need, probably including the many widows who were left without support after their spouses' death. Tabitha holds the distinction of being the only female of the Bible to have the feminine form of the Greek word for "disciple" (Dorcas) given in the text.<sup>1</sup> Here in this community, Tabitha has taken authority to care for others and is important to the livelihood of that city.

However, Tabitha becomes ill and dies. As her body is prepared for burial, word spreads to the other Christian communities that one of their leaders has died. This is a dilemma for the church as it causes a crisis in the community. Who will take care of the vulnerable ones? Who will provide clothing for the widows and orphans? Who will minister to the people of this diverse community? Not just anyone will do. Two disciples bring Peter to the room where the widows cry and showing all the beautiful tunics and clothing that Tabitha had made for others. Much like we do in modern times, we look at the things our loved ones made and wore to help us remember them.

Peter asks for everyone to leave the room. He prays and then commands Tabitha to get up as if she is simply asleep. As he extends his hand to her, Tabitha's eyes open and she sees Peter and then sits up. Peter then calls all of God's people, including the widows, and presents Tabitha to everyone. The name of Jesus Christ has power and his dominion includes that of death, which never has the final say. There is resurrection in the power of Jesus Christ who conquered the grave. The news is spread through Joppa, a seaport of Gentiles and Jews, and more people put their faith in the Lord. Joppa becomes a new living place for Peter as in chapter ten he will be given a vision from God that will lead him to the conversion of a Roman centurion. God is on the move, bringing all sorts of people into the Christian church.

---

<sup>1</sup> William Willimon, "Acts," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 1988), 84.

### **Application:**

There are several themes in this passage that teach us about faithful disciples. The first concerns Tabitha, a female leader in the early church. While we do not have many details about Tabitha's life from the text, we can infer from the few statements that she was important to the community of faith in Joppa. The fact that the feminine form of disciple in Greek is included in the text demonstrates that she was vital to those who called themselves followers of Jesus Christ. From what we gather in the text, Tabitha made garments and tunics, indicating she may have come from wealth as cloth could be expensive. Yet she shares that wealth with others. We can all think of those we know who are generous with their money as they provide for others. The amount of mourning though indicates that people also grieved as Tabitha died. She was an advocate for people and did good works making her community a better place in addition to her financial support.

Hopefully, we can all think of people in our churches and communities who are like Tabitha. With their time, their financial giving, and their care for all, the love of Christ is felt and shared. While reading this passage, we should think of those people in our very churches and give praise to God for them. It might even behoove us from time to time to give them thanks for all the work that they do and tell them how you have felt Christ's love through them. We should also strive to be like the Tabithas of our world, thinking of the ways that we might share Christ's love with others.

Another theme present in this text is nourishing our faith by seeking help from other people of faith. In this case, Peter travels from Lydda to be with the community to console them and to pray with them. Growing up, one of the things that I was taught was the "ministry of presence." The ministry of presence is the act of showing up, which sometimes could do more than trying to preach a sermon in a crisis or trying to fix everything. At times, what people need is someone to cry with them, to hug them, or to simply just be. For those who are achievers it might be difficult because one wants to fix everything and make it all better. Yet sometimes as people of faith, our task is to show up and trust that our presence is what will help people in tender moments.

I hope that is something that all Christians can strive to do for other brothers and sisters in the faith. The song Bill Withers "Lean on Me," comes to mind as I think about how we are all tied to one another and will all go through things in life together. In my own life, I know that there are other brothers and sisters in Christ, both clergy and lay, who nurture me when good things happen, and especially when the bad or confusing things happen. There are times I go to them when I need prayer, direction, a place to vent, and sometimes just for a laugh. As you go through life I hope that you find those people of faith that sustain and give you strength, your tribe rooting for you and following our Lord beside you. For as we read in this chapter, people of faith are those who understand and know the power of Jesus' resurrection that defeats all the powers of this world, especially death.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh  
Associate Pastor  
First United Methodist Church  
1380 W. Main St.

Dothan, AL 36301  
Office (334) 793-3555 ext. 240  
E-mail: [hunter@fumcdothan.org](mailto:hunter@fumcdothan.org)

