

“Love Abounds”
Acts 9:36-43
Rev. Denise W. Ingram
April 25, 2010

Just one of the many things to appreciate about scripture is its multifaceted aspect. As you first read a passage a certain theme or truth for our lives is revealed. You hold it up to the light, figuratively speaking, and similar to a prism that reflects different colors as you admire it from different angles, scripture offers another theme or reveals a deeper truth.

Today’s passage at first reading reflects the death of a beloved woman in the early Christian community and the miracle of her being raised from the dead. The scene was one of sorrow and mourning due to the death of Dorcas, a well-loved, well respected woman who used her energy and resources to help the poor and minister to the most vulnerable members of society as she cared for widows and orphans—those who could so easily fall through the cracks, marginalized by society. She was so beloved that the Christian community sent two men to summon Peter—for even in death, Dorcas deserved the lead apostle at her side. Maybe he would even preach her funeral sermon.

Peter arrives to discover a community in mourning. Widows that had been on the receiving end of Dorcas’ charity, display clothes she had sewn for them, it is possible the tunics they displayed were the very clothes on their backs. Tunics that represent the love Dorcas shared with them. Dorcas clothed widows with tunics, it is apparent she clothed herself as the Apostle Paul suggests in Colossians 3. *“So chosen by God for this new kind of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. . . and regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”*

Dorcas’ love for those in need reflected her love for Jesus Christ so much so that she is the only woman in the New Testament called a disciple. Many women followed Jesus and were called followers but only Dorcas is named a disciple. Remember Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25, “that a kind word to the lonely, a visit to the prisoner, a garment provided to the naked, a meal brought to the hungry, any act of love done for “the least of these” was a deed done

for Jesus because it demonstrated Christ's love for the children of God. Dorcas demonstrates her love for Jesus through her love for others.

The love shared between Dorcas and these widows is evident. Most likely the widows loved and cared for each other forming a community of Christian caring. One can just picture these widows sharing simple meals together, using their ancient equivalent to a phone tree checking on one another each day to make sure their basic needs were met, that they were safe, that they had awakened to greet yet another day.

The widow, the orphan and the alien remain near and dear to the heart of God and equally dear to God are those who make it their special ministry in the church to reach out to them as Dorcas did.

Was God's love for Dorcas the motivation behind Peter's action? Did God put the thought in Peter's head that Dorcas did not have to remain dead? Did it suddenly just dawn on Peter that God's power could work through him just as it worked through Jesus in the raising of Lazarus from the dead? Did Peter wonder, Do I dare believe it? Do I dare trust it? Do I dare try it? Why not, what's to lose.

Who better than a spiritual "bull in the china shop" to shake things up, or in this situation to raise the dead to new life? No matter how the idea gets planted in Peter's mind, he acts on it. Whether it is risking or trusting or a combination of both, Peter moves forward in faith. "Tabitha, rise." And she does!

It was an act of great love raising Dorcas from the dead as it reflected God's great love in raising Jesus from the dead. Peter's raising Dorcas was a sign to the early church that death never has the last word for those who now live in Christ. Death is no longer the last word, resurrection is. Jesus' Resurrection reminded the early Christians as it reminds us that Jesus revealed God's great love for all people as Jesus gave of himself on the cross.

Out of love, Dorcas is raised from the dead, able to continue her faith based initiative another day. No one knows how many more days Dorcas was granted but eventually she did die and no one raised her from the dead. But in this moment in the early Christian community, Peter did raise her back to show everyone that in Christ, death has been defeated and also that in Christ, those who minister to the ones God loves so dearly—the poor, the weak, the widowed,

the vulnerable of every age—are dear to God and God wants to see their work continue.

Philadelphia has been designated the “city of brotherly love.” The city of Joppa, where Dorcas lived, could well be called the city that demonstrates, “God loves everyone.” It is the perfect place to remember how much God loves all people—the widows, the poor, and those who serve them.

God loves everyone. And it is our job as Christians and our job as the church to reflect that truth each and everyday. May we do so with great love. Amen.