

Sermon: Baby steps

Psalm 23

Acts 9:36-43

Do you remember how you were named? Where you named after someone; a family member, a friend, someone from the Bible, perhaps a uniquely new name? Maybe your name changed when you were married. And then there are the alternate monikers; Gran, Oma, Opa, Poppa. We can be known by multiple names throughout our life. I was name Robert, after Robert the Bruce, and was called Rob and Robbie growing up. I have never been a Bob. My daughter is Anne, and my son is Greg. Now, Greg was going to be Thomas; my middle name; however, at the last moment, I felt more drawn to the name, Gregory; after a friend of mine growing up in Goderich whose family emigrated from Poland.

So, today I would like us to look at a woman with *three* names. Depending on the language you speak, she is Tabitha or Dorcas or Gazelle. Tabitha is her Aramaic name. Dorcas is her name in Greek. And Gazelle is the meaning of her name. It was commonplace to name a beautiful woman for such an animal. A gazelle was a creature with stunning eyes and swift of foot. What little we know of Tabitha is in her life of serving others, and women were always accorded special status by Jesus. They accompanied Him on His journeys, remained with Him at the cross (while the Apostles hid), were the first witnesses of the resurrection, and were very involved in the global expansion of the church.

Tabitha was first, a devoted disciple; a faithful learner and follower of Jesus Christ; determined to be like her teacher. But of course, she was not able to do this all at once. She had to take baby steps; start small and grow from there. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus said, "The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher". What higher compliment could we have but to be told "we act just like Jesus". Tabitha was also a person of action. Her heart was moved by the needs of people, and she responded by doing something to meet those needs. She served because of her Saviour. That was her identity. And Tabitha; or Dorcas; was quick as a Gazelle in her responding. No time like the present. One can only think that by *our* acts of kindness in the name of Jesus, people may be moved to give faith a try, or come to church, or return to church, and maybe accept Jesus as Lord. You never know. Baby steps.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven". Doing small things to show God's love can and does change the world. By serving others, we are strengthened, Christ's church is strengthened, and the lost are drawn to Christ. And look at what God can do. Have you ever faced a situation that seemed hopeless, or do you feel lost sometimes; not feeling God's Spirit? Well, today's reading about Tabitha offers a message of hope and encouragement, reminding us that God can turn even our darkest moments into moments of light and life. It prompts us to think about the ways that we have experienced God's power and compassion in our own lives, and to trust in God's ability to bring about good change, even in the most challenging situations. Thinking about this story may deepen our faith and confidence in God's unlimited power and boundless love for each and every one of us. Tabitha's acts of kindness were so much a model for other believers that when she died; God used Peter to raise her back to life.

Before Peter spoke to Tabitha, however, he prayed. It was not his own power on which Peter called; it was the power of Jesus Christ; the same Jesus that God raised from the dead at Easter. One would assume that after Tabitha regained her strength, she returned to her previous ways of serving. *And* her story spread like wildfire. So much so that “many people [in Joppa and area] believed in the Lord”. Friends; this is how God works. Plant a seed for God’s kingdom and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. The true measure of effective mission is not defined by what happens inside the church walls, but by what happens out in the world. No one can do everything, but every one can do something.

Illustration. A young doctor got a call from a farmer. “Come quickly, my wife is seriously ill.” Grabbing his little black bag, he hurried out to the farm. The doctor said, “Quick, get me a screwdriver.” The man ran downstairs and got a screwdriver and handed it to him through the door. The man and his children heard the moans and groans of their mother continuing on the inside. In a minute the doctor was back at the door. “Quick, get me a pair of pliers.” The father ran downstairs and got a pair of pliers. The doctor shut the door while the family continued to stand in the hallway wringing their hands. In a minute the doctor was back at the door. “Quick, get me a hammer and a chisel.” By this time the farmer had enough of it. “Just a minute, doctor. What is wrong with my wife?” The doctor replied, “I don’t know. I can’t get my little black bag open.”

This illustration paints a picture of how God helps us when we think we can’t get the little black bag opened. God opens our hearts and minds to His will and purpose for us in God’s time. Baby steps.

Jesus challenges us to offer the small act of kindness that will change a life. Remember what Jesus has done for us. We receive eternal life; not by what we do; but by what Christ has done for us and what He does through us. Remember our Lord’s words to us in the story of The Sheep and the Goats.

“When the Son of Man [Jesus] comes in his glory, he will separate the people one from another. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you in these ways?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you in these ways and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’”

I know that sometimes, we think too much of what we *can do on our own* and not as much of what *Jesus can do through us*. There are so many ways we can both be a blessing ourselves and be a blessing to others by the things we offer others. Maybe it’s a drink of

water offered to a stranger on a hot day, a meal for someone who has none, sharing a word of prayer, offering a listening ear or a ride to an appointment. We do these things because Jesus is our Lord and Saviour.

Tabitha's rising to life also signals that God values society's marginalized citizens like widows as much after Jesus' resurrection as before it. Widows, orphans, children, and other vulnerable people are very close to God's heart. So those who make it their mission to reach out to them are also very dear to God's loving heart. You and I will probably never raise anyone physically back to life from the dead. Even so, we can still perform good deeds as Tabitha did or simply live for Jesus in the way He wants us to.

Today, we have once again heard about the incredible power of God through the act of raising Tabitha from the dead. It serves as a powerful reminder of God's ability to overcome even the most impossible situations and bring about miraculous outcomes. The resurrection of Tabitha highlights the compassion and mercy that God extends to His people, proving to us that He is always present and willing to intervene *in even our lives* in extraordinary ways. May the Lord continue to direct us in paths of service that bring glory to Him. Amen.

Have you celebrated holy communion recently?

Give me a call. I make house calls.

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