

That We May Rise Too

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<http://www.pvillepresby.org>

“In an effort to reach people with different perspectives and preferences, we’re testing an automated speech to text transcription for Pastor Debbie’s sermon. This process is not 100% accurate but provides a rough transcription of the sermon Pastor Debbie preached. Pastor Debbie preaches from a manuscript but often goes off script as led by the spirit, making the original manuscript an inaccurate representation of the Sunday service.”

In this sermon from Pleasantville Presbyterian Associate Hannah Scanlon reminds us that Jesus promise of hope in the resurrection are for everyone, even us. "Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." --Acts: 9:40-42 (Originally Preached on Sunday, May 12, 2019 at Pleasantville Presbyterian Church)

Scripture: Acts 9:36-43

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=424690437>

[0:01] Our New Testament reading today is from Acts 9: 36 - 43.

Hear the words of the Lord.

In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabatha in Greek. Her name was Dorcus.

She was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

Lydda was near Joppa. So when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, Please come at once.

Peter went with them and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room.

All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made. While she was with them.

[0:56] Peter sent them all out of the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed.

Turning toward the dead woman, he said, Tabatha, get up! She opened her eyes. And seeing Peter, she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.

Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented to presented her to them alive.

This became known all over **Joppa** and many people believed in the Lord Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

[1:41] Please pray with me.

God, may the words of my mouth and the listening ears of our hearts be attentive to you this day and in every day and in your holy name, we pray, Amen.

Sermon: "That We May Rise Too"

[2:05] This morning. I want to ask that we reflect a few weeks back on Easter Sunday and the things that were running through our minds when the story of Christ's resurrection was read. Since we've heard it so often, some of us might unconsciously group in Christ's coming out of the Tomb, all bright and shiny, with all those other moral fairy tales that we grew up with, like Rumpelstiltskin or Emperor's New Clothes, a story that our parents would tell us that would teach us how to treat each other well, all good things, things about renewal and reconciliation between people and the inherent importance of joy and celebration.

Or perhaps some of us. When the story is read, thoughts of Easter's Gone by run through our minds, of warm weather and the Hallelujah chorus, a family coming together of smashing brightly colored Easter eggs over each other's heads.

[3:11] But I think that Luke's account of Tabatha, that we find in the Book of Acts, is meant to be a kind of shock to the system, an alarm, a jarring nudge reminding us that the Easter story is even more than these things. It's more important, more true, and more real than all the stories in history, books and novels and all the broadcast and printed news put together. That Christ lives, it's the story of all stories.

[3:49] As our lesson for today opens, Tabatha is dead.

We know little about her, except that she was a seamstress and was known in her community for her acts of kindness and charity.

She tended to the very really financial and physical needs of the poor and the widows, those who are known to be the most vulnerable citizens in her community.

[4:20] It is for this reason that her death is not simply a personal or family loss.

Luke reminds us that Tabitha's death has very real physical ramifications for the most needy. There is no doubt that her death caused sorrow, but in addition, it also caused a heightened sense of physical security and source of livelihood.

[4:48] It's also interesting to note, especially on this Mother's Day, that Tabatha is the only female in the New Testament who is referred to in the Greek as a disciple.

Writing within a public square that is typically only meant for men, Luke presents to us, presents to us God's radical idea that a disciple is any person, male or female who follows Jesus into a life of service, compassion and reconciliation.

[5:23] In the next action of our story, we see Peter called inside by Tabitha's friends, and we hear him say, Get up.

In response, Tabitha opens her eyes Gets out of bed.

[5:41] If we think of the Easter event as a pebble dropped into a still body of water, it is now four weeks after that, we sit with Tabitha in an outer ripple of Christ's new Life proclamation. At this time, after the stone has been rolled away and the good news has been proclaimed, we still feel the currents of resurrection lapping through the New Testament and spilling into our world.

[6:13] The rising of Tabitha actually meant the very real restoration of physical provision for the poor and the needy in her community.

It's for this reason that at the end of this story, not only is Tabitha alive, but so is the hope for the physical realities and structures of our day.

Hope that the present structures of injustice are not as impenetrable as they may seem.

Hope that the reconciliation and forgiveness between people can actually happen, hope that our feelings of loss and heartache, although they may be with us do not have the final say in our lives,

Hope that when Christ promised us that because I live, you will live also,

He meant it.

[7:13] I live?

What does Jesus mean to say when he speaks these words?

Does he mean that the abundant, eternal good life that he experiences with God and the Holy Spirit should be treated like a prized possession?

Is he intent on laying hold of it, keeping it and guarding it and enjoying it for himself?

Does he mean that Christ holds life as he would a breakable treasure so that his people are only allowed to get glimpses of it from a distance, but never touch?

[7:53] Surely not. Surely our God's love is not the selfish drive to keep all of the goodness to God's self.

It's not about carefully and meticulously ensuring that those green pastures and still waters we heard about in our song are kept safe and manicured and untouched, far away from the dirty hands of the crowds.

The God we know and worship is one who's fullness of love is most perfected and pouring it out or us.

I live,

when spoken by Christ. It means I live my life fully by loving you without reticence or reservation.

I live my life for you.

I live.

[8:49] In a recent article, David Brooks argues that although there is plenty of evidence in today's world that individual people have the full ability to destroy the social norms that govern good and bad behavior in our culture.

There is just as much evidence in our history to show that individuals can revive these social

norms, too.

Through the course of the article, he lifts up five different kinds of individuals who challenge old norms and enact new ones.

But I imagine that Tabatha, from our Story falls into his category of what he dubs the illuminators, those people in our culture who inspire a new way of behavior in others by pointing to those actions that characterize a better way of living,

Brooks lifts up Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin in particular, But the list is more deep and wide than we have time for,

Clara Barton, Rosa Parks, Harriet Beecher Stowe to name a few.

Those who like Tabatha point to resurrected life springing up all around. Those who confront our world and boldly proclaimed that the commotion of Easter is not over yet.

[10:10] So we know that Christ Rising and Peters called Tio Get up has something to do with the very fabric of our world.

But how does crisis call speak to our hearts as well? Because surely it does.

In a sermon by Lauren Mcfeatters, we hear the story of Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian minister who was once asked by a group of church members to share a childhood experience that shaped his life and ministry.

So he chose an experience of his growing up in the Depression.

An unsettled and an unsettling time, he says, especially for a young child.

[10:55] He tells the time his father came home and obviously had too much to drink.

His mother didn't want her husband to get back into the car, and so she gave the keys to young Buechner er, saying, "Don't you dare let your father have these keys."

Going to bed, he took the car keys and stuffed them under his pillow.

His father came into his room pleading for the keys, so not knowing what to say, how to be or how to react,

Buechner recalls pulling the covers over his head to escape the situation and then finally going to sleep with his father's pleading and begging ringing in his ears.

[11:42] After he finished sharing the story, a man approached Buechner and said, You've had a fair amount of pain in your life like everybody else. But you've been a good steward of it.

You've been a good steward of your pain.

That phrase caught Buechner off guard to be a steward of your pain, and he thought a lot about what it could mean,

when it comes to human pain, Mcfeatters reminds us, Many of us hide it. Try to forget it, diminish it, edit it because it's just too much to deal with.

We eat, we drink, we lash out. We anxiously try to fill the void it creates anything not to feel it.

[12:40] But Buechner has come to believe that to be a good steward of our pain is to be in touch with it. It's to be in tune with those moments in our lives that are tinged with loss, regret, grief for shame.

Why? Because it is in this listening to it that we can be most aware of God's promise to us that God is right there in it with us, with his resurrection hope.

[13:11] Because I live, you will live also.

[13:19] And you will live also. Carl Barth reminds us that this is not an obligation that we are urged to fulfill so that we may or may not live.

We aren't given a chance at life. We aren't offered life. You will live also is a promise.

Not only that, but it's a promise that we are all in on. It's of utmost importance that each of each one of us consider ourselves included as a participant in God's life.

As Jesus revealed to us on Easter morning.

It's more than a moral story or a nostalgic memory.

When we come together as church to proclaim as one that Christ rose from the dead, we declare a prophetic and emphatic rise and nothing is ever quite the same.

Amen.