

Acts 9:36-43

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 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 through Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly," Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Abba's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of my Abba's hand. The Abba and I are one.

## 'Talbitha, Get Up!'

Love  
graces



for first  
church

Reverend Ashton's  
Angel

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The phrase under my senior high school yearbook picture read: 'Looks like an angel, but acts like one too. But you can never tell what an angel will do.' So, when Grace handed me this picture after worship service last week, I broke into the widest of smiles. Images of what our church does to help children be touched by Holiness and help them connect their stories with Jesus flashed across my mind. Having just interacted with Grace during worship I could see her holding up her butterfly and telling about what she had learned in her class about change and being better. (Jesus' fishing story: from just feeding self to feeding others. Saul's story: from hurtful to kind man) Next I could see her smile as she stretched up high to



accomplish her acolyting duty. After that, in the memory banks of my mind's eye, I saw her placing the class offering plate on our table of remembrance, giggling over the communion bread and juice, and finding her voice of praise as a singer in the Children's Peace Choir. In our congregation everyone has equal opportunity to serve the Lord with hearts, hands, and voices as they are able. We raise them up so that we can say of our children: Looks like a disciple, acts like one too, but you can never tell what a disciple will do.

Today's story from Luke's was about an angel of good works and charity who became the only woman to be named a disciple in the New Testament. Her name was Tabitha. Her back story is told three chapters earlier in an argument in the church over the care of widows. The argument was resolved when the disciples voted to create the religious office of deacon to do the work. This early organizational move in the church was important because it affirmed that the emerging Christian community of faith identified itself with the prophetic tradition and service that lay deep with the heart of Jewish faith. Luke's preserving of it served as a reminder for generations to come that Jesus' Abba, the God of Israel, does not abandon, but rather throws Almighty Power on the side of the poor, widowed, orphaned, oppressed, voiceless, and marginalized people. The churchmen's vote to establish an office of deacons to continue the Holy Spirit's prophetic work was a good move because it harnessed the prophetic energy of the Risen Christ by giving it organizational clout. But, as Heidi Peterson noted in 'Clothed with Compassion', the organizational effort lacked one thing: "Yet despite the churchmen's concern they stopped short of imagining the widows free from dependence and powerlessness (Christian Century, 11).

The male disciples stopped short, but Tabitha did not. Under her leadership, she built a Christian community of faith that was not locked into the mindset of first century Roman thought that women had no value without a man. She was not discouraged by the fact that women had minimal access into economic structures in Joppa. She did not stop short in either her ability to

think or step outside the religious box labeled, 'Dependent and Powerless' that Jewish patriarchy had put her in.

When Tabitha died, the widows called for Peter to give witness to the truth that her death was not the end of the new life that belief in the Risen Jesus had given to Tabitha. Tabitha had modeled Christ's prophetic truth to the powers of patriarchy and won. She showed the world that in 'God's new world of the Risen Christ, new life blooms in communities where people are interdependent, treat each other with equal value, and create ways for each member to contribute to community well being. In Tabitha's faith based initiative the Holy Spirit's justice making dynamics of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity made it possible for resurrection believers to be agents instead of objects of ministry' (Peterson, Christian Century, 4/16). The apostle Peter said, 'Tabitha, get up!' And Tabitha got up. Just as God raised Jesus from the tomb, the Risen Christ raised up Tabitha to continue her justice work among women in her male dominated hierarchical society.

"Tabitha, get up". In John's community of faith generations later we hear the voice of Jesus urging Jewish Christians to make this leap of faith into justice making ministries of compassionate care. "First Church, get up!" We can still hear his voice, and, like Tabitha, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we stand up. Here, children are baptized, receive communion, and witness to their faith in word and deed. We are in covenant with a larger church body who, since 1851 has been ordaining women and openly LGBT persons since 1972. Here, we practice marriage equality with our sisters and brothers in the UUA and UCC. Now with a few taps on our key pads, we send pre-scribed letters to our legislators protesting injustices such as North Carolina's discriminatory law against transgendered persons. On line we urge prison reform, support immigrant families, like 'Black Lives Matter', call for fair wage and gun control laws. And right here in West Bridgewater, the prophetic energy of the Risen Christ is making eco-justice activists of us all.

Gracious Jesus, God, Spirit, help us to heed your call to tap into the power and potential that you have placed in us. Amen.