

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ 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!"

³⁹ 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 still with them. ⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Servants of Christ,

Who has had the greatest impact on your life? Sometimes people are asked that question and the answers vary. Maybe it is a parent or some other relative. Might be a pastor or teacher. Maybe a great leader in business or government or some other area. If I were to answer that question I would have to say my dad.

When we were celebrating my dad's retirement my brothers and sisters all spoke about things we remembered about our dad as we were growing up and then it was my dad's turn to speak. He started off by saying, "The Lord has been good to me." Those words really stuck with me because I knew life had not always been so easy but Dad saw how the Lord had always taken care of him and us.

In retirement my Dad used his time to serve the Lord and to help others. His words that day, along with encouragement from a few other folks, are what helped me to decide to study for the ministry. I have to say, "The Lord has been good to me as well and I want to serve him." That is also what this portion of scripture before us is all about – **"Serving the Lord in love."**

Today we are going to talk about Tabitha; also known as Dorcas. At the time this was written, many people had two names – Tabitha was her name in Aramaic (the language many people of the region spoke) and Dorcas was her name in Greek (the universal language of the time). Tabitha lived in Joppa which was a city about 38 miles northwest of Jerusalem and was located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. If you were to look at a modern day map, Joppa would be part of modern day Tel Aviv.

Tabitha is referred to as a disciple and Luke writes that she was known for always doing good and helping the poor. When Luke referred to someone as a disciple, he meant that they were a student or follower of Christ, so we can say with certainty that Tabitha was a Christian – she believed in Jesus for her salvation. In Tabitha we have a Christian who exemplified Jesus' words from our Gospel reading, **"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you"** (John 15:12). That's what Tabitha was doing with her life.

But then Luke tells us, **“About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.”** We sometimes wonder why God takes people who are doing good work away from us. Why didn't God continue to let Tabitha serve and help people? I have to admit I sometimes have those thoughts and then I have to remind myself not to be so self-centered. Even though Tabitha was faithfully serving God, he decided it was time for her to go home to heaven. You might say her death was her reward for her faithfulness as God took her to heaven in that way.

It doesn't appear that Tabitha was married or had family, but her friends took care of her body and prepared it for burial according to the customs of the time. Even in death she was treated with love and respect. It seems that Tabitha and her work were well known because Luke continues by telling us, **“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!”**

We're not sure why they sent for Peter. Maybe Peter knew Tabitha personally or maybe they felt that he should know about this faithful Christian who had just died. Maybe they had heard about Peter healing Aeneas and thought he might be able to help them too. Maybe they were just looking for comfort from one of Jesus' apostles. No matter the reason, **“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 still with them.”**

Here were Tabitha's friends and those who had benefitted from her charitable work. They were mourning the loss of their friend but they also wanted to show Peter how Tabitha had been so giving – they showed him the clothes and robes she had made for them – clothing they were wearing.

Peter knew that God had the power to raise the dead. He had seen Jesus raise the son of the widow of Nain. He was there when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter and later when he raised Lazarus from the dead. He knew what was possible and so, **“Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.”** Peter didn't know God's will for this situation but he took his request to God in prayer and when he said, **“Tabitha get up,”** her response was God's answer of “yes.”

“[Peter] took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.” In this way, Peter invited Tabitha's fellow believers to come in and see what God had done. What a wonderful display of God's power and mercy on that day. The people couldn't conceal their joy and I'm sure Tabitha continued her work of serving the Lord by helping people. **“This [the raising of Tabitha from the dead] became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”**

As always, this miracle was a sign pointing to the power of God and the truth of the gospel message which Peter was sharing. It had its results as seen in the conversion of many people.

What a wonderful example we have in Tabitha of someone who has been called to faith and who has responded by reflecting the love of Jesus in her life. She didn't do this to receive accolades – she did this because that is what God's people do and the Lord blessed her. I am sure she got great pleasure from helping people and her name has been remembered throughout the ages. Many churches have Dorcas societies with the purpose of serving others.

So how does this apply to us? Well, God wants us to love the people he puts in our path and if needed, to help them. That includes the nosy neighbor or grumpy cashier. It includes your family members even though they are not always nice to you. It includes your friends or acquaintances who might need a ride or someone to watch their kids for a few hours. It includes taking opportunities to volunteer in our school or with some of the local agencies that rely on volunteer help.

After all, the Lord has been good to us. God sent his Son to be our Savior and to pay for our sins. The Holy Spirit has given us the gift of faith and spiritual gifts so that we can serve. We do it, not for accolades, but as a way of saying thank you to our Savior.

So don't worry if no one acknowledges all that you do as you serve in different ways because Jesus will. On the Last Day he will say to you, **“Well done good and faithful servant. Come and take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”**

That's why we are eager to serve. We're eager to serve because we have a God who has been serving us since the creation of the world by preparing a special place for us and all believers in heaven – a place purchased by the blood of God's Son.

So who has been the most influential person in your life? Maybe there are many people who you could name but I think we can all say that Jesus Christ has had the greatest impact on each of our lives. He is the one who has saved us and brought us into his family. He is the one who brings us forgiveness for our sins on a daily basis as he walks with us through life. He is the one who loves us unconditionally. And our response is to Keep serving the Lord by serving others right up until the time he calls us home to heaven. Amen.