

Dorcas Society

The church in which I grew up, like many churches at that time, had a group of women who liked to sew. They brought their sewing machines to church once a month and called themselves the Dorcas Society. As a child I thought that was a peculiar name. Only after I bought my annotated Bible at age fifteen did I realize where the name came from. My new Bible told me that Dorcas and Tabitha were the Greek and Aramaic words, respectively, for “gazelle.” I was still puzzled, though, as none of the women I saw resembled a gazelle.

I was missing the point, of course. Those faithful women were following in the footsteps of the first Dorcas or Tabitha, sewing clothes for others. As we heard this morning, Dorcas had done so much good in her life that when she died her friends hurried to call Peter for help. Help he provided, bringing Dorcas back to life just as Jesus had done with a twelve-year-old girl. Her sewing years were not over yet.

This story of new life coming in the midst of grief was on my mind last weekend when Raisin and I attended the North American Deans Conference, held at another Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Sacramento, California. Our group had last met three years ago and we were glad to see one another in person once again. Naturally, much of our conversation was about the pandemic – how we adapted to it and where we go from here. Regional differences and financial resources played a large role in how each cathedral was able to respond. The conference also provided a remarkable example of service: the cathedral’s vestry enthusiastically cooked and served all of the meals that we ate.

During conversations among deans it became clear that there is still a lot of unresolved grief over who and what we have lost over the last two years. I thought again of Tabitha. Her friends had a lot of grief as well, weeping after she died. But then they acted. They sent for Peter, knowing that he was nearby. When he came and healed her, many believed in the Lord. Tabitha’s death became an opportunity for evangelism. I see some of that here in this Trinity Cathedral, where a sense of loss is being transformed into new ways to invite and welcome people, and connect them to our community.

The promise of new life is also embedded in the passage from the Book of Revelation that we heard this morning. The martyrs who had come through the great ordeal were now at the throne of God, worshipping him day and night. We are told that “they will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb...will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” What an incredible promise, that someday God himself will wipe away our tears. Don’t you just long for that day?

Meanwhile we are here, where God calls us to serve just as Dorcas did. I see that, too, at Trinity, where the outreach committee has found new life and vigor, seeking ways to get members involved in the wider world. Even if we can’t sew we can still serve. And those whose mobility is limited can still pray. There are many ways to build up the Body of Christ.

The Dorcas Society of my childhood is long gone, but the Easter message which motivated it remains the same. Christ is risen, so now we have work to do. Feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and visit the sick. Bring the promise of new life to a grieving world. Together we can do that, for we have God's everlasting promise that he will be with us, now and to the close of the age.

[Fourth Sunday of Easter: Acts 9:36-43; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30.]