

## ✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

### GODLY ENCOURAGEMENT FROM DORCAS

Do you know what we need for today's sermon? We need a sermon text that reminds us of Jesus' resurrection, because we're still in the Easter season. We also need a text that ties in with Mother's Day, because this is the second Sunday in May. And we need encouragement for our daily walk with Jesus, our Savior from sin. The Lord has provided just what we need.

Let me introduce you to a remarkable follower of Jesus. Her story appears in Acts 9. <sup>36</sup>*In the town of Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.* Dorcas. Just saying her name can bring a smile to many faces, and not necessarily for the right reasons. Her name, Dorcas, is not related to the mean label "dork"—you know, someone who looks odd or uncool, a term which was apparently coined only 60 years ago, and meant something else at first. "Dorcas" is the Greek version of her name. The Jews who interacted with her locally in Joppa probably called her "Tabitha," the Aramaic version of her name. In English we would call her "Gazelle," you know, those graceful deer from other continents we see running and leaping in videos. Suddenly the name Dorcas seems so

much more beautiful. I know two women who are named after this very Dorcas—both women are delightful reminders of this wonderful follower of Jesus in our text.

It used to be that most churches had women's organizations like our Ladies Aid. Many still do. Some of these women's organizations have interesting names. For example, the women's group at a church named "King of Kings" was called "Daughters of the King." At Faith Lutheran Church it was "Women of Faith." When I was growing up my mother joined the "Mary Martha Circle": this name reminded them of the sisters of Lazarus: Mary who put 'listening to Jesus' above housework, and Martha who threw herself into chores so she could provide room and board to her Lord Jesus. In a few of our churches the women wanted their group named after the faithful and kind woman in our text. So they called themselves the "Dorcas Society." In the Bible Dorcas was always doing good and helping the poor—just what Jesus wants all his followers to do.

We don't know if this Dorcas was single, married, or widowed, and that's probably good because then everyone can identify with her. We don't know if she had any children of her own, but she sure was like a mother to many. Dorcas cared for people. She was the kind of strong woman repeatedly held up in the

Bible as virtuous, God-pleasing, someone to emulate, a cheerful servant, highly respected. Dorcas was a kind of everyday heroine, the kind of woman found managing so many homes in so many places during so many centuries of human existence. Usually called “Mom” or “Grandma,” their names were probably known only to their families and their neighbors—and most importantly to the Lord who redeemed them from all sin. God knew we would need people in our lives as caring and compassionate as he himself is. Dorcas was the kind of woman people would want as their mom, the kind of person many a Christian mother has tried to be like.

We don’t know if Dorcas was a woman of means and this was why she could be so generous, or if she was just average and intentionally lived on less so she could be generous. Either way she was <sup>36</sup>“*always helping the poor.*” The Holy Spirit had worked in her the spiritual gifts of generosity and showing mercy. She decided that she had enough to feed and clothe herself, and some to spare for others. What a great example! We are all people of means here. I’m not saying we’re in the top 10% or even the top 50%. But all of us have enough to take care of our own needs and some to spare for others—thanks be to God! I encourage you to set aside one dollar for those in need from every 100 dollars of income the Lord provides

you. Then you will be ready to give a nice donation for our Last Sunday Offerings in January and in June when we gather funds for helping those in need locally, or for helping those who experience a tragedy like the recent earthquakes and flooding.

The Bible describes Dorcas as “*always doing good.*” Peter uses this same phrase in Acts 10:38 to describe the earthly ministry of Jesus! So Dorcas was like Jesus. And why not? He loved her enough to die on the cross for her, redeeming her from all sin. And then he was alive, watching over her from heaven, preparing a place for her, and protecting her from harm. Dorcas knew that Jesus wanted her to witness about him. She did so by her actions, and maybe also by her words.

But then sadness happened. <sup>37</sup>*About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.* Normally Jews were buried on the same day as they died. So why put her body in an upstairs room? We’re not sure. Maybe they were trying to show that her soul was now way up there with Jesus. Maybe, while she was sick and dying, they already had planned to do what we hear about next.

The town of <sup>38</sup>*Lydda was near Joppa,* only 10 to 12 miles away. You could walk there in three to four hours. Why

is this important? In the verses before our text begins, we learn that Peter was allowed to heal a man in Lydda who had been paralyzed for eight years. *So when the disciples in Joppa with Dorcas heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"* Why ask Peter to come at once? Did they want Peter to preach the good news to all the mourners at Dorcas' funeral? "Peter, tell us about how Jesus rose from the dead, and how he promised to raise everyone from the dead on the Last Day, and how he will give eternal life to all believers. We lost our loved one, and we want to be reminded that we will see her again." Was that it? Or did they hope that Peter would ask Jesus to raise Dorcas from the dead that same day?

We don't know, but they asked Peter to come. <sup>39</sup>*Peter went with them, and when he arrived, after a three to four hour walk back to Joppa, 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.*

How do you picture this scene? I used to imagine the widows standing by a pile of garments that Dorcas had already made but had not yet distributed, holding up one garment after another as they worked their way down the pile. But it's also possible

that one of the widows showed Peter the garments she was right then wearing on her body? "Dorcas made me this garment, the kind that everyone wears close to their body. She made me this outer garment that everyone wears to protect themselves from the sun and from the cold." And then the next widow showed Peter the garments Dorcas gave her. And then the next widow, and the next, until they had all demonstrated how Dorcas had poured her love into actions that they could wear. See how much they all loved and appreciated and respected Dorcas? See how grateful to God they were for her?

<sup>40</sup>*Peter sent them all out of the room, just like when Jesus was about to raise the daughter of Jairus. Peter had also been present when Jesus raised two other dead people, as reported in the Gospels. Jesus didn't raise all the dead he encountered—only three of them. Was Jesus willing to raise Dorcas from the dead today? Peter was about to find out.*

<sup>40</sup>*Then he got down on his knees and prayed. Peter knew where the power would come from to raise the dead—from God, not from him. After saying his prayers, turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up."* Notice that Peter uses her Aramaic name. Did he speak to her in Aramaic? We don't know. But if he did, his words sounded almost like the words

that Jesus had spoken to Jairus' daughter? Remember what Jesus had said? "*Talitha koum!*" which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up" (Mark 5:41). In Aramaic Peter's words would have sounded just like "*Talitha koum.*" Only one letter different: "*Tabitha koum,*" which means, "Tabitha, I say to you, get up."

It was indeed God's will to restore life to Dorcas' dead body that day. *She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.* <sup>41</sup>*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.* Wouldn't it have been great to celebrate Dorcas' resurrection and God's power with the believers in Joppa that day?

Wouldn't it be great if God would allow us to raise the dead today? They could tell us what it's like to die and what heaven is like—if they even remembered or were allowed to tell. Of course, God's usual way is to wait until the Last Day. Then he will raise all the dead, and he will give eternal life to all believers in Christ. No believer will ever have to die again. As far as we know, Dorcas later died a second time.

But for now she was alive, back from the dead, able to serve the Lord and his people with that kind of joy and peace only Jesus gives. <sup>42</sup>*This became known all over Joppa, and many people*

*believed in the Lord.* That's what miracles do. They are like signs, pointing to the Lord, the one who loved us enough to create us and sustain us, the one who redeemed us by his blood, the one who made us spiritually alive so we can serve. Miracles say, "You can trust Jesus for everything, even eternal life. Listen to Jesus."

What better way to celebrate Mother's Day than to glorify God by becoming more and more like Dorcas! It doesn't matter if you're female or male—we can all serve by doing good and helping the poor. Let's help as believers in Jesus our Redeemer. Let's think about what Jesus's death and his resurrection mean, and let's show their meaning in how we live, just like Dorcas: compassionate, busy for the Lord, caring for others even as we meet our own needs. If we use ourselves up helping others, and in the process get sick and die, no worries. The Lord can raise us from the dead on the same day we die. And if he chooses not to do so on that day, he'll just wait until the Last Day, when he will raise our dead dust from the grave, along with Dorcas' dead dust for a second time.