

“RESURRECTION POWER”

WE ARE IN THE EASTER SEASON.

THE TOP OF YOUR BULLETIN TELLS YOU THAT – “*THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER.*”

THUS THE WHITE PARAMENTS, THE WHITE ROBE, THE HYMNS OF RESURRECTION.

OF COURSE, IN REALITY, EVERY SUNDAY IS EASTER.

IN FACT, AS ONE OF MY FAVORITE EASTER SONGS PUTS IT -

“*EVERY MORNING IS EASTER MORNING FROM NOW ON.*

EVERY DAY’S RESURRECTION DAY, THE PAST IS OVER & GONE.”

WHEN YOU THINK OF RESURRECTION STORIES IN THE NEW TESTAEMENT, WHICH ONES COME TO MIND?

OBVIOUSLY, EVERYONE THINKS OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

BUT AFTER THAT, WHICH ONES DO YOU REMEMBER?

I WOULD IMAGINE THE RAISING OF LAZARUS WOULD BE NEXT.

MANY OF YOU KNOW & REMEMBER THAT STORY.

AFTER THAT, THOUGH, YOU MAY BE HARD-PRESSED TO THINK OF OTHERS.

MY GUESS WOULD BE THAT, IF YOU THINK OF OTHERS, IT WOULD BE THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS.

JAIRUS WAS A TEMPLE OFFICIAL WHOSE LITTLE GIRL HAD DIED.

JESUS BROUGHT HER BACK TO LIFE AFTER HE WAS STOPPED ON THE WAY TO THE HOUSE BY A WOMAN WHO TOUCHED HIS GARMENT & WAS HEALED.

PERHAPS SOME OF YOU WOULD RECALL THAT JESUS ALSO RAISED THE SON OF A WIDOW IN THE VILLAGE OF NAIN.

I DOUBT, THOUGH, THAT MANY OF YOU WOULD REMEMBER *THIS* MIRACLE PERFORMED BY PETER.

WE DON’T THINK OF THIS WHEN WE THINK OF SOMEONE WHO WAS DEAD & THEN WAS BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE.

I KNOW I DON’T.

IN FACT, I DON’T RECALL EVER PREACHING A SERMON ON THIS PASSAGE.

I WONDER WHY THAT IS.

I WONDER WHY WE CAN RATHER EASILY RECALL THE TIMES WHEN *JESUS* RAISED SOMEONE FROM THE DEAD BUT HAVE A MUCH HARDER TIME REMEMBERING PETER DOING IT.

IS IT, PERHAPS, BECAUSE IT COMES MORE EASILY TO MIND WHEN IT’S A STORY ABOUT JESUS?

IS IT BECAUSE WE *EXPECT* HIM TO DO SUCH THINGS?

“*AFTER ALL, HE’S THE SON OF GOD. OF COURSE HE CAN RAISE SOMEONE FROM THE DEAD.*”

BUT WHEN PETER DOES IT, WE FIND THAT A BIT MORE PROBLEMATIC.

I DARE SAY, WE MIGHT EVEN BE A BIT SKEPTICAL – WONDERING IF, IN FACT, IT’S TRUE.

SOME MIGHT EVEN SECRETLY HARBOR A THOUGHT THAT IT – IN SOME WAY – *CHEAPENS* THE MIRACLES JESUS PERFORMED.

“IF EVEN PETER – A REGULAR GUY LIKE ANY OF US – COULD DO SUCH A THING – MAYBE IT’S NOT SUCH A BIG DEAL.”

I DON’T THINK WE SHOULD TAKE EITHER OF THOSE APPROACHES – SKEPTICISM OR CYNICISM.

DIDN’T JESUS HIMSELF TELL THE DISCIPLES THEY WOULD DO GREATER WORKS THAN HE WAS DOING?!

HERE IS PROOF OF THE VERACITY OF HIS WORDS – PETER RAISING A WOMAN FROM THE DEAD – DOING PRECISELY WHAT JESUS HAD DONE!

I’D LIKE US TO TAKE A LOOK AT THIS STORY THIS MORNING BECAUSE I THINK THERE’S A GOOD DEAL WE CAN LEARN FROM THE TWO MAIN CHARACTERS IN THIS DRAMA – PETER & TABITHA – OR DORCAS.

AS WE READ THIS PASSAGE, LUKE TELLS US WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT OF BOTH OF THESE INDIVIDUALS.

LET’S START WITH THE ONE WHO WAS GIVEN NEW LIFE.

WE’RE GIVEN TWO NAMES FOR HER – TABITHA & DORCAS.

TABITHA IS HER ARAMAIC NAME & DORCAS IS HER GREEK NAME.

LET’S STICK WITH TABITHA – PRIMARILY BECAUSE, IN OUR DAY & AGE, I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO TAKE SERIOUSLY SOMEONE NAMED DORCAS.

MAYBE THAT’S JUST ME, BUT IT DOESN’T SOUND LIKE A VERY FLATTERING NAME.

IN EITHER LANGUAGE, THOUGH, THE NAME MEANS THE SAME THING.

IT MEANS “GAZELLE.”

IT APPEARS TO BE AN APPROPRIATE NAME FOR A WOMAN WHO WARRANTS THE ONLY USE OF THE FEMININE FORM OF THE WORD “DISCIPLE” IN THE ENTIRE NEW TESTAMENT.

TABITHA WAS A WOMAN CONSTANTLY ON THE MOVE – SERVING OTHERS IN ONE CAPACITY OR ANOTHER. HER LIFE WAS CHARACTERIZED BY ACTS OF KINDNESS & COMPASSION.

YOU CAN VISUALIZE HER LIKE A GAZELLE – GRACEFUL & GRACE-FILLED – ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SOMEONE WHO NEEDED LOVE, SOMEONE WHO WAS DOWN & OUT, SOMEONE WHO WAS POOR OR HUNGRY OR ALONE.

WE CAN PICTURE THE PAIN & HEARTACHE OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN BEFRIENDED BY TABITHA AS THEY SHOW PETER HER HANDIWORK – THE CLOTHING SHE HAD MADE FOR OTHERS.

IN TABITHA, THEY HAD LOST ONE OF THE MOST-DEARLY BELOVED MEMBERS OF THEIR COMMUNITY – SOMEONE WHOSE PRESENCE WOULD BE SORELY MISSED – PARTICULARLY BY THOSE IN NEED.

I THINK IT’S INTERESTING THAT IT’S THE DEATH OF SOMEONE LIKE TABITHA THAT CAUSES THE LEADERS OF THAT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TO GO SEARCHING FOR PETER.

IT WASN’T ONE OF THE ELDERS.

IT WASN’T THEIR CLERK OF SESSION OR THEIR PREACHER.

IT WASN'T THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OR THE MODERATOR OF THEIR DEACONS.
IT WASN'T THE WEALTHIEST MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION.
IT WAS A WOMAN "*DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS & ACTS OF CHARITY.*"
THIS IS WHAT HAD ENDEARED HER TO SO MANY OF THAT CHURCH FAMILY.
IN THE VERY EARLIEST DAYS OF THE CHURCH, THAT'S THE KIND OF PERSON WHO HELD IT ALL
TOGETHER & SERVED AS A WITNESS FOR WHAT THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY STOOD FOR.
FOR 2,000 YEARS, IT HAS REMAINED THE SAME.
IT'S AS TRUE TODAY AS IT WAS THEN.
IT'S NOT THE ONE WHO STANDS IN THE PULPIT OR THE ONE WHO MAKES DECISIONS IN A BOARD
MEETING THAT HOLDS THINGS TOGETHER IN THE CHURCH.
IT'S THE QUIET, UNASSUMING GAZELLES –
-GRACEFUL & GRACE-FILLED –
- WHO MOVE ABOUT –
- TIRELESSLY SERVING OTHERS –
- LOVING OTHERS –
- GIVING OF THEMSELVES –
-THOSE "*DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS & ACTS OF CHARITY.*"
YOU KNOW WHO THEY ARE IN THIS CONGREGATION – OR, MAYBE YOU DON'T, BECAUSE THAT'S PART OF
WHAT MAKES THEM WHO THEY ARE.
A CHURCH WITHOUT TABITHAS IS A CHURCH WITHOUT LIFE.
IT MAY BE THEOLOGICALLY PURE & BIBLICALLY SOUND.
IT MAY BE FILLED WITH THOSE WHO ARE INTELLECTUALLY SUPERIOR & IT MAY BE LOCATED IN A
BEAUTIFUL & ORNATE FACILITY.
ITS WORSHIP & MUSIC MAY SOAR TO THE HEAVENS.
BUT UNLESS THE CHURCH HAS A FEW GAZELLES TAKING CARE OF OTHERS AS TABITHA DID, IT'S AS DEAD
AS *SHE* WAS BEFORE PETER SHOWED UP.
THAT'S WHY THE PEOPLE WERE SO GRIEF-STRICKEN OVER HER LOSS.
THE CHURCH'S VERY EXISTENCE IS BASED ON SERVICE.
ITS SURVIVAL DEPENDS UPON ITS DEVOTION TO "*GOOD WORKS & ACTS OF CHARITY*" AS LUKE SAYS ABOUT
TABITHA'S LIFE.
I THINK THAT'S WHY HE TELLS US THIS STORY.
THE BOOK OF ACTS IS A CHRONICLE OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES & THE FORMATION OF THE EARLY
CHURCH.
LUKE WANTS US TO KNOW THAT THE CHURCH WILL THRIVE ONLY WHEN IT FOCUSES ON SERVING
OTHERS AS CHRIST DID.

YES, IN THIS PASSAGE, WE SEE VERY CLEARLY WHAT THE PEOPLE THOUGHT OF TABITHA.

WE CAN ALSO SEE WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF PETER.

TO GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT HAPPENS HERE, WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING OF THE GEOGRAPHY.

JOPPA, WHERE TABITHA DIED, IS LOCATED ABOUT 40 MILES NORTHWEST OF JERUSALEM, RIGHT ALONG THE COAST OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

IT'S CLOSE TO PRESENT-DAY TEL AVIV.

JERUSALEM IS WHERE THE BOOK OF ACTS BEGINS – WHERE THE PENTECOST EVENT TOOK PLACE & WHERE THE CHURCH FIRST CAME TO LIFE.

THAT'S WHERE THE MINISTRY OF THE DISCIPLES BEGAN & IN THE FIRST FEW CHAPTERS OF ACTS, WE HAVE EXAMPLES OF PETER'S PREACHING & HEALING MINISTRY.

NOW AT THE TIME OF TABITHA'S DEATH, PETER WAS IN LYDDA, ABOUT 10 MILES INLAND FROM JOPPA.

IN FACT, IN THE VERSES IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE ONES WE'VE READ THIS MORNING, WE LEARN OF ANOTHER MIRACLE PETER PERFORMED.

A MAN NAMED AENEAS WAS PARALYZED & HAD BEEN CONFINED TO HIS BED FOR 8 YEARS.

A WORD FROM PETER, IN THE NAME OF JESUS, HEALED THE MAN & HE WAS ABLE TO WALK AGAIN.

WORD OF PETER'S PRESENCE IN LYDDA HAD COME TO THOSE IN JOPPA & UPON TABITHA'S DEATH, THEY IMMEDIATELY SENT TWO MEN TO BRING HIM TO HER HOME.

NOW THINK ABOUT THIS A MINUTE.

WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT?

WHY WOULD THEY MAKE A 10-MILE JOURNEY TO LYDDA TO ASK PETER TO – AS LUKE SAYS – “...*COME TO US WITHOUT DELAY?*”

IT OBVIOUSLY WASN'T JUST TO ENABLE HIM TO BE PRESENT FOR THE VISITATION BEFORE HER FUNERAL.

IT WASN'T SO THAT PETER MIGHT BE THE ONE TO DELIVER HER EULOGY.

THEY WERE HOPING FOR A MIRACLE.

THEY WERE PRAYING FOR NEW LIFE.

THEY ANTICIPATED RESURRECTION POWER.

THIS TELLS US A GREAT DEAL ABOUT WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF PETER, DOESN'T IT?

THEY BELIEVED THE POWER OF GOD WAS PRESENT WITH HIM.

IMAGINE WHAT PETER FELT WHEN THESE MEN SHOWED UP IN LYDDA & TOLD HIM THE SITUATION.

LUKE SAYS HE “...*GOT UP & WENT WITH THEM,*” SO HE MUST HAVE HAD SOME SENSE OF THIS POWER HIMSELF.

WHAT FAITH & WHAT COURAGE, THOUGH, TO THINK THAT RESURRECTION POWER HAD BEEN GIVEN TO HIM.

IT HAD TO HAVE BEEN A BIT UNNERVING, DON'T YOU THINK, ON THE WAY THERE?

PETER SURELY WOULD HAVE HAD SOME MISGIVINGS ABOUT IT.

“WHAT WILL I DO? WHAT WILL I SAY? WHAT IF NOTHING HAPPENS?”

ON THAT 10 MILE JOURNEY, PETER SURELY REMEMBERED SOME OF HIS EXPERIENCES WITH JESUS.

SURELY HE REMEMBERED THE RAISING OF JAIRUS’S DAUGHTER BECAUSE HE – ALONG WITH JOHN & JAMES – WAS THERE.

HE WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED THAT JESUS GOT RID OF EVERYONE WHO LAUGHED AT HIM WHEN HE SAID *“SHE IS ONLY SLEEPING.”*

HE WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED THAT JESUS REMOVED EVERYONE WHO THOUGHT THEY KNEW WHAT DEAD WAS.

JESUS THREW THEM ALL OUT & KEPT WITH HIM ONLY THOSE WHO BELIEVED THE LITTLE GIRL WAS REALLY ALIVE IN THE ARMS OF GOD.

PETER WOULD HAVE REMEMBERED, SO CLEARLY, THE WORDS OF JESUS THAT DAY, *“TALITHA, CUMI”* – *“LITTLE GIRL, GET UP.”*

HOW IRONIC, HE MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT ON THE WAY – HOW IRONIC THAT *“TALITHA”* AND *“TABITHA”* SOUND SO MUCH THE SAME.

AND WHEN HE ARRIVED IN JOPPA, PETER FOLLOWED THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS – PUTTING EVERYONE OUT OF THE ROOM, KNEELING DOWN IN PRAYER & THEN UTTERING THOSE WORDS THAT SOUNDED SO MUCH LIKE THE WORDS HE HAD HEARD HIS MASTER UTTER – *“TABITHA, CUMI”* – *“TABITHA, GET UP.”*

RESURRECTION POWER WAS EXPERIENCED ONCE AGAIN AS TABITHA CAME BACK TO LIFE!

PETER HAD THE FAITH & THE COURAGE TO ENTER A PLACE OF DEATH & BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF GOD TO BRING NEW LIFE.

HE BREATHED WORDS OF HOPE INTO A SEEMINGLY HOPELESS SITUATION.

DO WE HAVE THAT SAME HOPE – THAT SAME COURAGE?

CAN WE BREATHE LIFE INTO THE SEEMINGLY DEAD BODY OF THE WORLD AROUND US?

WE LIVE IN A TIME OF CHAOS, CONFLICT & CONFUSION.

WE SEE TRAGEDY, TURMOIL & TROUBLE ALL AROUND US.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF WAR & ECONOMIC UPHEAVAL – A WORLD OF POLITICAL FIGHTING & SUICIDE BOMBINGS.

IS RESURRECTION POWER POSSIBLE IN A WORLD LIKE OURS?

AND IT’S NOT JUST ON A NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL SCALE.

IN YOUR OWN LIFE, YOUR OWN FAMILY, YOUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD, YOU SEE IT AS WELL, DON’T YOU?

THERE ARE LIVES THAT ARE TORN APART BY DRUGS OR DISEASE OR DOMESTIC DISCORD.

WE SEE DEATH ALL ABOUT US – THE DEATH OF FRIENDSHIPS, THE DEATH OF RELATIONSHIPS, THE DEATH OF A JOB.

DO YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO BREATHE LIFE INTO THE DEATH THAT SURROUNDS YOU?

DO YOU HAVE THE FAITH TO BELIEVE THAT, THROUGH THE RESURRECTION POWER OF JESUS CHRIST,
NEW LIFE IS POSSIBLE?

I THINK THAT'S WHY LUKE TELLS US THIS STORY.

HE WANTS US TO KNOW THAT THE EARLY CHURCH DEPENDED ON THE TABITHAS – THE UNSUNG HEROES
WHO WERE DEVOTED TO GOOD WORKS & ACTS OF CHARITY.

HE ALSO WANTS US TO KNOW THAT WE HAVE ACCESS TO RESURRECTION POWER JUST AS MUCH AS
PETER DID.

HE WANTS TO REMIND US THAT IT'S ALL AROUND US IF WE WILL BUT OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE IT.

THERE ARE LIVES THAT ARE BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE RESURRECTION POWER OF CHRIST – LIVES
THAT WERE ONCE IN A SHAMBLES BUT HAVE FOUND NEWNESS THROUGH RESTORED RELATIONSHIPS & RENEWED
COMMITMENT.

THAT RESURRECTION POWER HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US.

ON YOUR OWN JOURNEYS TO JOPPA, REMEMBER WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE & BE FILLED WITH THE FAITH
& THE COURAGE TO KNOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN THAT SAME POWER.

IT'S A RESURRECTION POWER THAT ENABLES YOU TO BRING LIFE OUT OF DEATH – HOPE OUT OF DESPAIR
– JOY OUT OF TRAGEDY.

IN THIS EASTER SEASON, REMEMBER THIS TRUTH - *“EVERY MORNING IS EASTER MORNING FROM NOW ON,
EVERY DAY'S RESURRECTION DAY, THE PAST IS OVER & GONE.”* AMEN.

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