April 17, 2016   
Acts 9:36-43   
Freedom to Rise Again

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Acts 9:36-43 New Revised Standard Version

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 throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

The power of death is overcome by the power of resurrected life. And we are able to see the power of God alive in God's world. This week with the earthquakes in Japan I have been thinking about my time living there as a teacher. It was one of the loneliest times in my life because I was living in a very small rural town and there were two foreigners in the town, myself and the other English teacher. I taught at four junior high schools, rotating at a different school each week. It was hard to make relationships with people because of the language barrier, I learned five Japanese words on the airplane to Japan. So it was one of the loneliest times in my life but it was also one of the times when I felt resurrection the strongest.

I was able to see God with me every single day. I saw God with me when I would venture into Tokyo on the weekends and visit the shrines and temples. I saw God with me when I worshipped at the Christian church that was an hour and half bus, train, and walk away. I saw God with me as I was welcomed into people’s homes and treated like family. I saw God with me in the English conversation class that I taught on Tuesday evenings. It was a group of folks in their 30s-50s who wanted to practice their English. They had t-shirts made for our group. They were red and in white letters said Wee Wee Club. When I inquired as to why the t-shirts were titled that way, I was informed that is the sound that you make when you ride a bike down a hill. Wee Wee… And when I felt lonely and sad and hopeless, when I felt like the power of death was going to overcome me, I would think of the Wee Wee club t-shirt. I would think about the power of resurrection that was all around me.

In our scripture we have a story of the power of death overcome by the power of resurrected life. Tabitha is brought back to life and rises from her death bed. Tabitha is also known as Dorcas and both names mean gazelle. Dorcas is called a female disciple, mathetria in Greek. This is the only time that term is used in the entire New Testament. Dorcas is empowered by God to be Jesus’ disciple and she heads up a welfare program among Joppa’s poor. In her day widows were on the very bottom rung of society’s ladder. They had no one to protect or represent them. In Joppa everyone knew and thanked God for this disciple of Jesus. And when she dies the entire community is plunged into grief. Not only is Dorcas gone but also her ministry to people on the margins of society is also gone. When Peter arrives, Dorcas’ old friends, most of them widows, show him her impact by displaying some of the clothing she had made for them. And then Peter joins a long line of God’s agents who demonstrate the power of God in the world.

In our scripture Tabitha is brought back to life and rises from her death bed. The voice of God says, “Come on, you can do it, get up.” The power of death is overcome by the power of resurrected life. And we think of the story of Jesus bringing Jairus’ daughter back to life in Galilee. We remember what Jesus did and we see Peter going and doing the same.

We are an Easter people living in a Good Friday world. And we know that a life lived in God is a life where death can have no final sway, that is the power of the resurrection. There are earthquakes and disease, there are wars and tragic accidents. Relationships end and families fall apart. Jobs are lost, people are homeless and hungry. We follow Christ through suffering and death into new life, we follow Christ through the darkness of Good Friday into the light of Easter.

We have freedom to rise again because of Easter. We believe in a living Lord who has power over death, power over disappointment, power over depression, power over addiction, power over divorce, power over an unhappy relationship. We can have personal resurrection. We experience this when we are at the end of our rope, when we have gone as far as we are going to go on our own strength. When we realize we have freedom to rise again, we take a chance and a risk and become who we are supposed to be. We know that we can take a chance and if we mess up we can get back up and do it again. And we do this in the community of faith because we have a community that will encourage us to take a chance.

I was talking with someone from our church family who has not been to worship in a few weeks. She said that it has been hard to come to worship because she is going through a rough time and when she comes to Greenland Hills she cries because everyone is just so nice here. This is a place where you are loved. This is a place where you are welcome to cry, where you know that there will be someone else who will give you a hug and will be ready to listen.

“Come on, you can do it, get up.” How do you see the power of God alive today? How do you see the power of death overcome by the power of resurrected life? On May 4 we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of equality for clergywomen in the United Methodist Church. The resolution at General Conference was only for unmarried women. There was concern that the United Methodist Church was not ready for women pastors who were married. But as folks stood to speak for the resolution, the Holy Spirit was there, the power of resurrected life was there and so a motion was made to expand full clergy rights for all women, married and unmarried, young and old, all colors, shapes and sizes. “Despite much resistance and fears about what this might do to our churches, expressed by voices of both men and women, the General Conference, voted down compromise proposals and ended up supporting the boldest position offered – full clergy rights for women with no exceptions.”[[1]](#footnote-2) One of the coolest United Methodist facts that I like to share is that in 1980 the United Methodist Church elected Marjorie Matthews as the first female Bishop in all of Christiandom!

Following Jesus is messy. Jesus challenges us every day to get out of our comfort zone so we can get busy and start taking care of people who are unlike us. Jesus challenges us to dialogue and develop relationships with everyone, those who are like us and those who are not. This means we are to dialogue with those who share our political affiliation and those who don’t. Dialogue with those who look like us and those who don’t. Dialogue with those who live where we live and those who live far away.

For Peter, following Jesus meant doing what Jesus did. A little girl was brought back from death, just as Jesus had done before. We believe that new life is possible. We believe that redemption is possible in the midst of tragedy, in the midst of suffering and in the midst of darkness that threatens to consume us. There is nothing beyond the redemptive power of God’s love. The power of death overcome by the power of resurrected life. The voice of God says “Come on, you can do it, get up.” And no matter how down and out we feel, God reaches out a hand to help us up. And we say, “Yes!” Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. http://unitedmethodistreporter.com/2016/04/13/the-debate-that-changed-the-church-60-years-of-clergy-rights-for-women/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)