

The 4th Sunday of Easter: Holy Trinity Church: May 8, 2022

John 10: 22-30, Acts 9:36-43: Mother's Day

“She lost her life to Jesus Christ, years ago when she trusted him.

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!

Good morning Holy Trinity Church, especially Happy Mother's Day to all our mothers and grandmothers in church this morning. Parents, both mom and dads have the hardest job in the world, and this world would be in a horrible shape without their love and sacrifice and perseverance. Of course, it is not easy to be a Mom. When my daughter Amy brings my grandson, Mitchell, to our house for a visit, we thank God for giving us such a wonderful boy. I always pray, dear Lord, thank you for giving us children when we are young. The challenges and sacrifices of motherhood. So, we thank you, moms, for your great love and dedication for raising the next generation.

I don't think you can overestimate the influence of a parent on a child's sense of compassion and compassion is what being a follower of Jesus is all about. Compassion is concern for the suffering of others. It's an active response to another person's pain. Compassion is at the heart of our lesson for today. Some people seem gifted with compassion, and some, not so much.

For an example, a woman falls flat on her face in December in the middle of an icy but busy parking lot. As she was lying there trying to clear her head, another woman drove up and called out the window, "Are you hurt?" "No, I'm fine," the first woman answered. "Oh, good," the second woman continued. "Will you be leaving your parking space now, please?" Oh my, that driver's compassion was as short-lived as a hummingbird's hiccup. Just "sayin."

In contrast, I read this story about a South Carolina teacher named Trevor Barton tells of a memorable event that occurred in his first-grade class. Most of Mr. Barton's students come from underprivileged homes. One of his students, named Paola lives in a small apartment with her grandmother, mother, sister and uncle. Paola's family are immigrants from El Salvador. One day, a new boy named Billy was assigned to Mr. Barton's class. As Billy sat down, Paola leaned toward him and whispered, "Hi. I'm glad you're in

our class . . . Don't worry. There's lots to learn. I'll help you." Later that day, Mr. Barton asked Paola why she wanted to help Billy. She said that she remembered how it felt to be the new kid in school and others had been kind to her. Then she added, "I just wanted to be kind to him because he's my neighbor." That first grader understood about compassion. One child reaching out in kindness can make a big difference in the world. Our world has a desperate need for compassionate people, people who will reach out with kindness to meet the needs right in front of them.

When I was studying for the priesthood at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, there was an Episcopal Chaplain at Harvard University. In one of his books, he shares a letter from a young woman he knew. I'll just read a few quotes from her letter. She wrote, "I have often realized that it takes courage to care. Caring is dangerous. It leaves you open to hurt and to looking like a fool. As a priest I have found that many people in their lives keep a secret store of indifference as a sort of self-protection. That's interesting, don't you think? "A secret store of indifference." Do you think that's why our world seems less compassionate these days? Do you think we have lost the courage to care? Do we keep a secret store of indifference close to your bullet vest as a sort of self-protection against getting hurt?"

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, those are some questions that flow from our scripture reading from the Acts of the Apostles 9:36 36-43 for this Mother's Day. Today, my sermon comes from the Acts of the Apostles 9, about a woman and mother named Tabitha/Dorcas in the Greek.

It is the story of a remarkable disciple of Jesus Christ named, Tabitha. Our story begins like this, "In the town of Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor." Someone once wrote that a truly great life can be summed up in just a few words, an epitaph of excellence. This is our introduction to Tabitha: *"she was always doing good and helping the poor."* What a wonderful epitaph. Sadly, Tabitha became sick and died, before her time. The other disciples in Joppa were so upset about her death that they sent for Peter to come to them from a nearby town. As you remember, after Jesus' death, Peter became the leader of the twelve apostles. When Peter got to Tabitha's house, he was taken upstairs to the room where they laid her body. Among the mourners in that upper room was a group of widows. Widows and orphans were the neediest members of society in Jesus' day. When their husbands died, the widows were completely dependent on the help and compassion of others, because the Temple priests took the widow's homes and everything in it. Without help, many of the widows would have to turn to begging or

prostitution to survive. These women were distraught. These were mothers to love each to one another. We read in Acts 9:39, *“All the widows stood around [Peter], crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Tabitha had made while she was still with them.”* Evidently, Tabitha cared deeply for the widows’ needs. And she showed her compassion for them by sewing clothing for them. She saw a practical need and she filled it. Note that these women weren’t just showing Peter the clothes Tabitha made; they were showing Peter the love that Tabitha had for them. Tabitha was truly a caring woman.

So, having listened to the women about the kind of woman Tabitha was, Peter sent them all out of the room, and he knelt beside the bed and prayed for Tabitha. And then he simply told her to get up. And Tabitha, whose body had already been washed and dressed for burial, opened her eyes and sat up.

“Then Peter called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”

I’ll bet that many of you had forgotten that Peter, by the power of God, raised Tabitha from the dead. What a remarkable story this is, and what a remarkable woman Tabitha must have been! She was so beloved and respected by her church family that she was brought back from the dead to

continue her ministry with them. Tabitha was compassion with a capital “C.” She truly lived her life walking in the steps of her Lord Jesus. She lived as Christ would have all of us live with concern and compassion for her neighbor.

But what I hope all of us will see today is that living like Tabitha lived—living with love and compassion for others which, by the way, is the way Christ lived is the only truly fulfilling way to live. You want the key to living at its best? A life of compassion is the key. Notice, first, that Tabitha lived with a sense of purpose. A sad thing is that so many people today live with no real purpose at all for their lives. The object of life is not what we think it is, which is to achieve as much as they can have lots of money, lots of power, and lots of pleasure. The object of life is the maturing of our souls, and you reflect that maturing of the soul when you care more for other people than yourself.”

Tabitha, a disciple of Jesus, cared for others. She understood that God had given her skills, and resources she could use for good works. She had the skill of sewing that she could use to provide for the poor and for the widows and their children.

So, my sisters and brothers, I challenge you this week to take some time this week to examine the skills and resources that God has given you. Then ask

yourself, how can we use these things to meet the needs of the people God places in your life. This is to say that the best way to find a fulfilling life is to translate compassion into action. Jesus' ministry didn't consist of simply telling hurting people, "I'll pray for you." Now there is nothing wrong with telling people you will pray for them. That can be very helpful, if you really mean it, and if you follow through with it. But there are some people who tell others that they will pray for them who simply use that as a substitute for saying or doing anything else to help the person who is in need. It is caring. It's all about and caring and action.

That was not Jesus' way. Jesus never ever told anyone to come to church to find the answers for their needs. Instead, Jesus went to them. Jesus went to the marketplaces and into people's homes. Jesus preached to crowds in the countryside. Jesus went where the needs are, and Jesus acted to heal the hurts right in front of him. Tabitha, this truly caring woman, lived a fulfilling life. She had a sense of purpose for her life. She translated her compassion into action. And because of the kind of life she lived, she will live forever.

Now please, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that because, by the power of God, Peter raised her from the dead, she will live forever. No, not at all, Tabitha eventually died. But think of it, here we are in the year 2022

talking about a woman who lived two thousand years ago. Why? Because of the caring life that she lived. What a legacy Tabitha left us. As long, as people tell the Gospel story, Tabitha will not be forgotten. Such is the power of a positive influence. It never dies.

Questions: Do you find it easier to pray for others or to pray for yourself?

Why do you think that is?

- Who has been a Tabitha in your life?**
- How might God be calling you to meet needs in your community, your church?**
- What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you/your family/your church/your community? Listen, to the Holy Spirit that lives in your soul**

Let me tell you of one more woman who had Tabitha's kind of compassion. In 1977, Dr. Martha Myers moved to Yemen to serve as a doctor of obstetrics and gynecology. Her target audience was Yemeni women who often lack medical care and, because of their religion, were prohibited from seeing a male doctor. Myers worked at a Yemeni hospital founded by Americans. But she also traveled into the most remote areas around the hospital to make house calls for her patients. Her love and commitment earned her both admiration and enemies.

One day, a patient of Dr. Myers told her husband that she had never experienced such love and compassion in her life as she did at Dr. Myers' hospital. That was the wrong thing to say to her husband. Concerned that his wife might be influenced by the doctor's Christian faith, her husband promptly went to the hospital and gunned down Dr. Myers and two of her colleagues. At the time of her death, Dr. Martha Myers had served the women of Yemen for more than 25 years. The result? Over 40,000 Yemeni people attended Dr. Myers' funeral. Martha's colleagues said, "the gunman did not take her life. She lost her life to Christ years ago when she trusted him. Martha was not living for herself, but to serve others."

For one moment, I want you to listen to this quote and put your name in it:

"She lost her life to Jesus Christ years ago when she trusted him. Martha was not living for herself, but to serve others." So, does that describe your life right now? Is that how people will describe your epitaph chiseled in their minds or a stone after you are gone? You and I were made to be Jesus in this world. That means living with a sense of purpose and translating our compassion into action. And if we commit to living this way, then our lives will have an eternal impact on earth and in Heaven. AMEN!