

A Caring Woman

Acts 9:36-43

Good morning, and Happy Mother's Day to all our mothers and grandmothers and mother-figures in the congregation this morning. I don't think it's a stretch to say that moms have the hardest job in the world.

One mom, explaining the challenges of motherhood, said, "My kids wanted to know what it was like being a mom. So I woke them up at 2:00 a.m. to let them know my sock came off."

Another mom wrote, "Parenting is 70% me yelling, 20% asking the kids why they're yelling, & 10% trying to find where I left my coffee." Speaking of misplacing your coffee, here's one Mom's recipe for iced coffee: "Get up... Get kids up... Make coffee ... Forget you made coffee ... Put coffee in the microwave ... Forget you put it in the microwave... ... Drink it cold."

That recipe for iced coffee alone tells us a lot about the challenges and sacrifices of motherhood. So, we thank you, moms, for your dedication to raising the next generation.

This morning compassion is at the heart of our lesson. And truth be told, some people seem gifted with compassion, and some not so much. Yet **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.

Do you think the world seems less compassionate these days? That we've lost the courage to care? Do we keep a secret stash of indifference tucked within us as some sort of self-protection against getting hurt?

Those are questions that float in my mind as I read our lesson this morning. Acts 9:36-43 is the story of a remarkable disciple named Tabitha, and it begins like this, "In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas); who was always doing good and helping the poor."

It's been said 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, evidently before her time. The other disciples in Joppa were so upset that they sent for Simon Peter to come from a nearby town.

When Peter got to Tabitha's house, he was taken upstairs to the room where they had lain her body. Among the mourners in that upper room was a group of widows.

Now, widows and orphans were the neediest of society in Jesus' day, completely dependent on the help and compassion of others. And these women were distraught.

Verse 39 says, "**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 by sewing clothing for them. She saw a practical need and filled it.

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.

Hers was compassion with a capital "C." She truly lived her life walking in the steps of her Master and lived as Christ would have all of us live . . . with concern and compassion for her neighbor.

I notice that **Tabitha lived with a sense of purpose**, which is not the case with many people today who seem to stumble through life and live with no real purpose at all.

Charles Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship, had a healthy perspective on living a life of purpose. He was once a powerful attorney and political advisor to President Richard Nixon. He was also involved in the Watergate scandal that led to Nixon's impeachment.

Colson spent seven months in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal. He lost power, prestige, and money. But, as a result, he became a Christian in prison which gave him a new sense of purpose.

Colson noted that his hometown of Naples, Florida, is one of the best spots in the nation for golfing and he watched wealthy CEOs retire from their big corporations and move to Naples so they could spend all their time golfing.

These CEOs began measuring their days by how many games of golf they could play. But after a few months, he could see in their eyes that they became bored and life seemed purposeless. They realized that what once looked like freedom and pleasure had become meaningless.

Colson writes, "The object of life is not what we think it is, which is to achieve money, power, pleasure . . . The object of life is the maturing of the soul, 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 particular skills and resources she could use for good, and she used the skill of sewing to provide for the poor and for the widows.

Notice, also, that **the best way to find a fulfilling life is to transform compassion into action**. Jesus' ministry didn't consist of simply telling hurting people, "I'll pray for you." There's nothing wrong with that, mind you. 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'll pray for them as a way of saying something and doing nothing. That was not Jesus' way. He never told people to come to church to find the answers for their needs. Instead, he went to them. He went to the marketplaces and into people's homes. He preached to crowds in the countryside and went where the needs were. He took action to heal hurts right in front of him.

The same can be said of Tabitha, this truly caring woman. She 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. I'm not saying that because, by the power of God, Peter raised her from the dead, she lived forever. Tabitha eventually did die, again. But think of it, here we are in 2022 talking about a woman who lived two thousand-plus years ago.

All because of the caring life 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.

Let me close with the story of a 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 American Baptists, but also traveled into the most remote areas around the hospital to make house calls. 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 went to the hospital and killed Dr. Myers and two of her colleagues.

At the time of her death, Dr. Myers had served the women of Yemen for more than 25 years and as a result over 40,000 Yemeni people attended her funeral. Jerry Rankin, former president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, said, "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."¹

"Martha was not living for herself, but to serve others." Does that describe your life today? Is that how people will talk about you after you're gone?

I hope it does. Because you and I were created by God in our mother's womb to be Jesus in the world. Which means living with a sense of purpose and transforming our compassion into action so that our lives will have an eternal impact on the world around us.

¹ "Martha Myers," <https://www.imb.org/175/missionary-profiles/martha-myers/?returnto=martha-myers&pageid=127438>