

## “She Lives”

12 May 2019: 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Festival of the Christian Home

Salado UMC—Salado, Texas 76571

Preaching Text: Acts 9:36-43

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“Sooner or later we all quote our mothers” (—Bern Williams).

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### MOTHERS DAY HISTORY

Observed the second Sunday in May, this day honors all mothers. It began in its present form with a special service in May 1907 at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Grafton, West Virginia. A Methodist laywoman, Anna Jarvis organized the service to honor her mother, who had died on May 9, 1905. By 1908 Anna Jarvis was advocating that all mothers be honored on the second Sunday in May. In 1912 the Methodist Episcopal Church recognized the day and raised it to the national agenda. It has some parallels with the old English Mothering Sunday in mid-Lent, which focused on returning home and paying homage to one’s mother, and with Mother’s Day for Peace, introduced in 1872 by Julia Ward Howe in Boston as a day dedicated to peace.

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From time to time we each wonder about the people we know and live with in our community. Outwardly, on the one hand, most of us cover the pain with which we live. On the other hand, inwardly, when we hear about one tragic circumstance or another of someone else, we breathe a sigh of relief and think, “Thank goodness, at least it was not me.” Sooner or later, however, we all come to *the*, or at least, *a* “time of trial” about which The Lord’s Prayer speaks when we pray, “lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.” Even though in our heads we each know difficult moments will come, in our hearts we believe these moments will not happen to us. Many young people think that they are impervious to injury and death and that experiences with drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors may get others but they will not get us. Just so young people don’t think I’m criticizing them, older people had the same attitudes when they were young too. I wish I had a dollar for every time in my life when I said to myself, “If I had only known . . . .”

My late friend, Rev. Rod Wilmoth, mentioned the late Carlyle Marney in a 1998 sermon. I too mentioned Dr. Marney on Easter Sunday. He was not only a superb preacher/theologian, he was a great person. Once when Marney was a religious emphasis speaker on a college campus a student asked: “Dr. Marney, I’m wondering if you could explain the resurrection in simple language so that I can understand it?”

Dr. Marney said he would not. Somewhat taken aback, the student asked why not. Marney said, “Because at your age you have not experienced the depths of despair, darkness, doubt, and death. One cannot understand the resurrection apart from life’s crushing experiences. One day when you have faced the devastations of life, you will begin to understand the meaning of the resurrection.” What Marney suggested to that college student is that just because we cannot explain the resurrection does not mean we cannot experience it (Rodney E. Wilmoth, unpublished sermon, “The Day He Defeated Death,” 12 April 1998,

Hennepin Avenue UMC, Minneapolis MN). But to experience resurrection faith one must flirt with the edges of depth, darkness, and despair in ways that are foreign to some here, but certainly not all. This is why our lesson today about Tabitha/Dorcas is a powerful story of one who has received new life. She was not one of the original twelve, but a disciple even so. Hear our lesson:

**[36] 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. [37] At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. [38] 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." [39] 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.**

**[40] 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. [41] He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. [42] This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. [43] Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:36-43).**

Luke sets this story in Acts larger context. In chapter 9, Saul begins a new course after encountering the risen Christ on the Damascus road. The next story in chapter 9 recounts Peter healing a man bedridden eight years named Aeneas. While in Lydda, Peter hears about a disciple whose name was Tabitha or, in Greek, Dorcas. Peter departs immediately for Joppa because it was near Lydda. Dorcas was a remarkable woman because not only was she a female disciple, but a widow. Yet, she helped other poor widows by hiring them to sew, and giving them dignity through supporting themselves. In a way, Dorcas functioned as a mother to these women. Widows in New Testament times rarely had prospects for financial security. Usually a male relative guaranteed their security. Thus, Dorcas offered these widows the gift of fiscal liberty. For this reason and for her discipleship that the widows devotedly mourned her death.

Doubtless, Dorcas lived in a bleak situation. First, she was a woman in a culture that made life difficult for women. Second, she was a widow. This, too, brought her many hardships. Third, although not definitely, she was likely, an older woman. Because her husband had passed and the text tells us "she became ill and died" we guess elderly. She knew the depths of grief and suffering simply because of her life's circumstances. Yet, "she was devoted to good works and acts of charity." Peter saw the devotion of those gathered and felt pity. Putting all those in the room outside, Peter said these words like a prayer, "Tabitha, get up." After she arose, most noteworthy, Peter returned her to her widows and friends.

This is a resurrection story. We read it at this Easter season to help those who live in darkness. Some in our village have buried loved ones this week; others struggle with diseases of which medicine may or may not cure. Some face a breakup of their covenants, while others worry about their jobs and families. Some folks stand on the brink of leaving home. While there is excitement in that prospect, it also creates anxiety. I suggest today, that despite the difficult conditions we face in life, we do not face these situations alone. We face these moments with a living Christ.

Did you ever hear about the man who rented a house by a river? Under the house, there was a light, airy cellar in which he kept his prize hens. But one night the river flooded his cellar. All the hens drowned. Early the next morning he was off to his landlord to announce that he was going to move. "But why?" asked the landlord. "I thought you liked the house." "I do," said the tenant. "I like the house very much, but the river has flooded the cellar and all my hens are drowned!" "Oh," said the landlord, "don't move on account of that. Try ducks" (Jim Moore, *You Can Get Bitter or Better*, p. 13-14)!

Now, that's a good Christian story because it reminds us that when one door closes on us, God opens another one. So, when disappointment comes, be resilient. Bend a little, and then bounce back! Finally, in your deep moments of despair, remember Paul's words to the church at Rome: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). This affirmation of Paul's is what we celebrate today! Amen.

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