

Sermon for Easter IV Year C 2025

Tabitha is any of the women we know who knits or crochets hats and scarves and blankets for the unhoused.

She is mindful of how cold it is in winter without shelter.

So, she knits or maybe crochets, little warm reminders that someone is remembering their needs, tangible reminders of God's love and the love of strangers who care.

Dorcas is the 10-year-old girl, who having lived in homeless shelters with her family, takes her own money and buys fabric.

She gets sewing lessons from her mom.

Now that her family has some stability, she wants to help other kids who are in the position she once was in.

She learns to make stockings and Easter bags.

She plans to learn to make them clothes.

She knows that the kids at the shelter will need clothes.

Tabitha lives on in the art professor who sets up her sewing machine on a sidewalk in San Francisco, mending the clothes of anyone who needs it and also in the woman from Iowa who sewed more than 1,000 dresses to send to children in need.

Tabitha, also called Dorcas, whose name means Gazelle, was the first woman explicitly called a disciple in the book of Acts—or anywhere in the New Testament for that matter.

What did she do that merited being called a disciple?

She saw people in need and she helped them.

She wrapped people in love—both literally and figurately—the love that she had come to know by faith in Christ.

This story of Tabitha always reminds me of my grandmother.

She, too, was a woman known by more than one name.

No one could ever really explain to me why she was called Sue or Sylvia by my grandfather, her sisters and brother and all her church friends when she was baptized with Margot as her first name.

And it really baffled me that on the name on her checks was Margaret O. Nelson.

We used to tease and laugh about her “many names.”
And one of them was a nickname—“The General.”
She knew how to keep a family of four children running well.
Nevertheless, she was a Tabitha.
She sewed bandages with the other women in her church during WWII.
She cooked and baked and shared her food with neighbors
during the Great Depression because my grandfather was one of the few
men in their neighborhood who had work.
She taught Sunday school and bible study leader for many years—
in fact, she was my first Sunday school teacher.
We always said she saw the world through “rose colored glasses”
because she generally found the best in everyone.
Perhaps that is why when she died, every woman in her circle of
friends—which like her names were many—leaned over and whispered
to me—“She was my best friend, you know.”
To me, that was a kind of miracle—not quite like Peter raising the
original Tabitha from the dead—
but a miracle of the heart, of knowing how to love others.
Like the original Tabitha, my grandmother also wrapped people in
love—both figuratively and literally—the love that she had come to
know by faith in Christ.

Tabitha and my grandmother and the myriads of women who have done
what they were able are sometimes overlooked in the church history
books and in the stained glass windows and yet where would the church
be without them and the other women who followed Jesus—and stayed
by the cross and returned on that first Easter morn?
Where would be without these “women of the cloth” who touch lives in
real and tangible ways.

The inclusion of Tabitha in the book of Acts, I believe, is about more
than just another miracle story.
True, the act of resurrection that Peter performs
is a pretty bit deal and it reveals God’s power and presence
in the early church in impressive ways.

Yet, what I find compelling, especially this morning on Good Shepherd Sunday coinciding with our secular celebration of Mothers Day is the reminder of all the women—and men too—that have been part of sharing God’s love and God’s story with others, with us.

The faithful disciples, the saints, who have accompanied us in faith and inspired us into new life.

I’ve already shared the influential Tabitha in my life,

now I want to encourage you to consider

who are the Tabithas in your life?

Who taught you about being a disciple?

Who showed you the way of Christ, wrapping you figuratively and literally in God’s love?

As I’ve said, when I think of some of my earliest memories of how I learned what it meant to be a Christian, it is my grandmother who first comes to mind.

But there have been others.

All of these women—and men—have been Tabithas for me.

They have reminded me of God’s love and compassion.

They have nurtured and inspired me to grow in faith.

They have drawn me into the kingdom of God in ways I never expected and ways I will never forget.

Their legacy of loving discipleship in word and deed have made not just my life more faithful, more hopeful and loving, but also the life of the church—even though their names are not written in the history books or stitched on banners hanging in the church.

They all lived Easter lives, lives of generous love and acts of kindness and compassion, thus showing themselves to be truly alive.

Let us name the Tabitha’s in our lives and always remember that through their hands, Christ, the Good Shepherd’s love was shared.

Let us each learn from Tabitha so that we—as the hymn says—can serve each other in Christ’s name in truth and charity.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. And because Christ is risen, we will rise too!