



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“RESURRECTION POWER”:  
FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—11:15 SERVICE

ACTS 9: 36-43  
PSALM 23  
REVELATION 7: 9-17  
JOHN 10: 22-30

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY  
MAY 8, 2022

I would like to focus our attention this morning on the reading from Acts. This is the story of Tabitha - Dorcas, in Greek - one of the few stories in Scripture about a female disciple in the early church. Her name means “gazelle”, and it seems to capture the grace-full spirit of Tabitha’s life: generous, beloved, faithful. It is a lovely coincidence that this reading is appointed for Mothers’ Day and Good Shepherd Sunday. Tabitha may have been wealthy; most houses did not have an upper room. Peter is summoned from Lydda to Joppa. People are hopeful that he can work some miracle, but Tabitha is already laid out for burial upstairs by the time Peter arrives.

Peter is ushered upstairs where Tabitha’s friends are grieving, and they show Peter the beautiful clothes she made. Peter interrupts the whole traditional mourning process and throws everyone out of the upper room. I am reminded of Jesus’ instruction to close the door when we pray and God, who sees “in secret”, will listen. Private prayer is not a public display. It is now just Peter and the dead body: this is Peter’s “Lazarus’ moment”. There is no-one to see this, no-one to watch what he does or doesn’t do. Peter gets on his knees. What would you pray? Peter throws himself on the mercy and

power of God. Peter isn't praying to Jesus as a consultant; Peter is praying to Jesus as his Savior. I believe that Peter is overpowered by the ask and hope laid upon him. I also believe that Peter knows the risen Jesus can raise Tabitha in that moment. Peter prays as though his life depends on it, as well as Tabitha's. Jesus is always close by when we pray this way. Peter comes into direct contact with the risen Jesus when he prays this way. After Peter has prayed, he knows what to do. Without hesitation, he speaks to Tabitha as though she is already alive. He turns to the body and says *Tabitha, get up*. This seems insane - telling a dead body to sit up - except that it actually happens.

This story isn't ultimately about Tabitha or about Peter. It is about the power of the risen Jesus to raise the dead. This is a story of the power of the Resurrected Jesus moving through the early church. The risen Jesus is working in new and astonishing ways through his disciples. All Jesus' disciples in the early church participate in acts of Resurrection in the world. Literally bringing a person back from the dead, as here, or spiritually and materially bringing people back from death to life, bringing people from despair to hope (perhaps with beautiful clothing, like Tabitha); healing in Jesus' name and

in his power. That is our mandate. Because the power belongs to Jesus not to Peter or any disciple as individuals, such things can also happen through you and me. Isn't that amazing to you? It is to me.

Yet...of course we are doubtful. We review our own lives of faith and may see no miracles or healings. Have you ever raised the dead after your prayers? What happened to that power in the early church? Did the Holy Spirit quit working such miracles? Here is something I find helpful. A wise teacher said that signs and wonders are given to get us started in our lives of faith. As we mature, apostolic prayer is dark or hidden. I think this may apply to the whole church as well.

The work of God in the world seems to be in stages or chapters, each building upon the last. The Hebrew covenant, the law and the prophets, the birth and death of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Ascension back into heaven. Then the coming of the Holy Spirit and the explosive growth of the early church. God is starting from nothing in building the church. So God provides miracles and signs as gracious gifts for the church to be born. Then things quiet down as the long-term journey of the church begins. And that is the chapter we are in now. Most of the time, we are not given the

gift of obvious miracles. Most of the time faith is faith, not sight. The Holy Spirit is still at work through the church throughout the world; through modern medicine and psychology; through 12-step programs that liberate people from the chains of addiction; through justice movements; through faithful people everywhere. We are guided by the gospel and the Holy Spirit working in quieter ways.

We do love and seek the spectacular signs of God's presence! Yet that is not what discipleship is in our age. Discipleship today is relationship with God + Time. We cannot be disciples without time, without the gradual seasoning of our faith, weaning us away from the spectacular that we crave, into deeper maturity and dependence on God alone, not whatever results we can generate. Our part is the faithful use of our time, even when it seems like nothing is happening. Faithfulness *takes* time. Faithfulness today is like an iceberg in that most of it is hidden, most is unspectacular. In fact, in our age, often what is spectacular in religion turns out to be fraudulent or exploitative or manipulative or a fad. But two things are as true for us as for Peter. All of us still have a part to play in bringing the risen Christ into the world. And all of us are still called to pray as though lives depend on it. In a

hidden and mysterious way, I believe that they do. I encourage us never to underestimate the hidden power of prayer in our own life or for others.

It has been said: Pray as though it all depends on God; work as though it all depends upon you. But the reverse is even more true in the spiritual life: *Work as though it all depends on God; pray as though it all depends on you.* Work as though it depends on God – labor and then step back and surrender the outcome. But pray with all your might. Pray to the risen Jesus as our *Savior*. Pray even harder than you work – like Peter. I know I don't always do this. We elevate productivity and outward results above everything, as though it is our god. Especially, we crave those short-term immediate results, the spectacular fourth quarter. I often intersperse my work with prayer, rather than interspersing my prayer with work. Work can be a form of prayer but so often, work is just work. This is one reason the monastic witness is so essential to our Christian life. The structure of their day around praying the offices reminds us all that our primary work is to praise, reverence and serve God as Ignatius of Loyola puts it. I hold this as foundational in my daily life: our primary purpose is to praise, reverence and serve God. When we keep this as our

daily focus we are better anchored and the world is better served. Then, when we are called to a specific work of faith, like Peter, our hearts will be ready. *Work as though it all depends on God; pray as though it all depends on you.*

AMEN

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