

Meet Tabitha,
the woman in today's first reading, from the book of Acts.
She's described as no other woman in the New Testament:
as a DISCIPLE.
For the first and only time in scripture, the feminine form of
the word "disciple" is used --
meaning one who is a follower, a student, of Jesus.

Tabitha's actions bear this out.
She's "devoted to good works and acts of charity".
She makes clothing, especially for poor widows,
who clearly adore her.

Tabitha herself is likely of some means.
She has an upstairs room at a time when this isn't particularly common.
Earlier in the book of Acts, there's a scene in which the disciples
are in an upper room
prayerfully awaiting the Holy Spirit.
Was Tabitha among them?

Her very name suggests that she got around.
Known in Christian circles by the Aramaic name "Tabitha",
she was also called by the Greek name "Dorcas"
(both of which mean gazelle, swift and graceful.)
She knows the power of the Gospel
to break down the barriers between peoples.

Yet for all that Tabitha has going for her,
the fact is that she's a mere mortal.
Tabitha becomes ill and dies.

Even amid their mourning, her community springs into action.
They gently wash her body and take her up those stairs.
They call Peter to come quickly to help.
Through their tears they show Peter the clothing Tabitha made for them.
They show him how much she has done *for* them
and how much she means *to* them.

We know how this feels, don't we?
To lose a loved one,
to cling to their memory, the little artifacts of their lives.
Twenty-six years after my mother's death,
I still contend that salad tastes better
in the wooden bowls she gave me,
and that wine is better in her old goblets.

We know how it feels
to want to do something – *anything* – to reach out to one another
in times of loss.
Make a casserole. Write a card. Boil water!

In many ways, this tender scene at the death of beloved Tabitha
looks familiar to us, doesn't it?

But then Peter kneels and prays, "Tabitha, get up"
as he offers his hand to help her up.
Then he shows her to her friends, *alive*.

This is what we long for, isn't it, in our deepest moments of despair.
Why back then, why Tabitha?
And not now, not my loved one?

Oh, we can try to explain it away.
Maybe she wasn't really dead, only in a deep coma.
They didn't have all the medical know-how we have, you know.

Maybe there was something more powerful, more miraculous,
about those first disciples
who walked this earth with Jesus.

Or, well, maybe Tabitha lived on through those she loved.
She lived on in that community of disciples – women and men –
who believed in the power of Jesus' resurrection
to conquer despair and death.
Tabitha lived on in the community who put this faith into action,
devoting themselves to "good works and acts of charity"
as she did in her life.

We don't know.

All we know is that Tabitha, for all her good works, was mortal,
as vulnerable and finite as you and me.
Yet here we are today, telling her story.

This coming Saturday at the Community Celebration
we're telling our story,
the story of this parish's first 275 years of love and service.
We'll hear brief narrations of our parish history
punctuated by all manner of beautiful music.
We'll hear about the rectors who led this flock over the years,
and about some esteemed lay leaders.
You know some of their names just by driving the streets of Wallingford –
Samuel Simpson, Moses Y. Beach and E. Hinsdale Ives.
Their contributions to our life together are significant.

But no less significant are all the Tabithas and their friends
who've devoted themselves to other good works and quiet acts of charity
throughout these 275 years.
Generation after generation of Tabithas,
whose stories we read between the lines of official histories,
and whose faithfulness has made us who we are today,
no less than those whose names are on the pictures and plaques
hanging on our walls.
Throughout this our 275th year, we celebrate both.

By all means, do yourself a favor and come (and invite friends)
to the Community Celebration this Saturday at 7:00 PM.
Learn the story behind some of the folks in those pictures and
on those plaques.
Listen for all the ways people in this parish have pulled together
to serve one another and the larger community, in good times and bad.
All the times we've risen from the ashes (sometimes literally)
to choose resurrection and life.

And while we're at it, *recognize the Tabitha in you.*
Recognizing the Tabitha in you
isn't necessarily about being female,
or a seamstress or having an upper room.

It's about being a disciple,
a follower, a student, of Jesus the Risen Christ.

It's about *living as Jesus lives*.

It's about going out to do our own good works and acts of charity that speak to the world today, in Jesus' name.

Look around. Look in the mirror.

Tabitha is alive and well right here,
275 years -- and counting.

Thanks be to God.