

Ps 23; Ac 9:36-43; Rev 7:9-17; Jn 10:22-30

The Shepherd's Voice

We meet the disciple Tabitha (Hebrew) or Dorcas (Greek) this morning. You have known a Dorcas if you have spent any time in the church. There are needlework groups called the Dorcas Circle or the Tabitha Fellowship. It is usually just women, though not always. These are the saints who provide clothing and craft items for the congregation and the community.

This story is familiar also because we know the heartache of journeying through illness and death with a saint we love and do not want to lose. My spiritual mother, Mary Cobb, was such a pillar of the church. She was not wealthy. Yet, she was rich and faithful in prayer, in teaching and in the clothing ministry. She was a widow. She had been a seamstress before she retired, so was expert at mending and making anything in fabric. In one sense, Mary is still with me as part of my Christian journey.

As we read this story of Dorcas, we realize we know her—we've been blessed by her. There are still many spiritual mothers like Dorcas in the

church. This is a miracle story. Once in a while we receive a wonder such as the raising of Dorcas. Most often it happens that Dorcas, or Mary Cobb or the saints you have known, die of the illness and leave us to grieve. But not today.

Last week we explored the Apostle Peter's journey through self-doubt and anxiety. Today, we see him as the strong leader called to Joppa to help the congregation there. Through being called, chosen and anointed by the Lord Jesus he now shepherds many flocks across Palestine. He has grown up in the faith. What does that look like?

I believe as Peter traveled from Lydda to Joppa, he was praying for God's will to be done. He didn't even know what was going on in Joppa. Those who asked him to come did not say. He did not go in full assurance of his own authority or power. He could only ask the Lord Jesus to be present. He listened for the Good Shepherd's voice to guide him. The Shepherd's voice – ask for the voice of Jesus in your life!

Let's return to the scene on Solomon's Porch in the temple. Jesus is there. The religious leaders gather around Him and begin demanding that He tell them whether or not He is the Messiah. They want Him to speak plainly, they say. Here's the thing: They have seen the wonders He has done – they have heard first-hand accounts of those they have not seen. What keeps them from believing?

Their ideological agenda doesn't allow them to call Him Messiah. He is not their Shepherd, as He says. Jesus' sheep can hear his voice – these very religious men cannot. If they cannot hear His voice, then they cannot follow Him. There are other Pharisees who have listened to Jesus and now follow Him, although secretly. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus both call Jesus Lord.

Back to Joppa and forward in time. Jesus has already given Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, been buried, is risen and has ascended to heaven. Peter is making his way upstairs where the women have laid Dorcas. He has all the mourners leave the upstairs room, and he closes the door. Peter knows Jesus' voice –

Peter follows the Lord as closely as he may. At this moment, he is anointed to heal. He kneels down beside the bed to pray. He turns toward the corpse and says, “Tabitha, get up.” She opens her eyes, sees Peter and sits up.

I do not believe Peter had any personal assurance or confidence that this would happen. He had seen Jesus do it – and he believed Jesus when He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father.” (Jn 14:12) Peter invites the members of the congregation to come back into the room to greet Dorcas alive and well.

The Holy Spirit gave the church a miracle that day by His working through Peter. And we have this record of it in John’s gospel. The religious leaders in Solomon’s Porch firmly blocked such a thing by their need to be super-wise – by their fear of being duped or fooled.

You and I have the same capacities. We can keep our hearts open – listen for the Shepherd’s voice – be ready to go where He calls us. Just as Jesus

says, He comes toward us with these signs. He is Master of natural phenomena – disease – evil forces – even death. He calls to everyone. As we learn from the Gospel, there are always going to be some who firmly resist, like the temple leaders. When Jesus calls His sheep, we hear Him beyond circumstances – beyond the troubles of the world – we hear the voice of the Shepherd even beyond death. This is the inner witness of our spirit with God’s Spirit. By His grace, we can rise up and follow Him where He leads us, as Dorcas does.

David writes, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Ps 23:6)

By your faith in Jesus, you are a child of God. He is calling you and me to be with Him.

Amen.