

## LIFE GOES ON

After something big we often say, 'Well, life goes on.' And while it did for the disciples after Jesus' resurrection, Peter was in the process of being transformed. Have we ever experienced this? Paul, when he was writing a letter to the Christians at Corinth, said, 'We are being transformed and our lives are gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become more like him.' 2 Cor. 3.18

In the Acts reading we note that Tabitha was healed through Peter's faith. Her name means 'gazelle' which was an ancient symbol of grace and beauty. Now something big has happened in Peter's life. No longer is he the snivelling follower, ashamed of Jesus, but has become a man of faith and prayer. This dear lady lived in Joppa which is a seaside town on the Mediterranean. It is in the oldest part of Tel Aviv. It was also known as Jaffa – the name of the famous Israeli oranges. It was the point of entry for the cedar trees of Lebanon which were brought in for the temple building. Also, Jonah embarked from here for Tarshish when he tried to run away from God.

Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, was a disciple – the only woman in the whole of Scripture to be called a disciple. And she was one of those women you could rely on to be there and help out. Among other things she sewed clothes for others. But she became ill and died. Her friends prepared her for burial. Some of the Jesus followers heard that Peter was not far away and sent a couple of men to ask him if he would visit them. Was it just a courtesy call to comfort them in their grief? Apparently not. It was a 12 mile walk for Peter and as soon as he arrived he was shown into her room which was crowded with mourning, keening widows. Mourning was not a quiet private activity but a loud public occurrence. Peter ushered them all out and knelt and prayed first. Then he said to the body, 'Tabitha, get up'. How extraordinary.

Peter knew his Bible, the OT, and knew what Elijah did when a hospitable widow's only son died. He revived the boy. Similarly, when Elisha was faced with another only child of a widow, he revived him too. Peter has the precedents and he also has the prayers – those spoken thoughts that changed the lives of others - prayers from the Psalms, prayers from the words of the prophets, prayers from the heart.

Dorcas opened her eyes and on seeing Peter she sat up in bed. He took her hand and helped her up and then called in the believers and the widows. She was alive! Everyone heard about it and many put their trust in Jesus. Up until this time, Peter believed that it was his mission to convert Jewish people. After the raising of Dorcas, Peter realizes that he has a more profound role to play in human history. After a dream he knew that he must witness to Gentiles and Jews about his faith in Jesus Christ. Peter stayed in Joppa for quite a while with Simon who tanned animal hides – a profession considered unclean by Jews. So life goes on.

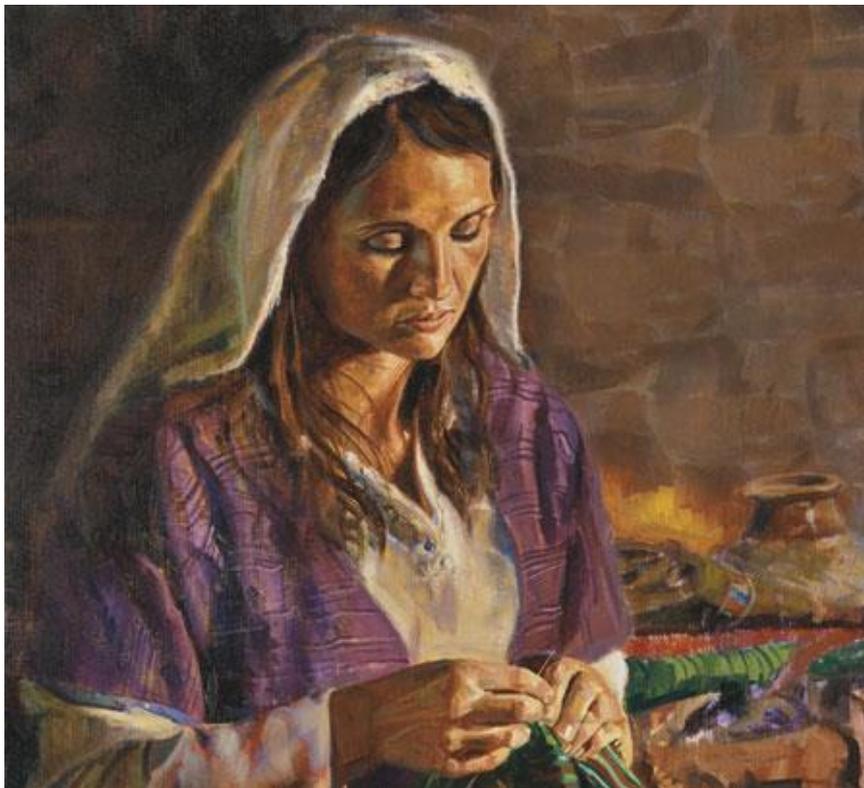
How do we bring this into our own lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? There is an inherent blessing for those women and men who practically do what needs to

be done, who are continually helping others in acts of kindness. Yet, there is a selfish side to us. We spend our frightened energy trying to stay young and be healthy with anti-oxidants in red wine and green tea. We use our money to secure our existence. We work frantically to establish our worth. Our governments, with our support, produce policies and actions of aggression and militarism. Alongside this, we, followers of Jesus, are drawn to be peacemakers, to be completely free of such bondage, living for God and others with love, with a gentleness and living faith within a life that is eternal. But we don't 'go it alone'. God's Spirit is within us and we also have 'companions on the way'.

Another question implicit in our reading about Dorcas is, 'What will we leave behind?' It wasn't so much the clothes she had sewn but the acts of kindness that spoke volumes. One of my dear friends, Mary, has recently died in Adelaide. She spent her whole life within a large family doing special things for others and, more so, was known for her life of prayer. While folks will treasure her knitted garments, they will cherish her prayers even more. She has gone from us and we are the poorer for her passing.

While some may say that this healing is all in the realm of metaphor, it is more than powerful enough to transform our little lives with little resurrections. While 'life may go on' as we are engaged in doing good for others, let us pray that something of the supernatural will awaken us all into living our lives abundantly before Christ comes or calls for us.

May it be so, as Dorcas knew, for His name's sake. AMEN



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