

"The Pause That Refreshes" Acts 9:36-43

The Church of the Good Shepherd

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Meg Hess

If he didn't know better, Peter would have thought the neighborhood women in Joppa were hosting a Home Party Trunk Show for a clothing line. The minute he walked through the door the women were showing him their dresses, tunics, shawls, blouses, cloaks... all trying to outdo one another with their praises for the one who had made the clothing.

Tabitha, or Dorcas as the Greek women called her, had used her needle and thread to stitch together a community of care, nurture, and support among these widows. Tabitha cared for these broken-hearted women in concrete ways: she made them clothes. And for widows, who were on the low end of the socio-economic totem pole, finding enough money to clothe themselves was a challenge. You might say that Tabitha was willing to give someone the shirt off of her own back if they needed it.

We don't know how or when Tabitha became a follower of Jesus, but we do know that she took seriously his challenge to clothe the naked and love the heart-sick. Her name meant "gazelle" in both Greek and Aramaic. And like a gazelle, we imagine her to be swift and graceful in coming to those in need.

Did you know that Tabitha was the only woman in the New Testament to actually be called a disciple? She was important, known to the community who followed Jesus. And into the spotlight of a grieving group of widows walks Peter and the focus shifts to this other disciple who had been re-made by the resurrection of Jesus.

The man who had denied Jesus when faced with the horror of the crucifixion was now about to perform a miracle. In some ways this story is less about raising Tabitha from the dead than it is about establishing Peter as a front-runner in emerging church's leadership.

But honestly, I'm more interested in Tabitha than I am in being reassured that Peter is the true rock of apostolic succession. So I invite us to shift our focus back to Tabitha.

The large crowd of people attesting to Tabitha's extensive good works makes me think she gave a lot of her time, talents, energy, and even resources to serving others. It's probably not a stretch to imagine that she wore herself right out taking care of everybody else.

Maybe Tabitha wasn't dead as much as she was on Refresher Leave. So at the risk of being slightly irreverent, I'd like to think of Tabitha's death and return to life as a metaphor for the ways that resurrection restores us to a new life... as a metaphor for refresher leave.

Good Shepherd and Pastor Alana are now engaged in the experience of Refresher Leave. Alana is experiencing rest and rejuvenation as she reflects on her past, present, and future. The congregation is on a parallel process as it thinks about its history, assesses its present ministries, and imagines its future.

It also gives us an opportunity to take a good look at our own personal and family lives and think about where we need to be refreshed. Let's start with the basics...are you getting enough rest?

2008 Study showed that Americans get 2 hours a sleep less a night than the average in 1960. "Being mildly but chronically sleep deprived makes you more susceptible to stress, cravings, and temptation. It also makes it more difficult to control your emotions, focus your attention, or find the energy to tackle big willpower challenges." (Any new parents here?) So perhaps our Refresher Commitment #1 should be to get more sleep.

What commitments are you willing to make to your own Refresher Program? One of the things I'm committing to is to do something creative every day. I'm also trying to meditate daily and to make sure I'm getting enough sleep.

Interestingly, we don't hear much about Tabitha after this story. If her ministry was so powerful before she was raised to new life, what was it like afterwards? We don't know those details, but we do know that we are still talking about Tabitha 2000 years later.

I wonder, what will our future ministries look like after we are refreshed?

AMEN