

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Only Love**

### **Lesson: Acts 9:36-43 NRSV Updated Edition**

*<sup>36</sup> Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." <sup>39</sup> So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup> Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.*

**(Slide 1)** It's the fourth Sunday of Easter. Let's say Easter's greeting: Christ is risen, Christ is risen indeed! And it's also Mother's Day. In the United States, the second Sunday in May commemorates Mother's Day, and the third Sunday in June commemorates Father's Day. In Korea, May 8 is celebrated every year as Parents' Day. Koreans usually write cards to their parents on May 8, and children put carnations on their parents' left chest. So, when I learned that this Sunday was Mother's Day, I thought about whether the church should prepare carnations for mothers. However, when I learned how Mother's Day started, I realized something more important than carnations.

Mother's Day began when a woman named Anna Jarvis from West Virginia held a memorial service for her deceased mother. For reference, her mother passed away on May 10, 1905. Since 1906, she had invited her friends to a gathering in memory of her mother. Then, in 1908, it became a big event to invite 1,500 people to a large department store in Philadelphia and a campaign that children commemorate their mothers. However, there was a twist here. Anna, who started Mother's Day, said she regretted creating Mother's Day because, contrary to her intentions, Mother's Day was

commercialized and its meaning was altered. Under the pretext of Mother's Day, companies started making all kinds of bouquets, chocolates, balloons and cards and selling them to people. The commercialization of Mother's Day was not what Anna intended or wanted.

Friends, it's Mother's Day. The love and devotion of mothers is like a miracle. I hope that the love and devotion of all mothers in the world will be remembered by their families.

**(Slide 2)** In the scripture reading we read today, Peter and a woman named Tabitha appear as disciples of Jesus. Peter may have initially decided to follow Jesus because he had seen the miracles Jesus performed. However, Jesus' love for Peter changed him, and in the end, he was crucified just like Jesus. John Ch. 21 describes Peter's third encounter with the resurrected Jesus in Galilee, and he was convinced of the resurrection and started living a new life.

After hearing the question from Jesus three times, "Do you love me?", Peter realized the love of the Lord. The repentant Peter was a leader in the early church. The book of Acts testifies to how he made the influence of the gospel beyond Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The gospel he conveyed was the risen Christ. Like Jesus, he sometimes performed miracles, and his miracles came from God's love and compassion for others.

**(Slide 3)** Today's text is one of the many miracles that Peter performed. At that time, while Peter and his companions were conveying the gospel in all directions, they visited Lydda, where there was a Christian community. While Peter was staying in Lydda, he was asked to come to Joppa, about 10 miles from there, because Tabitha, a female disciple of Christ who was active in Joppa, had died. The Bible describes Tabitha as a disciple. Through this, we can know that there were female disciples in the early church, and they worked together with the male disciples.

Tabitha was a Jew. According to the text, her Hebrew name was Tabitha, and her Greek name was Dorcas. The New Testaments introduces her name in

Hebrew way and Greek way because the main readers of the New Testament were mainly Greek speakers.

**(Slide 4)** The Bible introduces the dead Tabitha as “she was devoted to good works and acts of charity”. She had many widows around her, and it seems that she was also a widow. When Tabitha, a main leader in Joppa's ministry, died, many widows, including her family and friends, came to see her and wept with grief. They remember her good deeds and were grateful for the clothes she had made.

For dead Tabitha, all people could do was prepare for her funeral, so people washed her body and kept it in a room upstairs. By the way, it seems that the people there did not accept her death and were expecting her to be risen. So the people rushed to Peter and led him to the place where Tabitha's body was.

**(Slide 5)** The Bible describes many miracles of the resurrection of the dead. In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24), and the prophet Elisha raised the son of a Shunammite woman. (2 Kings 4:32-37) Jesus also called Lazarus from the tomb (John 11:43-44) and raised the dead daughter of Jairus to life. (Mark 5:41-42)

**(Slide 6)** Peter also performed healing miracles just like through the name of Jesus Christ. Verse 40 says: “Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up.” People's earnest heart for Tabitha and their faith believing in Jesus saved her.

The miracles Peter performed were not just magic. It was a miracle that happened through the love of Jesus Christ and compassion for others. That love was the power of the gospel that the early church practiced. If the early church had only relied on miracles, that church would soon have been shut down because the miracle of raising the dead cannot continue. The text shows not only the miracle of raising Tabitha from the dead, but also the love of Christ that the early church practiced in Joppa.

**(Slide 7)** The love of Christ and gospel were practiced in Jerusalem as well as in areas such as Lydda and Joppa. The love of Christ and gospel were conveyed to Jews as well as to gentiles so they could become the children of God beyond racial and cultural barriers. In the love of Christ, there was no discriminations against races, cultures, languages, gender, or economic status.

It was love that saved the dead Lazarus and the dead Tabitha. Like this love saves people. A community without love is meaningless. If we are reluctant to weep together for others' pain and sorrow, if we are reluctant to do good to others, and do not have respect and dignity for others, such a community has no meaning.

Peter raised Tabitha from the dead and was crucified just like Jesus, but he wasn't like that in the first place. Peter also denied that he was a disciple of Jesus three times in order to survive. However, it was love that changed and transformed him and made him conform to the heart of Jesus Christ.

**(Slide 8)** Did I mention last Sunday that one of my hobbies is watching movies? The movie I'm going to introduce today is 'A River Runs Through It'. The film describes the beautiful nature of Montana and the Presbyterian pastor Rev. Maclean and his family. The pastor has two sons, Norman and Paul. The eldest son, Norman, was docile and listened to his parents, but the second son, Paul, was rebellious like a wild horse. One day the pastor's family was eating oatmeal. For no reason, Paul refused to eat oats. His parents and older brother could not understand him for refusing to eat oats. When the two sons became adults, the second son unfortunately died in an unjust accident. At the end of the movie, Rev. Maclean preaches like this:

**(Slide 9)** "For it is true we can seldom help those closest to us. Either we don't know what part of ourselves to give or, more often than not, the part we have to give is not wanted. And so, it is those we live with and should know who elude us. But we can still love them - we can love completely without complete understanding."

Friends, the most meaningful thing in our lives is to love. Love saves the community, love saves the family, and love saves us. It's Mother's Day. I hope it will be a day to express love to those who are dear to you.

May the peace of Christ be with us, so we love our community, our families, and ourselves. Amen.