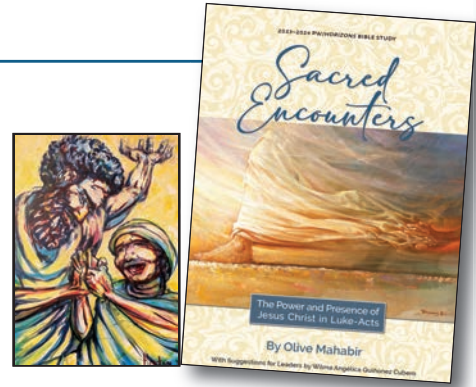


Blessed to Be a Blessing

BY REV. SUSAN CARTER WIGGINS

For use with Lesson Nine of the 2023–2024 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Sacred Encounters: The Power and Presence of Jesus Christ in Luke-Acts*, by Olive Mahabir



Scripture: Acts 9:36–43

Tabitha, disciple of God Incarnate Jesus Christ, is a leader that her community relies on for many things. She is a gifted seamstress who provides dresses for the women, especially for the widows, and most especially for widows with deep financial need who were left with so little when their husbands died. They may need more than clothing. They may need the very basics of human life: food, water and shelter.

When a person loses a spouse or partner, it can mean the loss of not just a loved one, but also the stability of the household tasks they covered, and perhaps the loss of income. Commonly, individuals remain quiet about the emotional, social, financial and day-to-day impacts of the loss of a spouse. Many struggle, but only some will share the details with a trusted friend. Other times, financial and other difficulties become obvious as the weeks turn into months and we begin to recognize how widows (and widowers) hurt in many ways.

Tabitha is her given name; in Greek it is Dorcas. In honor of Dorcas's kindness, compassion, generosity and hospitality to women in need, regardless of their situation, "Dorcas Houses" have been established around the country and even the world. Whenever we see or hear of one, we know it means a welcoming home for women. Dorcas's home in Joppa is just such a home, open to all. Her community—widows in particular—depend on her to make ends meet, most likely each day.

Where is the nearest "Dorcas House" to your church or home?

Maybe it has a different name. What is it called? Where is it?

How do they provide for women?

Dorcas, disciple of Jesus Christ, is also a gifted spiritual leader in her community. I imagine she taught and preached the Word of God and about God's Incarnation—God coming to humanity as a baby boy, dependent on his mother to nurture and nourish him, while simultaneously being completely divine and growing up to be our Lord and Savior. Dorcas brought many in her community to know Jesus and believe in him. We can know this with certainty because of her title: "disciple."

When a person becomes a disciple of our Lord and Savior, their entire persona and countenance may be, even should be, transformed into the person God calls them to be. Those who live into the Gospel are people filled with the love of God, the peace of Christ and the strong comfort and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. All these aspects of being a disciple of Jesus Christ become the very way a disciple presents to the world—someone who embodies compassion, kindness, generosity and hospitality. Disciples of Jesus Christ lead with love. They see Christ in everyone, and others plainly see and experience Christ through them. This is the woman we know as Dorcas.

Who represents Christ, as Dorcas did to her community, to you? Who do they support, and what do they do?

Who reflects the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the strong comfort and fellowship of the Holy Spirit every time you are blessed to encounter them?

The Apostle Peter is near to Dorcas's home in Joppa when she dies, and so the women send two men to find Peter and bring him to Dorcas so that he can heal her. I imagine the women exclaiming over their urgent mission. These women believe in the healing power of Jesus Christ, and most likely would have already heard that Peter, sent by Jesus out into the world to share Christ's good news, also had the ability to heal. It's likely they knew he had healed a formerly bedridden man in Lydda, just a day's journey away. So, the community carries Dorcas to an upstairs room and lays her there as they await Peter's arrival. They believe. They trust, and they wait with all the patience they can muster.

When Peter arrives, they first tell him all about the woman Dorcas was—of her kindness and compassion, generosity, hospitality and love. They show Peter the beautiful garments that she had sewn to give to women in need. They want Peter to know her before he goes upstairs to “meet” her, as she lays there. We can imagine the women wanting to stay near Dorcas, but Peter needs them to wait outside the room so that he can be alone with Dorcas and with God. And, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter is blessed to heal Dorcas. She comes to life, opening her eyes. Peter reaches out his hand and helps her sit up and then stand again, fully restored to life.

Every time God's Holy Spirit moves in and through disciples of Jesus Christ, blessing those in their presence, both people are affected for good—the one reaching out their hand, or using their voice or presence to bless someone, and the one being blessed. The blessing goes beyond these two, however, as it blesses all the witnesses and those who will hear of the blessing. All will be affected for good. In scripture, each time there is a blessing or a healing, all those around are blessed to then believe in Jesus Christ, all by the Holy Spirit's power, and the same is true today.

When is a time you've felt the Holy Spirit's power moving in and through someone right in front of you?

Describe how you felt.

Dorcas's story is important for us today as it reminds us not only of the Holy Spirit's healing power, but reminds us that we, like Dorcas and Peter, are called to be a blessing for others. We are called to look around us and find those in need, and then to care for them in every way they might need. Both Dorcas and Peter cared for those in their midst—teaching and preaching God's Word and the good news of Jesus Christ. Peter's audience often was multitudes, but sometimes was an audience of one, like Dorcas, who needed his healing touch. Dorcas's audience also was many, but more often than not, was just one woman who needed the very basics of human life.

Where is your caring, healing touch needed today? Tomorrow? This week?

Your nearest “Dorcas House” needs your support and your hands-on care. How can you and your PW group care for the women in your community, especially those who are widows?

May each one of us seek and find those in need in our communities, and then may we answer God's calling on our lives to be a blessing for them.

May it be so.

To God be all glory, honor, and praise. Amen.

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