

Dorcas - A Shining Example - Acts 9 v36-43

In one of my previous churches, when I was training for the ministry, there was a very quiet humble woman. The church that she was part of was going through difficult issues, and the temperature in the church was often hot.

This lady didn't get involved in church politics. She didn't stoke the flames, rather she took it on herself to weed the path of the church and it was a difficult path to weed, all up hill. Whilst others were bickering, she was weeding.

She went quietly about her business, every day doing a little bit more. On her knees, no doubt praying, as she slowly tackled those challenging weeds. Perhaps she had the thoughts and concerns of the church on her mind but she didn't make them known. I don't think too many people noticed her, she kept her head down, and served the Lord in this way.

Slowly but deliberately, she cleared the weeds away.

When the summer passed and autumn set in, she turned her hand to chopping wood for kindlers for fires, and again she did this quietly, her efforts were going to support the church building project.

Nobody asked her, she just did it!

Her name will not be in the Session Minute Book, there will be no plaques to her honour, but in my eyes her contribution was great and silently she helped people see the important issues in a church, are not about who puts forward the best arguments; her contribution was about building up people and building the church.

She might not have had a lot of gifts, although she was a learned lady, but she saw an issue and that was the weeds in the church and the weeds tend to take over – don't they!

My mother-in-law has a very special large rhododendron bush in her garden. She tells me that it is a rare species. It flowers every four years, I always say to her that it flowers on the year of the world cup but the ivy began to take hold of it, and it was strangling the life out of the tree. Last summer, I went to war with the ivy, and cleared this off the bark of

the tree. The tree thrives again and this spring it is blooming, just on time for world cup year!

Weeds are a problem and I would guess that it's not the number one task for anyone to commit to in a church.

But I expect if you asked the lady why she weeded the path, she would say, it's my contribution to the building of God's kingdom.

I'm sure that you can think of many people past and present just like her at Cadder Church, who go about doing good and helping the poor quietly.

This leads me on to our story today.

Today's story is told by Dr Luke in the book of Acts, it is so beautiful.

It's simply this.

There was a lady called Dorcas, which is the Greek for Deer or Gazelle. Her Hebrew name was Tabitha but Luke changed it. She lived up to her name for she was an elegant lady, and was considered to be a lady of standing and integrity within this church community.

Sadly, Dorcas died.

It's always difficult when we lose someone from our Christian community who has contributed much and is well thought of.

But the reality of life is that at some point we all die!

Dorcas, was no exception. Her passing was obviously very untimely as she was involved very much in the mission of this fledgling church.

Dr. Luke describes Dorcas in one sentence: Dorcas was a believer, in other versions it has 'she was a disciple'.

Luke is letting us know immediately that Dorcas knew what she believed and who she believed in. As a disciple she would have been committed to Jesus.

The Guild motto is.... "Whose we are and whom we serve"

Dorcas's belief informed her that she was a child of God. This is Luke's starting point. Dorcas was a woman of faith. In his words, "There was a believer in Joppa named Dorcas".

Our starting point as Christians is who we are and what we believe.

When people look at us – can they say of us, she or he is a believer, is a disciple of Jesus, for that's what distinguishes a Christian.

The early Church had a simple faith in the risen Jesus. They believed that Jesus was with them through the power of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus enabled the early Church to grow.

Those early believers were not called Christians to start with, that came a bit later, they were called "Followers of the Way".

I like that description.

There was a believer in Joppa named Dorcas.

But belief is not enough! Belief is only one side of the same coin. The other side is works.

Faith and works go hand in hand, faith without works is useless and works without faith is fruitless.

What is the second thing that Luke notes about her?

She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor.

Already my heart has warmed to Dorcas. I haven't met her, but there is something about her that I really like. She is my kind of person. She is a genuine Christian.

She is a woman of genuine faith and she demonstrates it in her life by doing kind things and helping the poor.

Luke has summed her up in two ways, a woman of strong faith who is a disciple, who goes about doing kind things and helping the poor.

Tragically she became ill and died.

The community was in shock that someone so good had been taken from them. A shining light had gone out from their church, and you can almost sense the grief coming over this Christian community.

Why has this happened?

The community did what they had to do, washed her body and prepared her for burial. They had accepted that she had left them. Her race had been run and she was to be buried.

Is that the end of the story?

No, for we are now living in resurrection times. Their faith was built upon the resurrection of Jesus.

All is now possible.

Then in the story comes a 'but' ...

But the believers heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda.

What an encouragement to them: the leader of the wider church, the head of the Church, was in a nearby town. Wouldn't it be good to get Peter along to pray and say a few kind words about Dorcas? Wouldn't it be good for him to do the service for her?

But they got more than they expected that day.

When Peter arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room where Dorcas had been placed and as Peter entered the room, he must have been overwhelmed by what he witnessed.

The room was full of grieving widows, showing Peter their coats and other clothes that Dorcas had made for them. They literally would be wearing the clothes that Dorcas had made.

What is significant about this is, here was the community of people that Dorcas supported. She was supporting the poorest in her community. Widows in those days had no rights or benefits, they depended on the generosity of people like Dorcas.

Here is the early Christian community, reaching out with charity and love, is this beautiful woman called Dorcas. She has led the way.

Who in our communities needs our help today?

This is the Church at its best, when our beliefs are put into action.

The story doesn't finish there, for Peter miraculously, through the power of Jesus working in him, brought Dorcas back to life.

Yes, this was the season of the Resurrection and miraculous things were happening.

What an encouragement for that community to see their angel back amongst them again. Can you begin to imagine what those grieving widows must have felt like, their joy, their faith, their love...

In another church that I was a part of, there was a woman who had the spirit of Dorcas. Several times I met people from the community, nothing to do with the church and they would describe this woman to me as the angel of the church.

Who are our angels here at Cadder Church?

No wonder Luke then writes, "The news spread through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a leather worker." But that another story for another day.

Dorcas, like the woman gives us a great example of using our gifts in the Church.

What are our gifts and how can we use them?

I know that many are using their gifts here at Cadder Church and that's wonderful. The story that I started with - I could tell similar stories of people here in this church going the extra mile. But I would like to encourage everyone to get involved in the life of the church.

Just this week, I've sent out to the congregation by email information about our new growth structure in the church. At the heart of it is an opportunity for everyone to be able to use their gifts for the building up of the church.

You might think that you don't have anything to give, you have! Its just a case of finding your place in the church. Just recently Margaret Redpath asked for cleaners for the church and she was delighted with the response that she got. There is a willingness to get involved, it's sometime just knowing how.

As part of our Growth structure, we are focusing on the 5 Marks of Mission, Teach, Tell, Tend, Transform and Treasure. To help us achieve this the Kirk Session has decided to reshape what we do and how we do it. Our vision is that in 5 years' time the spiritual life of the congregation will be growing strong and deep, offering multi-generational worship and fellowship opportunities. If you go to our website, you will see more information about this. If you are not on email, there are some information sheets available in the vestibule. This information sheet will give you an overview of what's happening and of how you can play your part.

If the church is to have a future and we are to go forward then it will take a joint effort from us all. This is the time for the Dorcas' of Cadder congregation to shine, and to lead the church forward. There is something for everyone. Someone asked me about folks who are not able to contribute physically, there is a great role to play for them, to be encouragers, to pray for the work of the church, and to support others, especially convenors and leaders, by words of encouragement, and be a supporter of a team.

The lady that I shared about at the beginning has gone to be with Jesus. But the very fact that I'm telling her story today, 25 years later, demonstrates that her life lives on.

What will they say, when God calls us, will they gather to speak about how we played our part in encouraging others, building God's kingdom by being a disciple and doing good things?

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen