Fourth Sunday of Easter All Saints’ Church

April 17, 2016 Year C

Acts 9:36-43 Revelation to John 7:9-17

Psalm 23 John 10:22-30

The door opens. You are outside, hungry, cold, and thirsty, with no place to go. You have walked for miles. The night sets upon you; darkness surrounds you. You are desperate. You hadn’t even knocked, so afraid, and so hesitant to believe that it might, maybe, could be, all true…. the wildest possibility ever……that you will find relief.

The door opens, wider. There she is, just like they said, a widow like you, inviting you into her warm home.

“My name is Tabitha, some call me Dorcas; others call me Disciple; you may call me, Friend; come and sit. Let me give you something hot to eat and drink.”

She puts a colorful tunic over your shoulders. You rest your aching feet, and the food appears miraculously in front of you. She’s asking you questions about what you need, but it’s difficult to take it all in…. a stranger, a woman, a widow, is loving you, protecting you, supporting you. You are no longer alone. You begin to cry.

She takes your hand and prays about the love of Christ, about the beauty of your own soul, about the holy spirit resting in your heart, honoring the dignity of your own calling, your own power, your own gifts.

You’ve never heard anything like this before. You’re just a sinner, bereft of any worth, filled with shame and loss and death. Who could this be? What does she know? How can she believe in you?

She tells you that tomorrow is a new day- under the banner of Christ’s love. That even in the midst of illness, disease and pain, there is prayer, support, love and hope.

You stay and you become part of Tabitha’s community- an ever-expanding group of men and women, rich and poor, who are sharing everything- everything they have is given for the common good, is held is communion, for all. And out of this collected wealth, homes like Tabitha’s are created everywhere as safe havens, sanctuaries, and places of solace.

Daily, you sup and share in the bread and the wine as a living presence of Incarnate Love lifted up within all of you. You are alive in a way you have never been before.

But then the worse thing happens. Tabitha becomes ill and dies. How could this be? She was just fine the day before. How could the Lord take her away from you?

You are called to her home and with many of your friends, you wash her and lay her out in her room upstairs. You are all wailing. Then someone says that they heard Peter was nearby, the next town over, in Joppa. “Let’s send two men to call him here without delay.”

And the next day Peter arrives. He comes into Tabitha’s room. You are there, surrounded by her gifts of love, her trademark tunics, all stitched by her arthritic hands. Peter asks you to leave.

Gladly, you go downstairs to give him his space to mourn. But then there is a commotion; you get up and you see a ghost- it’s Tabitha walking down the stairs. It cannot be. You know she is dead. You anointed her very dead body. But there she is, breathing, and talking and walking.

You fall to your knees. She comes to you and blesses you and says, “This is not about my life or my death; nor is it about Peter and his powers to raise the dead. This is about you. This is about God who created the world and raised Jesus from the dead. This is about the spirit of God still moving over the chaotic waters of our world, creating and breathing life where there is only an empty void, chaos and death. You are God’s hands and heart. Don’t be afraid to wade in, to be, to trust that Jesus holds you in his palms and unites you with God’s work in the world.

“I will die, Peter will die, and you will die, but the community of faith will never die and goodness and mercy shall follow the Body of Christ forever. “

You leave to return to your home, a simple dwelling built by the community, and you ponder in your heart how you could ever be a part of God’s work in the world.

There’s a knock at the door. And a woman walks in with a box full of paper work and bank statements and governmental letters that chart the history of the Monadnock Area Food Pantry, but she needs help to organize it, to understand it, to honor it. You begin to sort it out with her.

There’s another knock at the door. And a man walks in and stands next to the hospital bed in the ICU at Dartmouth Hitchcock and takes his wife’s unresponsive hand. He will be there all day. You are praying for them.

There’s another knock at the door. And a teenager, over lunch in the school’s cafeteria, tells you about a great service opportunity in Juarez, Mexico and you help him organize a car wash and raise money so that he can travel again in June to help build a school.

Another knock, and a woman walks into the living room and unleashes the dog after their long walk around Norway Pond. The sun is shining through the windows and she picks up her Psalter and reads Psalm 121, “I lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help?” She leaves an encouraging note on the kitchen table. You read it when you come later that night.

And another knock, and a man gets up, though he’s feeling pretty lousy and his bones ache, but he knows people depend on him to set the tables for Tuesday’s community meal, so he goes to Reynolds Hall and begins to unfold the tablecloths. Inspired by him, you volunteer to serve at the River Center’s Spelling Bee Fund Raiser.

Another knock, and a woman sits down in your chair to give blood for the first time. As you pull out the IV, and place a Band-Aid on her arm, you say “May this be the greatest pain you feel today.” And she smiles back at you.

And then it dawns on you. You are you; you are Tabitha; you are Dorcas; you are Disciple; you are Friend; you are Peter; you are Jesus; you are Mary; you are the Body of Christ, and through ***simple, simple, simple*** acts, you are a conduit of love. You are you; and not you, greater than you could ever be because you are opened up to the very source of the holy power of life itself. You are witness to the miraculous power of love, and like a wildflower, working its way out shorn granite rock, you reach for the Sun, for Light, for Grace. You may be destroyed, you will die, but it doesn’t matter, because you will never be defeated. Love always endures.

Wait, wait, I think I hear another knock at the door.