**[1]** Fourth Sunday after Easter, May 11, 2025 (Mother’s Day)
Sermon Title: Here and There about Joppa of Judea
Scripture: Acts 9:36-43
Theme: Re-telling the stories of Aeneas and Dorcas in the first person account
   of one who followed Peter around the countryside.

**[2]** My name is Simon. I am a tanner by trade, which is why I live just off the seashore, to wash off the hides that I strip from the animals and lay out on the rocks for soaking in the shallow water of the seaside. I live near the port city of Joppa which is built on a rocky mound, 116 feet high, just above sea-level, and running parallel to the off-shore reef. A gap in the reef allows ships to access a safe-harbor during storms. I own a boarding house in Joppa with a second story that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea, and has a beautiful view of the mouth of the Yarkon River, the distant mountains of Judea to the east, and the ocean sunsets to the west. Alas, not too many visitors want to stay in my house because they consider this side of the city unclean; the **[3]** tanner side of the city, they call it. The city of Joppa itself is popular with visitors from all around the region, Caesarea, Sharon, Lydda, and even as far away as Jerusalem, some forty (40) miles to the southeast. Farmers from the Yarkon River valley and the fertile plains of Sharon, bring their produce to market on the east side of the city.

**[4]** Joppa is something of a miracle city, or so the sea-faring legends go; one may find the presence of God in this city if you stay long enough; you may remember from the Holy Scriptures that Jonah sought out this city as a place to converse with God about Nineveh. Although I guess that one could say that his experience with God was almost the opposite of a miracle, propelling him to seek ship passage to Tarshish on the other side of the world. Yet it was still a miracle that eventually brought him reluctantly back home to his divinely-planned destiny in Nineveh. Think of that, going west in order to go east, or something like that, if you get my drift. But, despite all the negatives, I still offer up my house to visitors from land and sea alike, as a hospitable place of diversity and inclusion. One never knows who one might meet in my boarding house; people from Constantinople or Egypt, Jew or Greek, Roman citizens.

However, my story today is not about the sea, the ships or the fanciful legends of the sea. Rather, I would like to tell you a story of miracles too awesome to keep hidden or obscured, miracles that occurred over an entire region surrounding my home, involving a man named Peter, or more exactly, Simon Peter, as we share a name together, he and I. Let me see, did I mention the word ‘miracle’? Yes, this is a story I know as a bystander, as a follower of the Lord, Jesus the Christ,
through my new friendship with this Disciple named Peter, also called ‘the Rock.’ Looking back, I call it a story of resurrection because it has transformed my life, from a bystander to an active Disciple. But, I get ahead of myself. Let me tell you how it all began.

**[5]** I had been on one of my marketing trips to Lydda, just down the road a few miles. I stopped to eat with some friends at a boarding house. Peter was there, along with some others, who were traveling with him, Philip, Stephen, Timon, as I remember, whom he called “deacons.”
I remember Peter saying: “But I am among you as one who serves.” (Lk. 22:27). The deacons were intentionally dividing up their food in equal shares and giving it to at the table, and keeping some back for those who were absent, saving a share for these. As I watched this process unfold, I can remember thinking: “they are truly eating their meal together with glad and generous hearts, praising God for the goodwill (*charis*) of all the people.’ (Acts 2:46). They truly had a common table; no one was going hungry. I went over to join them, asking ‘May I and my friends sit down with you? We want to know your story. Please tell us about yourselves.

Several started telling me about recent events in Jerusalem, about how Jesus, a true miracle worker, healer, teacher, counselor, prophet, had revealed himself as the Messiah, the Christ of God, and how the Romans had put him on trial and crucified him, and how, after three days, God had raised him from the dead and sent them out as witnesses, to share with any who would listen the story of the coming Reign of God in the land of the living, the story of an infinite peace to those both far and near, the story of the Son of God who became as one of us and lived as one of us to make us all one with God. And Peter was leading them, as they traveled here and there around the area to meet as many people as they could. They were staying with the “believers,” as they traveled from one village to the next; and we were all now in a believer’s boarding house. New believers from Sharon are traveling with us today; you are welcome to join us as well.

**[6]** Peter then opened up and told us the events of the day. “We spent the day with Aeneas.” Let me tell you more about him.

Aeneas of Lydda could not see any life at all beyond his bed-mat.  He had been paralyzed for eight years; restricted to his pallet, unable to move about, in a palsied condition.  His pain must have been intense, not only from lying helplessly on his mat, twisting back and forth, rolling around trying to get comfortable, but also from lack of motivation to plan for his future, from despair over his condition and what the next day would bring.  He could only be concerned with the objects close by and surrounding him. Aeneas was a near-sighted person in the sense that only his immediate needs occupied his attention, only the here-and-now was front-and-center in his thinking. But all that changed today. I called out to him: “Aeneas, get up and make your bed! Jesus has healed you today!” He now wants desperately to see the world with us. He has become far-sighted and eagerly anticipates traveling with us for a while. But, he will find over the next few days that it is difficult to change from near-sighted to far-sighted and will require a lot of work ahead.

Just then, two men from my hometown of Joppa came into the room looking for Peter. They were urgent in their pleading with him. “Please come with us, Peter! We need you desperately!
Tabitha has died. And everyone is beside themselves in grief over her. She has been our life’s blood in the community and in this region. Please come. We need you desperately!”

Now, this is what I know about Tabitha. Her Greek name is Dorcas. She was a godsend to the people of Joppa, always looking to find a need she could meet with her sewing skills. She
definitely had a different viewpoint from Aeneas. If Aeneas was helplessly near-sighted, Dorcas was just the opposite, helplessly far-sighted.  She was empathetic and caring for everyone she met. She was active in good works and charity.  She planned her day with others in mind. Dorcas was always thinking of how to make her family’s life better, her neighbor’s life better, her community’s life better, always planning for what might be needed in the winter or in the spring, and working ahead to meet her goals for the future.  As I am told, she was “full of good works, devoted to good, and gave alms continually.” But, this wording just isn’t strong enough to describe her. It was more than single acts of charity here and there. It was a way of life for Dorcas. It was continual giving with the hope of making a difference in her world.  Dorcas has a long range vision for her family and those who were in her circle of vision to help. With wisdom like that of Joseph in Egypt, she prepared in good times for times that she knew would not be so good. She had foresight and long-suffering patience, a vision for the future that drove her values and her work.  In some ways, her focus on the future-care of her community overshadowed her self-care in the present.

Upon hearing the news about Tabitha, Peter got up immediately and left, many at the table followed him out the door. They were all headed in a heart-beat to Joppa. And I joined them
as we all started walking quickly toward Joppa, some fourteen (14) miles. I really had wanted to stay in Lydda for a while, but now I was much more interested in following Peter back to Joppa
to find out about my neighbor, Tabitha. As we traveled, I found out much more about her
importance to our community, much more than I ever knew before, or could appreciate.

Among the believers that Peter mentioned, Dorcas is pointedly called a *mathetria*, a Christian woman, a female disciple.  A *mathetes* is a male disciple; a female disciple is *mathetria*.  Both male and female words come from a root word in the Greek language meaning “to mentally think something through with effort and time.” A disciple is one who considers the steep cost of what it will take to follow the principles of Jesus, to follow the doctrines of Scripture, and then commits to doing so with the full cost in mind. Peter told me more, that Jesus challenged us to go into the world and make disciples everywhere, and the Gospel is challenging us to consider the effort required and then commit toward the goal of discipling others in the same way that we have been discipled.  So, we are challenged to think of the effort required.  Consider the future needs. Commit to the far-sighted goals of future-care and faith-care as you might plan for your own health-care.  “Tabitha is our model for discipleship! “ Peter said. Unlike the rich young rulers that sometimes visited Jesus on the road, she was able to commit herself to the one thing that Jesus describes as “yet needed (Luke 18:18-25)” by those wanting to be disciples.  “Her name is synonymous with compassion!  When the *mathetria* got together, they called themselves “Dorcas Societies.” They accomplished great things together!” he said.

Tabitha was her name in Aramaic, the language Peter preferred. Her names means “gazelle.”
Indeed, she was as beautiful as a gazelle.  In ancient times, Oriental love songs would describe beautiful women as gazelles; it carries the sense of romance.  Tabitha was beautiful because of her solid and passionate commitment to helping others; she was a beautiful *mathetria* of the highest character!

As we were making our way along the road to Joppa, we paused a moment to look out upon the Plain of Sharon, in the distance the mountains of Judea, and looking out toward Mount Carmel.
In Jewish lore, the calves of Sharon are the best of the best. According to Isaiah, the fields of Sharon are large and fruitful (Is. 65:10).  In the time of the ancients, they were considered to produce the finest wines. In the heart of this abundant land, Peter was bringing the abundance of God’s healing to those in need. Could he possibly restore Tabitha to life? The thought crossed our minds. What if he could? As we talked, I could only imagine the conversation among those who witnessed Peter’s healing of Aeneas.

“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.” You will not be needing that poor man’s mat any longer.  Get up, Aeneas, and literally, “spread your table.” Spread your table of grace and thanksgiving for all to see!  Make your bed!  Give God the glory!  With these words, Peter is saying “Go forth, your healing is complete!” Make your plans for the future, my man!  Explore your world.  Find your distant dreams. Use your wings of salvation to find your gratitude!

We finally arrived at Tabitha’s house late in the evening. As Peter and all of us entered, we discovered a thick grief had set into the people who were just standing around.

**[7]** Not knowing what to do, her friends had laid her in an upstairs room. They were saying: “It was not right that all their projects should be cut short.  How could they continue with their precious leader gone from their midst?  Look at all this clothing that Dorcas made; look at all these tunics, these coats, these garments.  Look at all these warm blankets for the children.  Just look at all this!”

Peter, we needed you to come right away and see what has happened. We have an emergency
here!  As Peter enters the room where Tabitha’s body has been placed, the very first thing he does is kneel and pray.  I think Peter was crying along with everyone else.  He grieved the loss as much as any other.  But, he keeps saying: “it is Jesus that does the healing.  It is Jesus that does the raising. I have no control whatsoever.”  Peter then orders everyone out of the room. He continues to kneel and pray.

**[8]** I thought to myself, as I was watching all of this, “It probably takes a while to feel the silence of his praying.  However long it takes, we must wait for the silence to come and to touch us in our praying.  The only thing Peter can do is pray and believe, or so I thought to myself. Then, all of a sudden, Peter calls out:  “Tabitha, get up!”  A loud commanding voice breaks the silence: “Tabitha, stand up!”  ([*anastēthi*](https://biblehub.com/greek/anaste_thi_450.htm)) And, as he helps her up, and introduces her as “alive,” “risen,” and “awake,” he makes sure that everyone seeing her knows “the Lord Jesus has raised her.”  Believe in the Lord. Peter’s message is clear.  “Spread your table, Dorcas!” The Lord has raised you from the dead to live yet again!  Spread your table, Aeneas. The Lord has made you well.  Follow me to the portals of life!

Someone recently told me:  “These acts of the apostles preach themselves. All you need do is recite their doing.  They preach themselves.  They are full of revival and praise.  They are full of glory and love.  They are full of grace and peace.  They are full of prayer.  They are full of people like Aeneas and Dorcas, models for our faith.  Spread your table!  Find your voice again!  Give of the best of your best to the Master!

**[9]** During his lifetime, Peter told us, Jesus told us a parable about the Jericho Road.  The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a brutal path of places where robbers could hide and attack and kill and steal.  It was dangerous to move to the side of the road to help anyone left for dead in the ditch. But … Then Peter paused and seemed to go off on a tangent to the story. Then, Peter changed up the story a bit, as he put it: “The Good Samaritan found Jesus in the ditch and carried him to safety, so we too have our own Jericho Road along which we administer compassion.  It might be any of our streets in any of our towns. We must keep the Inn along the Jericho Road open to care for those along the road who are desperate for love and destitute of faith.  One act did not change the road, one parable did not change the narrative of that brutal road, but when we help those in need along the road, we find the face of Jesus in the ditch and we carry Jesus to the Inn to be restored to health in the body of the one we have helped along life’s way.

And the road from Caesarea to Joppa, or from Joppa to Lydda, or from Sharon to the sea? How about that road?  Do we keep the Inn along the Sharon road open also?  Do we have the foresight to follow the Dorcas model to prepare ourselves to be a blessing for others?  In the name of Jesus, “Spread your table!” “Make your bed!”  Disciple your neighbor!  Know the cost of your own salvation!  Share the mercy you have received from the Master!

At this point, I can only guess at what Aeneas and Dorcas will do with their new lives!  I know
it will be enough to bring many to Christ along that Sharon Road or any road. And lo, and behold, as I found out later, all the residents of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord. All the residents of Joppa knew about what happened to Dorcas and many turned to the Lord. We have it on good account.  It was the first of many acts to come.  It was a persistent way of action, repeating itself over time and distance.  One act led to many more.  One act led to a pattern of acting which changed the world.  One act will lead us to a pattern of acting that will eventually change our world.  The Dorcas miracle has begun.  We cannot ever put it back in the bottle.  It will overflow every bottle in which we try to trap it. It is alive.  It is unstoppable.  Dorcas, stand up!  Aeneas, spread your table!  Act in the light of God.  Believe in the name of Jesus!

I have decided to follow Jesus.  I have decided to follow Jesus.  I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back!  Alleluia! Amen!