

Fourth Sunday of Easter, New Testament, Year C

GOD'S GARMENT MAKES GOOD

Acts 9:36-42

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Mark Marius

36Now 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. 37At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. 38Since 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." 39So 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. 40Peter 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. 41He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. 42This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

DIAGNOSIS: Out of Tunic with God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Good Works

Tabitha was a disciple of Christ who devoted her life to good works and charity. She made some beautiful garments. What a saint! But not even that could prevent her from dying. Illness and death are not prevented by the good that we do.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Panic Grabs You
What do we do now? Feeling powerless the people attending to Tabitha decide they need a super disciple to intervene. "Please come without delay," is the word sent to Peter. When death happens, who or what can you trust? Instead of trusting the "Shepherd's voice" (John 10:27-28) the saints speak up in earthly panic. Death has a way of causing disciples of Christ to flee.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Tears and Tunics
The only thing left to hold onto was the empty tunics that Dorcas had made. Is this what our life amounts to—the things we made while we were living? Those left behind often hold on to the wrong things, earthly things that perish, instead of trusting the hand holding us (see a counter reference in John 10:28, 29).

PROGNOSIS: God Changes Our Tunic

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Voices Herd [sic]
Peter has been here before. And so (to borrow imagery from today's Gospel), he knew the Shepherd, followed the Shepherd, and so he prays to the Shepherd. And just as was promised, the risen Shepherd responds to his sheep. Death had been defeated on the cross but we can only know that through Christ. God heard Peter because God was already there holding onto Tabitha's life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Give a Hand
Peter helps Tabitha up. That's what happens when the chains of death are broken. We rise up with the help of the one God sends to us. We don't stay put. The Holy Spirit, given to us in our baptism, gets us on our feet. It is our baptismal garment, which is impossible to take off, which gives us life.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Alive
Peter gives the saints a glimpse of the resurrection. By showing

Tabitha to be alive, many others became alive, through faith. When we trust our baptism—our own sharing of Christ's death, then we too can live as God intended. Charitable acts and good works flow out of the death of our sinful self. We seek to clothe others with the same God-given garments of righteousness that we wear.