

We are in the middle of a sermon series on the five marks of mission and today is the fourth mark of mission, the mark of Transformation. Transformation is of course a broad topic, and has been talked about at length by many preachers, but today we are specifically talking about the kind of transformation that is around changing unjust structures of society, challenging violence of every kind, and the type of transformation that comes from pursuing peace and reconciliation. A much narrower window of transformation. (This is a joke of course.)

The topic is exceedingly broad and finding a biblical passage that reflects this mark of mission was not particularly difficult, but finding one that I felt compelled to preach on was a bit harder. Heeding the advice of my dear friends and colleagues I chose to read the second half of Acts 9, the story of Dorcas or Tabitha depending on if you call her by Greek or by Hebrew name.

At first glance this may not appear to be a story about the mark of transformation. Peter is out and about doing his thing, healing people, spreading the gospel and such. When he is approached by a group of believers, and they are urgently trying to get him to go with them to an upper room. Our text does not say if they explained the situation to Peter or not. The text reads they sent two men to beg him. These believers are desperate, but also still polite, saying please come as soon as possible. And Peter obliges these two men.

So Peter rushes off, and finds a house full of people mourning, the death of a beloved community figure. Something we are seeing an awful lot of on the news, the death of a strong community figure. The room is full of widows who are showing Peter the clothes, the coats, the tunics, that Tabitha made for them.

This sentence might not make sense out of context to you, I wouldn't feel shame about missing the importance I glossed right over it reading another translation earlier this week. This statement is important because of the societal status that widows had in the ancient world. 2000 years ago. The society was patriarchal, and much more so than even today. Women and children would have been considered a form of property. What this meant is that most women, did not have their own land or money. So when a husband died his widow was left without any form of income or assistance. There was some public housing, and the temple was

supposed to distribute money to widows, but that only went so far for managing peoples needs.

Dorcas here has of her own time and effort made clothes for these widows who have nothing. The people whose lives she has touched the most turn up for her funeral and are grieving her, but are at the same time showing to Peter their gratitude for all that Dorcas has done for them.

Peter is moved by this scene, almost certainly, even though the text does not tell us that specifically. Peter asks everyone to leave the room and says, get up Tabitha! And she is raised from the dead, returned to her beloved community, whom I am almost certain she got straight back to work serving and caring for.

This is a moving story about the life in the early church, and I see a strong parallel to our modern world today, and to today's mark of mission. In her life Dorcas/ Tabitha was hard at work taking care of people who were already theoretically being taken care of. In ancient times, just like in modern day, there were many organizations that were working hard to work against injustice, and seek peace, that are religious and secular in nature. When we are called to this form of mission it can be overwhelming when you see all the other groups already hard at work.

For this reason I feel this mark of mission can be particularly difficult to be enthusiastic about because we already see so many organizations in the field working hard and tending to the task. But much like Dorcas, who was simply filling a need that she saw, we should not shy away from the call to mission because others are already at work. Our world is full of need and there will always be more work to be done, Christ himself said it, "You will always have the poor with you."

It is important to recognize, transformation of society at large dismantling systems of injustice, and tackling violence of every kind while pursuing peace and reconciliation is a large task. And realistically it is not a task that we are called to as individuals, which is why we should not shy away from rising to the task when we see opportunity to serve and to help even when others are already aiding in similar ways.

I want to encourage you, as a congregation who is already hard at work on many fronts to take care of the world around you. Supporting missional organizations, going out into the world traveling to Africa, having a marketplace supporting fair trade goods, a crafting team that sends care supplies out after hand making them like Dorcas herself.

There is much being done in this Kirk already to empower the fourth mark of mission. But I tell you, there is more to be done. This is not to dismiss the efforts of those already hard at work, you should be lauded for your good deeds. No, this message is for the rest of us, who have yet to find our missional call.

When you set forth on your own journey to find what mission you can engage in to transform the world, do not let the presence of your family in Christ make you feel that your presence is unneeded. Instead let it bolster your confidence that you are helping to make a transformative difference in the world around you, with your family in Christ just like Dorcas and the early church did.

This is the good news of the Gospel
Thanks be to God.
Rev. Austin Wicks