

St Brandon's 12 May 2019.

Acts 9:36-43: Tabitha raised to life

Rev 7: no more tears

As we've heard it's CHRISTIAN AID WEEK, so I want to bring you a message today based on this year's Christian Aid project to support women in Sierra Leone, but also linked to this morning's reading from Acts, about another woman, Tabitha, also known as Dorcas.

My Mum would be thrilled to see the church today, with Christian Aid flags and posters, and the wonderful big banner on the notice board. She campaigned for Christian Aid for many years in our rather sleepy, middle of the road Anglican church in suburban Liverpool, and some of my best memories of our youth club (or to be precise YCF: Young Communicants' Fellowship) are of Spring evenings when we were sent out two by two to deliver all the envelopes round the parish, in order to save the rather reluctant collectors from having to go round their roads twice.

I'm not suggesting that as a model for St Brandon's, but rather I am saying that my mother's determination, to raise awareness of global needs and to motivate comfortable Christians to get involved, made a big impression on me, so that every year since my teens, Christian Aid Week has registered and felt important to me. I'm thrilled it is important to St Brandon's too.

Talking of mothers, it has been the week for babies, hasn't it!

That wonderful picture of baby Archie being adored by his parents, grandmother and great grandparents was very different from the usual royal photo line-ups, and brought home just how precious and unique this baby is, as every baby is.

Which brings us to Sierra Leone. On our church door today, and on every CA envelope this year, is Jebbeh, awaiting the birth of her baby, not with joyful anticipation but with fear.

Fear because, only a few weeks ago, her sister Fatmata died in childbirth, walking to the clinic in the hot sun... their nearest clinic is 3 hours' walk away. Jebbeh's only other option when she goes into labour is to give birth at home on the earth floor without any medical help.

Christian Aid is working with its local partner agency to build more health clinics and train more nurses to stop this tragic and preventable loss of life.

£5 buys a bag of cement (and you can give that with a swipe of your card right here using our wonderful machine!)

£20 buys a stethoscope to check the health of mums and babies

£60 would pay for a sturdy roof for a clinic

I wonder how much we can raise in Brancepeth this year?

THANK YOU for your generosity in giving your time + money this week.

Life is so precious, and every life is a gift from God.

So let us move now to Joppa, a mainly Jewish town on the coast about 30 miles from Jerusalem, on the way north to Samaria.

Peter is up that way, staying in Lydda, which was known as Lod in the OT. He is fulfilling Jesus' command to his disciples to preach the gospel *in Judea and Samaria* and to the ends of the earth, but you have to start somewhere and close to home was Jesus' command... for us too, perhaps?

In the few verses which precede today's story in Acts chapter 9, Peter has brought healing to a man named Aeneas, bedridden for 8 years and paralysed. Peter goes to him, prays and says: 'Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and make your bed!' and Aeneas, catching and sharing Peter's faith in Jesus' power to heal, gets up...

It is very clear that it is Christ's work of healing, not Peter's, just as it was when Peter and John brought his healing to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Remember 'silver and gold have I none...?'

Peter is using the Holy Spirit's power to **bring Christ's healing**.

And so to Joppa, where Dorcas (or Tabitha) has just died, and the Church, knowing Peter is down the road, send word for him to come and help them. This is reminiscent of the times in the gospels when people send word to Jesus to come and help them. It is Christ's work being extended and continued.

Clearly Tabitha, is a much -loved lady, a devoted disciple who uses her skills as a seamstress to help others , possibly giving some of her garments to the poor, such as widows, as well as selling them to make a living. When Peter arrives, there is much weeping and they are keen to tell him all about their friend, but in a scene reminiscent of Peter's visit to Jairus' house when he was with Jesus, he sends them outside. Then he prays and uses words very similar to those Jesus spoke to Jairus' young daughter- not *Talitha cumi*, but 'Tabitha cumi' - Tabitha, get up! Peter has remembered, this incident, maybe also Lazarus, and his own mother in law's healing, and he is following all he has learned from Jesus.

And we know Tabitha awakes, Peter takes her by the hand and then calls in all the church members and the widows and 'gives her back ` to them, much as Jesus gave the little girl back to Jairus and all her family.

The news of this healing, or raising, spreads throughout the city and causes many to believe.

I want to draw out 4 things from this great story, and link them to Christian Aid.

ONE: The work of healing belongs to Jesus. Peter does not claim any miraculous powers, but he calls on Jesus to heal. As Christians we believe God to be the source of all life and power, and whether healing today comes through medical, psychological, emotional or spiritual means, it is God's healing we pray for and work for. So too in Sierra Leone, the health clinics will bring God's healing to individuals and families, and more of God's kingdom to that whole region.

TWO: Peter is part of Christ's work, Christ's mission if you like, and so are we. Theologians talk about the *Missio Dei* the mission of God, but we too often think that it is our idea to reach out to others, to help other people, set up projects, mount campaigns.

In fact it is the reverse- God has a mission and calls us to be part of it- to be part of his kingdom coming on earth as in heaven. The work of Christian Aid and its partners in Sierra Leone is God's mission, and the nurses and health care workers are Christ's hands and feet, just as Peter was in Jerusalem, Lydda, Joppa.

THREE: When Jesus sent his disciples to preach the gospel- the good news of the kingdom, they weren't only meant to give sermons! They knew that **the gospel message included helping and healing**, just as Peter does in today's passage. Through the miracles they witness and hear about, many people come to faith in Christ. And in other places we read of Peter doing plenty of preaching and teaching. So lets never drive a wedge between proclaiming the gospel in word and doing so in deed. As Christians in Sierra Leone bring change and healing to communities, so too they are proclaiming the good news and others will come to believe in Jesus Christ.

FOUR and finally!

This isn't complicated. In our story Peter basically does two things. He goes and he prays.

His going to Joppa brings massive comfort and support to those bereaved and devastated Christians who have just lost their dear friend and helper. So **being there** matters. But Peter knows that his other priority is to **pray**, so he clears the room, then listens to his Lord in prayer, and asks the Lord to grant his request on behalf of the Christian community he has come to serve.

Only then does he speak to Tabitha.

Being there and prayer.

We can do both, today. In our own locality we can be there for those in need, visiting at home or in hospital, sending a card, making a phone call. As we partner with Christian Aid we can make it possible for others to be there on the ground, in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, trained and helping. And above all, whether here, or there, we can pray!

So lets do that now.

Lord Jesus Christ

We thank you that you are the great healer and that you use people today to bring healing and wholeness to those in need. May we too be channels of your healing today.

We thank you that you call us to be part of your great mission across the world and right here in Brancepeth. Help us to know the part you want us to play.

Lord Jesus we ask that others may come to believe and trust in you ,as they see your church carrying out your mission, even here in our time.

And finally we ask you to show us how, when and where you want us to be there for others, and to remind us always to pray, for without you, we can do nothing. But we know that with you, all things are possible.

We pray in the precious name of Jesus

Amen