

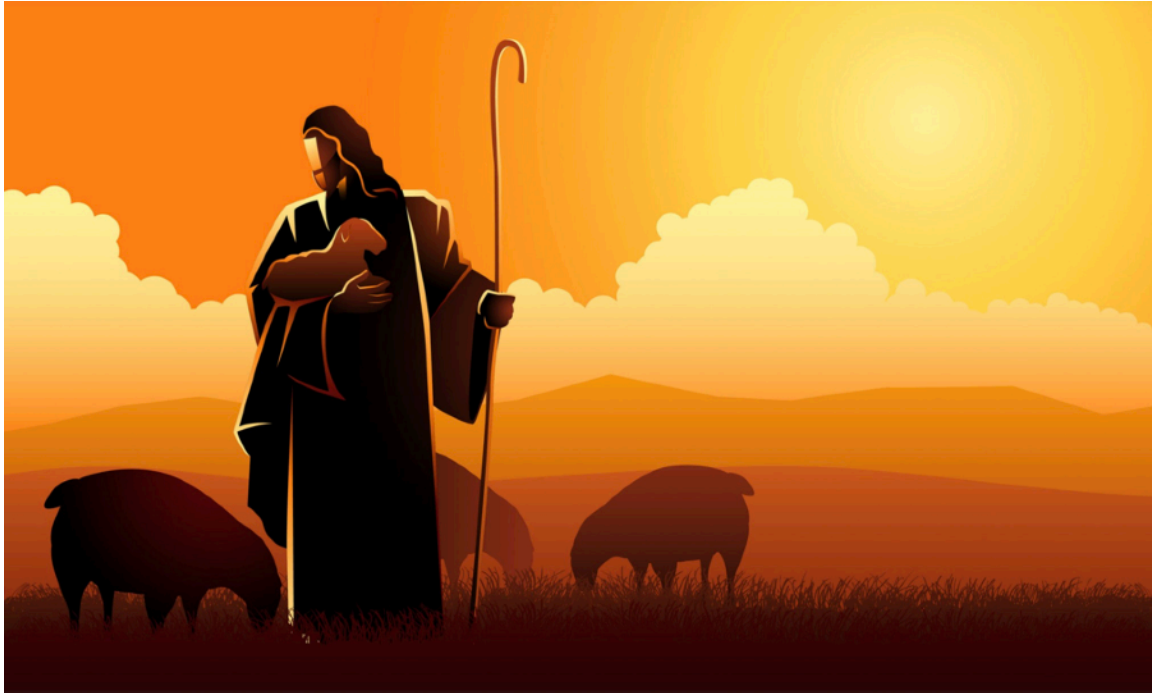
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# Tabitha and the Good Shepherd

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 11 May 2025**

Acts 9:36-43 • John 10:22-30

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Happy Mothers' Day! It is fitting that we celebrate the women in our families who are raising or have raised children. I suppose, really, the raising of children never ends; it gets less intense or less time-consuming, but we all of us still need a mother's guidance. I remember my own mother continuing to correct me in little things, even decades after I'd left home and gotten married. As she got into her senior years, she took more delight in addressing me as "Son". "How are you, Son?" she'd say when I answered the phone, with just a little emphasis on the word "son," showing that she knew it was a slightly humorous, over-formal way of speaking; but her love was in the word, too. In her last years, when we were back in the US (and during COVID), she started calling several times a day, simply because she couldn't remember the earlier calls. "How are you, Son? It seems so long since I spoke to you!" We were fortunate — although her

memory had faded, her bright and cheerful personality remained. I'd tell her again what I'd been up to, and Melissa often sang old songs with her over the phone. She'd always been a singer, and she kept that up almost until the end.

My mother lived a good long life. She died just two days short of her 94<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was reminded of her, and mothers in general, by the reading from Acts today, about Tabitha (or Dorcas, in Greek, but I think Tabitha is the prettier name). Tabitha was much loved. We are not told this specifically, but I imagine her as an older woman, and a mother with grown children. She was certainly well-loved, and we are told "she spent all her time doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36). We are also told that when she died, "all the widows crowded around" (9:39). So she had certainly made an impact on their lives. She would have been a woman of great love, who took care of the people around her. Such a woman is a true Christian, and her life, her death and her resurrection served as a great example to the people around her of God's love. God brought her back to life through Peter, and no doubt she continued to serve God, and serve God's people, for more years after that.

What do we learn from this? It is a perfect little gem of a story, quickly and clearly told, and it is one of a series of stories which show us the spread of Christianity among the people. It certainly shows us how God wanted the faith to spread, and how the miracles performed through Peter and the other apostles helped people to come to God. Many of the stories in the Book of Acts feature a healing, done by Peter or one of the others, and end with something to the effect of "... and many more people believed in the Lord." Acts, traditionally said to have been written by Luke, tells of the early church, and was written to bring God's word to many more people. As the church grew and extended farther and farther from Judea, these events and stories multiplied. Acts does not express any deep theology; it is a very practical book of how the Christian church began to spread. It is from Acts that we learn when the disciples first were called Christians, in Antioch, a city in Syria, north of Judea, where Paul and Barnabas preached and taught for almost a year. These new Christians, who came to dedicate their lives to Christ at this time, will forever belong to Christ. They have received the Holy Spirit. They became part of his flock; they know him as their shepherd. They follow him because they know him. As Jesus says,

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never die. No one can snatch them away from me. (John 10:27-28)

When we give our lives to Christ, there is no turning back. We belong to him. We may stray; we may sin; we may do a hundred bad things; but we are still Christ's people. To commit our lives to Christ is no light thing. God does not take it lightly, and for us, it is the most important thing we will do in our lives.

The world may try to distract us with its temptations and pleasures, but it cannot take us away from our God. Jesus says that God gave us — the sheep — to Jesus, and we will not be taken away from him. And Jesus and God, our Father, are one.

The love of a mother or a father for a child is an imitation of the love which God has for all his children. We will never be lost, as we continue to live in Christ, and have Christ in us. We may rest in the Father's love forever. Let us give thanks in the name of our Saviour and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.