

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May

Acts 9:36-end

Revelation 7:9-end

John 10:22-30

Kate Crocker has recently put on a couple of computer basics courses in Church House for people who want to know how to use their laptops or I pads, but are a bit wary or scared of technology – and who find technical language hard to understand. Telling such people to read an instruction manual is a sure fire way to turn them off completely; but allow Bob (the tutor on the course) to show them how to send emails, search for things on the web or take part in a zoom meeting and the whole thing loses its mystique and becomes something they can do. Its much easier to follow someone who knows what they are doing than try to work it out yourself.

Kate is hoping to set up another course fairly soon if you are interested.

Last Sunday we thought about Peter and Paul – the two main leaders in the young church that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles. We thought that, although by our measure they probably weren't ideally qualified for the leadership roles God had in store for them, he looked at their potential rather than their pasts. He could see what they would be capable of, and trusted them for the future. And we thought too about how God calls people like us – with all our faults and failings – to follow him.

In our reading from Acts today we have one of the stories about Peter – about how he began to be that leader God was calling him to be– and its interesting to see what happened, to look at what Peter did.

The story is about Peter and Tabitha (or Dorcas as she was known in Greek)

She was a faithful Christian – one who did things behind the scenes; not a limelight person, but one who was all important in what she did and the way she did it.

Tabitha had sadly died - we can picture her neighbours grieving at her death, showing each other the things she made; talking about the person she was and the difference she made to the community.

She was just like countless people in our churches and communities today, who work tirelessly for the benefit of others, who don't look for fame or reward, but act out of love and dedication and commitment to those amongst whom they live and worship. No doubt we can all think of many here in Shirley Parish

Now the other Christians in Joppa were hoping that the stories they had heard of people being healed, and even people being brought back to life were true. They sent for Peter – who was nearby – with an urgent request – come to us without delay. Confident that he could help them – and help Tabitha.

So Peter arrives, and is faced with a scene of tears and death.

How would he react? What would he do?

And we see by what he did that he had learned from the master, from Jesus himself.

Remember this is Peter, a fisherman by trade, who just a short while before was denying he even knew Jesus, now a respected leader of the church and looked on as the one with the answers.

So what did he do?

No doubt when faced with the scene, Peter's mind went back to seeing Jesus at work. Just as it probably did when he encountered the lame man outside the temple, when he encountered the crowds eager for teaching and the priests eager to challenge him.

What would Jesus have done in this situation? How would he have reacted? Could Peter learn from him?

So let us cast our minds back to the gospel stories of healings and miracles. Remember the disciples witnessed what Jesus was doing; he then sent them out in pairs to heal and teach; he encouraged them when they returned. He taught them by demonstration and example, by equipping and encouraging – not by giving them detailed written instructions or a lecture in evangelism techniques.

And let us in particular recall the story of Jesus's encounter with Jairus – the synagogue leader – whose daughter was dangerously ill. You remember that Jairus came to Jesus and asked him to come and heal his daughter. But Jesus got delayed on the way by the woman with the menstrual bleeding. So much so that Jairus's servants came and told him the girl had died, so not to bother Jesus. But Jesus still went with Jairus. We read these words ...

*Jesus did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.<sup>38</sup> When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> He went in and said to*

*them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.”<sup>40</sup> But they laughed at him.*

*After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was.<sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).<sup>42</sup> Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.<sup>43</sup> He .. .told them to give her something to eat.*

Our story of Peter and Tabitha is almost a carbon copy. Peter sends the crowds away, goes into the room and prays, takes the girl by the hand and tells her to get up.

And it’s interesting to note that even the words he used were virtually identical. Jesus said Talitha Koum – little girl get up. Peter addresses the woman by her Aramiac name and says Tabitha koum – Tabitha get up. He has clearly learned from the master.

In the gospel Jesus says My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me. Part of that following is learning, copying and putting into action.

We can see clearly here how Peter had developed in himself – his character and his faith - by learning from Jesus and doing what he did. If you read through Acts you’ll see Peter was always learning, always developing in his understanding and practice. For him learning was life. Growing in his faith and understanding as he journeyed through life.

Peter had seen Jesus with his own eyes, had walked and talked with Jesus, had been an eye witness to wonderful things – miracles of healing and even (as in the case of Jairus’s daughter) someone being raised from the dead. That, however, is not true for us. We can read about Jesus; we can look to others who followed Jesus but we don’t have those personal memories that Peter had.

But we can still follow Jesus’s example.

First of course by reading the gospel accounts of what Jesus did. Not just in terms of the miracles he performed, but also his encounters with others and his conversations, his teaching and his attitude. The WWJD movement of a few years back is based on this. When we think about what we know of Jesus from the gospel stories, what do we think he would do in a particular situation. Of course this means knowing what the gospel stories tell us. Reading and thinking about the Bible. Being prepared to ask questions of each other and to learn more and more.

Second by looking at some of those who have followed Jesus over the years – like Peter and Paul in scripture. In this story we can learn from Peter's example. We can also learn from the example of Tabitha's life in this story – quietly going about her business of encouragement and support of others. And we can learn from the examples of countless Christians through the ages – we might call them saints sometimes. I have recently read biographies of Dietrick Bonhoeffer and Maxmilian Kolbe – two prominent Christians in the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war. Reading those biographies (and others) has given me examples to follow in life. Following people who followed Jesus. And this of course involves reading about and finding out about other Christians – again from studying the Bible through Acts and the NT letters, but also from reading about some of the faithful Christians through the centuries

And third, people closer to home. Those we know or have known personally. Christians who have helped us or influenced us over the years. Christians who themselves have modelled their lives on Jesus and others who follow him. People in our churches, families and communities. Following people who have followed Jesus. Much like in those computer courses people followed Bob's example – Bob who in his own turn had learned from others.

Much can also be learned from doing things together. We read in the gospels that when Jesus first sent those new disciples out to do similar things to what he had been doing he sent them out in pairs. So that they could encourage each other, support each other and learn from each other. It's the same in our churches today. Through courses we seek to learn with and from each other; in activities we try to set up teams (café, journeys etc) so that we can support each other and help each other. We are not supposed to be alone in this! Our Christian journeys are ones we take together.

This following of Jesus, this discipleship we might call it, this journeying in our faith – I think all these things mean the same – is all about learning and developing. If our Christian experience, our faith, our church life has not changed over the years something is wrong. Anything alive grows and develops and changes over time, and our faith should be no exception.

So perhaps all this is a call to think about how much our faith has grown and developed over the years, and what we might do to help make that happen. A call again to follow Jesus.