



*My Butterick Shirt, A Mother's Day Message*

*Acts 9:36-43*

*Sunday, May 12th, 2019*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text:*

*All the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. (39b)*

When I was eight or nine years old my mother made me a shirt, white with blue sailboat silhouettes for school. It was white with the silhouette of blue sailboats. I loved that shirt. I wore it to school as close to every day as I could.

My mother used to make a lot of clothing, in large part because, outside of the cost of her labor, we didn't have a lot of money. We were comfortable but definitely not affluent.

I remember shopping with her at the old Szold's department store on the south end of Peoria as she looked through Butterick and McCall's clothing patterns. I remember the feel of the thick packages and that thin tan paper with blue patterns that she pulled out of the package. She laid them out and carefully take my measurements. There was always a little plastic box of straight pins nearby.

Not many people that I know sew shirts or dresses any more. A few do, but not many. Now we buy shirts and dresses from Target or Walmart. The labels, even of the best name brands, say that they were made in China or Thailand or Vietnam or India or wherever. Former foes have become at least economic friends. We are far removed from making our own clothing, the amount of work and skill that it takes. I'm not bemoaning the fact; it's just the way our worlds works today.

In our lesson today, Tabitha, or Dorcus as she was called in the Greek community, was a seamstress. And our lesson from Acts is interesting in a variety of ways, not the least of which is that Tabitha is called a "disciple". This is the only place in the New Testament where a woman is actually called a "disciple".

We make a mistake if we think that our story is about Peter bringing someone back to life for it is also a story about a woman who in her life brings hope to those who are the least, the last, the lost, and the forgotten.

Tabitha was beloved because she used her vocation--being a seamstress--not only to support herself but to minister to the widows of the community. She provided them beautiful sturdy clothing.

When Peter arrived at her home in Lydda he was shown not just her body but the beautiful clothing that she made. Her loss was a devastating blow. Now, we have a hard time understanding the importance of clothing in the ancient world. We readily give things to Goodwill when our clothes go out of style or simply throw them away when they become worn. But in the ancient world clothing was so central to life that there were laws against taking someone's cloak because that cloak may be all that they have.

In New Testament times the people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder were widows. They had no one to look for them or to care for them. They were pitifully alone, easy prey for those who would take advantage of them.

I caught a glimpse of this harsh reality when I was in East Africa seeing from the window of our host's van a mother with a small child sitting on a blanket on the curb on a busy city street with a few pieces of fruit, each corner her blanket, for sale. She had to sell the fruit would provide money for her daily bread as well as her child's. And so it was in the world of Acts.

Tabitha's contribution reminds us that our vocation, our work is not about just making money but about making this world a better place, an outpost of God's Kingdom. There are no small actors in the building of God's Kingdom on earth. There is role for everyone willing to put their hand to the plow.

My mother made me what some may think of as a simple shirt. But she did more than that; she made a difference. To God be the glory. Amen.