**First German Lutheran Church**

**May 5, 2024**

**Sermon**

**Sermon Theme: Dear Friends of Jesus: Love as You Have Been Loved!**

**First Lesson: Acts 9:36-42**

**Second Lesson: 1 John 4:7-11, 19-21**

**Gospel Lesson and Sermon Text: John 15:9-17**

**Preacher: Pastor Jacob Hoff**

You are a real Dorcas.

I can hardly think of a better compliment.

Tabitha (whose Greek name was Dorcas) was a delightful person. Everything we know about her was in that first reading for today, but it is enough to get a picture of the woman: “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.”

Maybe you’ve had the privilege of knowing a Dorcas or two in your lifetime. I know I have. Off the top of my head I can think of four women who were always doing good and helping the poor (there are more, but four of them come immediately to mind). Two of them are in heaven. Two are still doing good and helping this side of eternity. Filled with an infectious joy, they walk into a room and the whole place brightens up. In every conversation I had with them (or overheard as they talked with others) they were always kind, always patient, always compassionate, always quick to bring in Jesus and his clear promises in the word. They are the kind of women who are a gift from God. After every interaction, you are left thankful that they are in your life.

I’ve known some women like that. Maybe you have too.

You are a real Dorcas. I can hardly think of a better compliment.

It makes you wonder; how did they get that way? If you’ve ever known someone who is overwhelmingly positive, kind, wise, and generous - how did they get that way?

Love.

The defining characteristic of someone like Dorcas is love - Love that is patient; love that is kind; love that does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud; love that does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs; love that does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth; love that protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres (1 Corinthians 13).

Our world has a lot of funny ideas about what love is. We talk about “falling in love” and “I just don’t know if I *feel* in love.” We create T.V. shows about one man dating twenty women as he tries to find “true love”. There are a lot of funny ideas about love out there, but we know real love when we see it. It’s what makes the Dorcases of this world so remarkable.

Dorcas didn’t demonstrate love something to be fallen into, or something that needed to be found. Love was something she did, not fell into; it was something she produced, not searched for. Love in a person like Dorcas is an action she did for others, not a feeling she hoped to feel around others. Love in a person like Dorcas was a gift she gave. She brought love into every room she walked into – always doing good, always helping the poor.

There are a lot of funny ideas about love in the world, but there is a better kind of love that we know when we see it, and we are blown away by it because it is such a beautiful thing.

And if you’ve ever had the privilege to know someone like Dorcas, you probably also know where they learned to love like that (they probably would be the first to tell you). “In Joppa there was a ***disciple*** named Tabitha…” A disciple… Dorcas learned to love from her teacher.

Her teacher who had said (John 13): By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Her teacher who had said (John 15): This is my command: Love each other.

And you know who Dorcas’ teacher was. You know who is speaking in John 13 and 15 – someone who knows a thing or two about love.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,” Jesus says to his disciples.

As the Father has loved me… let’s think about that.

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.*

*What does this mean?*

*I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities.*

*And I believe that God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, property and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life. God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven and not because I have earned or deserved it.*

This world has a lot of funny ideas about love, but the Father knows a thing or two about real love – love that he chose to give as a gift (not earned); something he did, not fell into. It is a love that you have been on the receiving end of every minute of every day from the moment you were conceived. He knit you together in your mother’s womb. He preserves, provides, protects, because that is what love does.

And the Father taught the Son a thing or two about love. “As the Father has loved me, ***so have I loved you***…” let’s think about that.

*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*What does this mean?*

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.*

This world has a lot of funny ideas about love, but Jesus knows a thing or two about real love – “Greater love has no one than this,” he said “To lay down one’s life for one’s friend.” Did you catch that? He called you *friends*. Friends! You know how friendship works. Your friends are the ones who are always doing you good and helping you. Jesus calls you friends – his love is action that you receive on a daily basis. And it was love that lead him to lay down his life for his friends.

The Father and the Son know a thing or two about love, and, Jesus says, when it comes to this love, you didn’t choose him. He chose you… let’s think about that.

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.*

*What does this mean?*

*I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.*

This world has a lot of funny ideas about love, but our Triune God knows a thing or two about real love – “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you…” This is love that does not wait for reciprocation. This is love that does not wait for you to meet him half-way, or party-way or even express a passing interest in him. It is love that chose you. It is love that God brings to you.

Can you see it?

How did Dorcas become a woman who “was always doing good and helping the poor?”

She was a disciple. She learned to love from her teacher. She learned to love from the best. She loved because Jesus first loved her. She lived and loved as a disciple. Then she died. And then Peter raised her to life and she got to live and love some more.

She was a disciple. She is an example. You are a real Dorcas – a compliment that should be said of all of us. You heard Jesus.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. This is a command given not to servants (who would obey out of fear), but to friends (who would obey out of love).

Now, I know, this bar is high. The Dorcases of this world are remarkable for a reason. To love like the Father, the Son, the Spirit, this could easily be a crushing burden. The more you know about God’s love and how it is supposed to look in our lives – this is an impossibly high bar.

Jesus said that this is how everyone will know we are his disciples, if we love one another. Love is to be our defining characteristic. This is a high bar. This is Jesus’ command to his friends: to love like God, a love that always patient, kind, protecting, providing, sacrificial; a one-way love that doesn’t wait for them to meet you half-way or part-way; love that isn’t just for those who are easy to love, but even for enemies. This is a high bar.

But first, no excuses. The God who has loved has every right to command it back. No excuses. Lord, have mercy.

Second, full forgiveness. God did lay down his life for us, his friends. And because he laid down his life for us we are completely forgiven for all of our failures to love.

So, with no excuses, but full forgiveness, this is how a Dorcas is made: We love because he first loved us.

Fellow friends of Jesus: be a real Dorcas. Love as you have been loved. When you walk into a room, bring the love with you.

Amen.