

Abiding

Mother's Day – May 8, 2022

Acts 9:36-43

³⁶Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. ³⁷At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.

Scripture: John 15: 4-5

⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

I Choose you, says a mother to her child, says a child to her mother, says the one to whom they both belong. My mother was a nurse at OSU, she was the surgical nurse requested by Dr. James, and Dr. Zollinger for their particularly difficult surgeries. When Jack Nicklaus needed hand surgery, mom was called in. But she spent most of her career working in the outpatient clinics, her heart was in caring or those of lesser means and she would come home with stories of trauma and resilience.

She was born in 1927, so was a child of the Great Depression. Her father was a pastor, and there was almost no salary for a while. He was paid in bushels of corn, tomatoes, and beans, so with that, and the food from their garden her mom fed the family of six as well as all the hungry men passing through who came to their back door.

My Mom would make pies when we had company always making a second one which she sent home with her guests. She was always giving things away, we don't need this, she'd say, and she was disappointed in us when we chided her for being generous forgetting that it was hers to give, her life to offer.

We can forget that, folded into the domesticity of mother's lives is a path of holiness. Like her mother, mom ended her days on her knees in prayer by her bed. The strength to feed, to make, and make do, to care for those in the household and those at the door or the hospital, was possible because they were connected to a source. Came from and led into union with God

Just once in the New Testament do we hear the word, *maetria*, the feminine form of the Greek noun for *disciple*: It is in our story today, Tabitha, a widow, is a disciple. She does good works, and when she dies, the women are bereft. They lift up all the garments she has made, *What shall they do without the one who has clothed them with love.*

We get the despair, its hard not to feel that for the nation, our sense of union, failing, or the world economy, or the only three months old. But seemingly endless war on Ukraine. And of course, we have our own issues in our own particular lives and homes. We may find ourselves shutting out the hard parts drinking it away, ignoring it, walking away. But Walter Brueggeman, a bible scholar says, *The trouble with steeling yourself against the harshness of reality is that the that can also steel yourself against being opened up and transformed by the holy power that life itself comes from.*

In the 15th chapter of John, Jesus gathers his disciples around him. He foresees the hardships and death he is about to face and wants to console them. He knows the trials they will face in the days ahead. And wants to prepare them. Rather than arming them with words and strategies to defeat the enemy, Jesus speaks of vines and branches. Of hope and trust *I abide in God, you, now abide in me*, he says, *make your home in me just as I do in you.*" *You cannot go it alone, he says, you will not bear fruit abide in my love.*

Paul knew this story, walks into this community of bereft at Tabitha's death as one who was abiding in God's love, and through God's spirit, life returns to Tabitha and to that community of faith. We hear this story of resurrection in Acts and we think it impossible, we see the devastation in Ukraine and in other places and think, how can it return, we sense the strife among us, and the reports of what is ending. Yet, Jesus says, abide with me and be open to the restorative power from which all things come.

I heard a radio reporter tell of visiting a place that was home to dozens of severely disabled children, whom parents had left to institutional care and then their caregivers, as the invasion came left behind again. There were others who came, who stepped in when parents and caregivers failed. But they, like the reporter, sounded shattered. Bereft on behalf of these innocents caught in war. As the reporter was recording, one of the young girls, who was blind, with infirmity of mind, and body, became interested in the reporter and his microphone, and she took it in her hands, she spoke, with delight, and then she began to sing. To sing!

She was singing the song in her heart. The life that we listening to her had presumed was beyond hope was insistent on saying, I am here and I can give you my song.

In the depression, Grandma always answered the back door at the clinic. Mom was present to the sick. We enter into the world we've been given, and to which we are called and in the midst of it, sing our song.

A song given by the one in whom we abide. A song for all those who abide or hope to abide. The magnificent community, this magnificent community. For if we abide in the love of the Christ, then we abiding in one another, we build a bridge.

I've been thinking this week about a mom named Naomi who was a nurse and her daughter, Wynonna, and their song about what endures the love between God and us, between the Christ and us, and between all of us. That we can bear God's love in the world. Love that is greater than death. Love that abides.

Love can build a bridge
between your heart and mine.
Love can build a bridge,
don't you think it's time.
Don't you think it's time?