

What's your legacy? * Acts 9:36-42

June 21, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Given that today is Father's day, it seems like a pretty good time to talk about legacy. What is the legacy that you are leaving for your children? What is the story that you are writing with your life? Will you be remembered as a selfish person? Or a selfless one?

Those questions come from the passage of Scripture that we're going to look at today; a little story that's not terribly well known but one that has a profound message.

You can find it in Acts 9, starting at verse 36.

Now, right off the bat, I have a confession to make. When I was a child, I had an Aunt Dorcas. She was my mom's great aunt and so technically my great great aunt and we occasionally went up to the senior's centre to visit with her. And as an 8yr old, I thought it was really funny that her name was Dorcas. It's a lovely name, except that in English, Dorcas has a different, less than flattering meaning.

But when I discovered this story in Acts 9, I gained a whole new appreciation for Aunt Dorcas and for the woman I presume she was named after.

So let's check it out – Acts 9:36.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas),

(Tabitha means gazelle in Hebrew and so Luke gives the equivalent in Greek – Dorcas – so her name means twice over that she is like a noble and beautiful gazelle) – so Tabitha/Dorcas

who was always doing good and helping the poor.

37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

(Now it's not entirely clearly what they expected Peter to do. Some commentators say that since she was washed and prepared for burial, they just wanted Peter to do the funeral; others though say that since she wasn't immediately buried (because at that time, before refrigeration, you would bury the body the same day and) they were hoping that he would resurrect her. At any rate, Peter apparently dropped what he was doing and travelled back with them 17km as the crow flies to Joppa.

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

41 He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord (Acts 9:36-42 NIV).

That's a powerful story – Peter prayed that God would bring Tabitha back to life – and He did. Tabitha/Dorcas showed that God had power over death – and that anyone believing in Jesus would ultimately be resurrected. And many people came to faith because of it.

Now that's the 'big idea' of this passage, but there are a few details that I want us to focus on. Look back at our passage. How does Luke describe Dorcas?

Verse 36 – 'there was a disciple named Dorcas who was always doing good and helping the poor.' Verse 39 – 'all the widows were there, crying and showing him robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made for them.'

When Dorcas died, people gathered around her, remembered all the ways that she had served them in life - you get the sense that Dorcas lived for the benefit of others. Because she knew Jesus, (she was a disciple – she lived in light of His self-giving love – she lived in a way that was worthy of her calling) – she left behind a legacy of generosity. You've probably heard something like this before – "Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched in the minds of others and the stories they share about you" (attributed to Shannon Adler). That's clearly what Dorcas did.

What about you? What will your legacy be? What will people say at your visitation?

This I think is important for us to consider as Christians. I mean, sure, anybody can be generous and charitable, but it is especially important for us as believers, because we have already been the recipients of boundless generosity.

Jesus – who is God – did not count equality with God something to be clung to – but instead, became a servant, dying on the Cross for us, to forgive our sin and give us life. He did not look only to His OWN interests – He laid down His life to benefit us and generously gave Himself so that we too can look forward to resurrection.

In light of that, we need to leave a legacy of Christ-like generosity in our lives.

That's what I want you to take home today – Leave a legacy of Christ-like generosity. Just like Dorcas, live your life so that when you are gone, people will celebrate all the good things that you have done for them in Jesus' name. Scholars think that Dorcas was a woman of some means, with the time and opportunity to do good (See Witherington, 331) and many of us are in that same situation. We have time and opportunity to do good and unique gifts and abilities to do it with. Follow in Dorcas's footsteps; follow in Jesus' footsteps and look for ways to selflessly serve others in this life. Leave a legacy of Christ-like generosity.

I know that it's Father's day but I'm going to quote my mom to close – her emails often have this quote from Any Stanley at the end that says "The value of a life is always measured by how much is given away, specifically to the generation that is coming along behind us." What are you giving to the next generation? What's the legacy that you're leaving? Let your life reflect the selfless generosity of Jesus.