

The Do Matters
Acts 9:36-43
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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I was lying in a dark room of the emergency department, alone and feeling scared. I watched as other emergency patients were brought through the hallway in front of the room I was lying in. I had my cell phone with me but nothing else. The nurse offered a blanket to cover up with but, as thin as it was, it did little to provide warmth. And then my daughter walked in. She immediately placed a lap-size fleece blanket over me. I have never before felt such instantaneous warmth—both physically from the blanket and emotionally from my daughter's presence. She not only brought something tangible that I desperately needed, but she gave me the comfort I so desperately needed. She showed up for me.

Now you may be thinking that it's pretty easy to show up for family or for people who are like family and you are probably right.

We can assume in today's Scripture reading—since we are not told otherwise-- that Peter was not related to Tabitha. We can also assume—since we are not told otherwise-- that most likely he was not related to those who were mourning her death.

But he went. Right. Away. Why? Why did he go *right away*? Why did he go at all? Was he just a nice guy? Peter had his flaws. He sometimes failed to understand Jesus' parables. He and the other disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus. Peter's faith falters and he is unable to continue walking on the water toward Jesus. He argues with the other disciples about *which one of them is the greatest*. As an onlooker of the Transfiguration, he had the audacity to TELL JESUS that it's a *good thing* that he and James and John are there so that they can build shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Peter committed Jesus to the Temple Tax without actually consulting Jesus first. Peter resists the single greatest reason Jesus became a human: to atone for the sin of the human race. Remember Jesus rebuking Peter with, "Get behind me, Satan!" Peter resists Jesus when Jesus says that He is going to wash Peter's feet. "No, you shall never wash my feet." Peter fails to fight off sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asks him and the other disciples to stay awake with Him while He goes off to pray. And possibly the most astonishing grievance, Peter publicly denies Jesus with "oaths" and "curses."

So why DID Peter go to Tabitha? And without delay, at that. Peter didn't try to show off his resurrecting-from-the-dead capabilities. He sent everyone out of Tabitha's room. So we know he didn't show up as a PR stunt.

Since we can assume that Tabitha wasn't a family member or close family friend, Peter likely didn't show up out of obligation.

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We can also assume that Peter didn't show up because of his work duties. Raising people from the dead was probably not written in his job description.

And we can assume that Peter wasn't just waiting around for something to do.

As I have mulled this over the past few weeks and have done some research and tried to find some deep theological answer, I finally concluded that Peter was simply presented with an opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ. It really wasn't any more complicated than that.

The early church recorded and repeated stories of miracles, like Tabitha's resurrection, to give credence to the gospel. But I don't think that Peter just showing up was part of that miracle. Peter saw an opportunity to praise God, to demonstrate the miraculous power of God, and to share the love of Christ with others.

Pastor Jill shared some of the thoughts that the Bible study group had when they read and discussed this Scripture a week or so ago. They posited that Peter simply trusted that he was needed and went where he was sent... aka he saw an opportunity and he answered the call.

In addition to Peter showing up for Tabitha, I think we also need to pay attention to Tabitha's friends...the widows in our story. They loved her so much and were grieving her death so much that when they heard that Peter was near, *they sent for him*. Did they know that he would be able to raise her from the dead or was this a desperate plea for help of any kind?

Tabitha was deeply loved. We are told how selfless she is by making clothes and doing things for those in need. Did her friends want her brought back to life so that she could continue her good work?

I don't think so. I would like to think that her life and her compassionate service would have inspired *others* to emulate *her*.

I think Tabitha's friends just couldn't bear the thought of her being gone and *realizing an opportunity—that Peter was nearby*-- they acted upon it. They showed up for Tabitha.

As I was working on my message, I began to wonder what other examples the Bible shares of people showing up.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Jill talked about how Esther showed up for her people.

Those who fasted and prayed for Esther also showed up.

David showed up to fight Goliath.

Moses showed up to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

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Joshua showed up to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Rahab the prostitute showed up to hide the spies sent by Joshua.

Ruth and Boaz both showed up for Naomi to ensure she had a secure future.

Who are we showing up for? *How* do we show up for someone? What does it look like? What does it sound like? How does it feel?

While these experiences might be different for different people, I think there are some things we can keep in mind that will apply to many situations.

1) When you are with someone, listen carefully to what the person is saying. We should be aware that we are not thinking about what we are going to say when the person stops talking. We might think that we have the perfect comment to build someone up, but let the person first share what's on their heart and mind. This is the time to exercise patience and self-control. Silence is often hard, but don't be afraid of it. Let the person say all that they need to before stepping in. We might just find that few words are actually needed.

2) Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation rather than downplaying it. Often what a person needs is to be heard, seen, and validated. None of us can ever know exactly how another person feels or what their lived experiences are. Ignoring the difficulties does not build someone up, rather it only increases the struggles. Extend empathy and ask God for the wisdom to give the encouragement 'your Tabitha' needs. Our response when showing up for someone should be grounded in the love of Jesus.

3) Offer hope. Hope is for every single person on this earth even when their situations may be incredibly overwhelming. I know from personal experience that hope is actually everything. Even when a situation seems insurmountable or hope/less, when you see that proverbial glimmer of hope, everything changes.

4) Be encouraging with our attitude and actions. When preparing for this message, I came across this: "How we relate to those who are harsh, judgmental, or unfair reveals how close we are to God." Wow. I don't know about you, but I always want to assume that when I learn someone is a follower of Christ, they are going to be a kind person. Obviously, we know that is not always accurate. However, if we allow it, God's Spirit will equip us to deal with such people and situations that will either encourage their faith or towards living a life of faith. And remember, we don't have to do *everything*. In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul tells us that he planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. We don't have to do everything. We just have to show up.

5) I am a huge fan of Pinterest, which is an online bulletin board of sorts where you can create different categories of boards and save ideas to them. While browsing there one day, I came across

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this little nugget of wisdom: “Serving others is rarely convenient.” Showing up obviously takes time. It takes energy, sometimes money, sometimes a long-term commitment. It takes a heart that is listening to what God wants from us and what our priorities should be.

6) We should be proactive in our faith, looking for ways to fulfill God’s purpose. There are *always* opportunities around us, and when we see these opportunities around us, whether to help someone in need or to share the Gospel, we should act with courage and faith. Recognizing that these opportunities come from God helps us to be more *intentional* in how we respond to them. Showing up for someone doesn’t have to involve some big grand gesture. It can be as simple as a smile, a hug, or a warm fleece blanket.

7) And similarly, we should be prepared. Special opportunities can come our way at any moment. We must *stay* prepared for when they come to us. We must set in our hearts and minds that *we are going* to answer God when an opportunity to share Christian love arises. Each opportunity presents us with a chance to make a positive impact in our community and the world. We transform every gesture of kindness, every moment of service into opportunities to reflect the love of Christ. Be grateful for the opportunities. Opportunities to share God’s love help us to grow, connect, and deepen our relationships.

8) And finally, I want to add that sometimes it’s necessary to show up for ourselves. As the popular sayings go, “we can’t take care of others if we don’t take care of ourselves” and “put on your own oxygen mask first.” Do things that refresh you, that make you smile, that nurture your spirit so you are ready to show up for others when God calls.

I want to leave you with a very short story. Perhaps you’ve heard it before.

There are five seagulls sitting on a dock. One of them decides to fly away. How many seagulls are left? Did you answer four like I did the first time I heard this story? Well, we’d be wrong. There are still five seagulls sitting on the dock. Deciding to fly away is not the same thing as actually flying away.

Deciding that you want to help out a neighbor more is not the same thing as actually helping out a neighbor. Deciding to volunteer for a non-profit is not the same thing as actually volunteering for a non-profit. Asking God to help us have love and patience with others and then going about our day finding fault with everything and everyone is not the same as thing as asking God to help us have love and patience and then *remembering* throughout the day that we had asked God for this help.

Ask me how I know this.

It’s The Do That Matters.

Tabitha’s friends could have talked amongst themselves and said, “you know, I heard that that Peter fellow is somewhere around here. We should call for him” but then nobody fetches him.

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Or Peter could have been summoned by Tabitha's friends but thought to himself, "I'll go after I catch some fish for supper" but then he gets sidetracked by some boat races on the Mediterranean Sea and never goes.

It wasn't the desire of Tabitha's friends that raised her from the dead. It wasn't really even the fact that Peter *had the ability* to resurrect her. It was the "doing" of Peter and Tabitha's friends. They showed up and did something.

Please, please don't think that I am trying to guilt trip anyone. I am probably the worst offender when it comes to good intentions and lack of follow-through.

And I know that probably everyone here already gives time and money to the church and its mission, and so many of you already share your talents.

I think that this Scripture serves as somewhat of a reminder that we just need to show up when God presents the opportunities, just as God presented the opportunity to Tabitha's friends, and just as God presented the opportunity to Peter, just as my daughter showed up for me in the ER.

Praise be to God. Amen.