

### 1. Acts 9:36-43

9:36 Now 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. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since 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." So 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. Peter 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. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

### Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

### John 10:22-30

10:22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Would you pray with me? Loving

God, our comfort and our hope, we come to

you on this special day seeking your

guidance. Open our ears to hear your word,

open our hearts to learn your understanding

and open our hands to join in your work.

Amen



Church, it is my pleasure to be here with you today on this side of the pulpit. Many of you have reached out to welcome me in the past few weeks as I've begun to attend. For those who I haven't yet had the pleasure to meet, my name is Erin Simmons and I am a Provisional Deacon from the Northern Illinois Conference. My husband and I recently resettled here in Port Angeles. In the UMC, we often describe our wonderful elders like pastor Tom here as shepherds - appointed to go and care for a church flock. Deacons work hand in hand with elders as bridges. We are called to equip the saints here in our local churches and help them get out of the church into the community to share their gifts with the world. Many of us work in the world, which helps us to invite the world, especially those most in need, into the church. While our callings differ, we are our best together.

I have a heart and a calling to work with young people and their families. Over the years I have worked at camps, teaching nature programs, in local churches, and in social work. This week I begin a new role at the Washington Department of Children Youth and Families downtown here in PA working in Family Reconciliation - mostly with runaway teens and their families to give them services to stay together. While I have a deep passion for teens, please wish me luck and pray for me.

As I have reflected upon these scriptures and their occurrence on mother's day - I have thought a lot about my own mother - and those who have mothered me

through my life so far. My mother was our church organist. While my brother often stayed home with my father, my younger sister and I always went to every service with my mother. My best friends now are PK's - pastor's kids - and we have a lot in common. The church has always been a warm welcoming nurturing place for me. My mother has great gifts in serving, she loves to be in the background and provide hospitality. We would still with her in this little bench behind the organ in the far corner of the chancel area. One day I vividly remember our play got a little out of hand, and during a sermon, our ball somehow found it's way bouncing across the chancel and rolling down the steps into the front pews. We were afraid to even look up to see the look on our mother's face - surely red but visible by the entire congregation. The next week, unbeknownst to us, was the start of rotation of amazing church ladies, who took my sister and I by the hand excitedly sharing that we would get to sit with them today for worship.

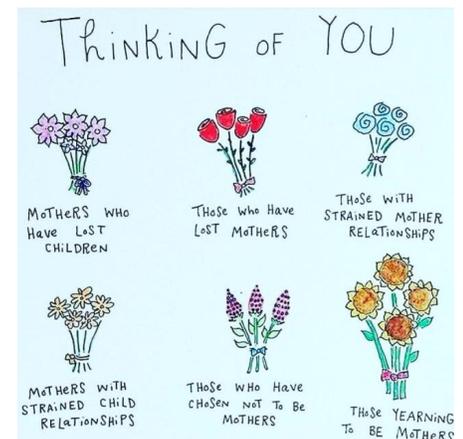
It is not lost on me that in our passage from Acts today we have the only time a woman is named and specifically called a disciple. In Greek the work is Mathetria, and as we hear about Tabitha or Dorcas in Greek - so named twice - this is the only occurrence of the feminine word. Now of course, this is an entirely different context than what we know today here in our lovely little corner of the world. As we honor our Mother's Day with gifts, pictures, brunches, tributes and more - we know the amazing calling and gifts that God has given to so many women. The roots of

Mother's Day even are found in the Methodist Church. Rev. Rob McCoy of Moline, IL writes of the founders of Mother's Day **They were crusaders, rallying around the universal power of mothers to make the world a better place.** Their passion, their overriding sense of call, was to the cause of peace. Julia Ward Howe, who wrote, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was appalled by the evils of war and wanted to create a day where women would come together to make change in the world. Juliet Calhoun Blakely came to the pulpit in her Methodist Church in Michigan when the pastor was too drunk to finish the job and preached about temperance. Anna Jarvis taught Sunday school at a Methodist Church in West Virginia. Jarvis advocated for children's health and welfare and promoted peace in a community torn by political rivalries. It was in West Virginia that the first Mother's Day was officially recognized in 1908.

As Peter comes to deathbed of Tabitha, we hear this amazing widows gifts exalted by the community. She sewed clothing, ensuring none would go without. Her life had been transformed by the message of love we call the gospel, and others saw God radiating out of her. On this Mother's Day, we remember Tabitha, and so many like her in our communities and beyond whose discipleship brought joy and life into the lives of all those around her. We lift up the beautiful stories and the difficult. Love is patient and kind, and complicated. Many of us grieve on Mother's Day, for those who have left us. For mothers who have died, and for Mother's who left because they were not able to mother. We lift up those mothers

who have lost children - those again who have died- especially the community of Highland ranch Colorado reeling from the latest school shooting leaving many injured and one senior having a funeral instead of a graduation, and those children who have not been able to stay in relationship with their mothers. We lift up those who have strained relationships with their mothers, and mothers who have strained relationships with their child. We also celebrate those who many not be our biological mothers - but mother us just the same. And we lift up those who yearn to be mothers, and the many hardships that keep that reality from coming true. Love is complicated.

In our passage from Acts today, we encounter a community in grief. When they call for Peter, they aren't calling for a miracle. They are simple asking for his presence. In their mourning, they are holding themselves together, and reaching out for support. Stephen Jones in the commentary *Feasting On the Word*, offers the thought "The helpful distinction is between praying for a cure, which seems to dictate to God our desired outcome, and praying for healing, which can come in a hundred unexpected ways. God's Spirit will intervene on behalf of our prayers, yet the healing that comes often surprises us



and causes us to catch our collective breath...Communal healing requires that we overcome the intense privacy and individualism that are the cultural icons of our day.”

As we each come to this sacred space today - we all have different hurts that need healing. On this Mother’s Day, I hope that we hear the Good news that our God brings us into community to be healed. Especially in unexpected ways.

In our passage from John this morning, we continue to with that theme of unexpected, although we often do as we venture past the synoptic storytelling gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Here we find Jesus celebrating Hanukkah, the festival of dedication, and facing an opposition group of Jews. While very different - the idea of a deep political and religious divide is very real to us here today. As we strive to follow Jesus and live lives of discipleship where our actions speak out faith like Tabitha and so many church mothers who have gone ahead of us. We in the United Methodist Church today know very well the things that divide us. And so find Jesus being met by these opposition Jews demanding to know what they want to know. Giving Jesus their own litmus test for belonging. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." As I have studied scripture, the one thing I continue to come away with is that it does not speak to us plainly. And worse, when we want it to - or force it to, without taking the care to find out the context - it is as dangerous as running across the street without looking.

Jesus replies, I have had this conversation with you before. (I can hear my mother's voice there) If you don't believe my words, look to my actions. In my work in social work - this hits me hard. I have heard many a parent say the right things when wanting to reunify with their children and yet their actions past and present speak a much different story. I know we all believe in discourse and conversation. Yet even Jesus here reminds us that our actions speak to who we are. In a world where we have already had 15 school shootings this year in the US, our actions and our faith speak to who we are. In a world where another state passes a 6 week heartbeat law, despite cutting funds to support low income families and children experiencing poverty, our actions and our faith speak to WHO WE ARE. Friends, these problems are complex and don't have one easy answer. And yet we cannot throw up our hands and ignore them.

Jesus heard the litmus test from these leaders - and its literal interpretation of scripture and answers with creative words from Psalm 98. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What exactly does that mean? Ironically, Jesus does not answer them plainly. Yet, he offers words that bring comfort. He recognized the bond that we as disciples have with him. He describes himself as the good shepherd.

Friends - if we come to our holy scriptures and our faith looking for plain answers on how to live in black and white - we will not find them just as we do not

find black and white in our own families. On this wonderful day of celebration, let us see a world not of black and white - but of color - of yellow daffodils and red roses. Let our actions speak of the transforming love of God in our lives, and bring light and life into the lives of others. Let us take comfort in the good news that Jesus, our good shepherd is with us and the gift of presence is a great one that we can also share. Let us relish in that peace and go out to from here to share it.