

# A Sermon for DaySpring

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**“It Happens all the Time”**

Acts 9: 36-43

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On every page of Acts there’s something dramatic taking place.  
Someone’s ascending...

Someone’s speaking in a language they don’t know...

Someone’s having a vision...

Someone drops dead... Someone else is blinded.

Someone is healed... lots of some ones, actually.

Someone’s preaching a sermon they shouldn’t be able to preach, **“They hadn’t even been to seminary.”**

There are signs and wonders on every page... so that ten times in the first ten chapters Luke says something to the effect of, **“There was great power in the church... or in this apostle or that one.”** Luke uses the word “power” ten times to describe what is going on... what was flowing into and through the Church.

And we read about that and we say... what?

**“Sure wish it was still that way????”** or...

**“It could be, we’re just not doing something right. Don’t have enough faith or the right words or something.”** Or

**“That was a special time...”** and

**“They were special people.”**

Or maybe because our perspective is so limited by time and cynicism, we say in our rationality something irrational like, **“I’ve never seen it, so it must not be so. I’m thinking the writer just got a little carried away. This should be called Tales of the Apostles, not Acts of the Apostles.”**

There are a lot of things we might be thinking... the most common of which might be, **“I sure do wish God would do something like that in my life.”**

In Acts it seems almost the rule of thumb. If the Apostles are around, something out of the ordinary will happen... Out of the ordinary was ordinary...

That’s why, in our text for today, when Tabitha died and they heard that Peter... that Apostle who was with Jesus... was down the road in the next village... **“They sent two men urging him to ‘please come at once’.”**

There’s lots of grieving going on back in Joppa. Tabitha, who was also called Dorcas... (which I always thought was unfortunate) had died. Dorcas was dead. Apparently she was quite a person...

She had a business that was really booming... she made beautiful cloth and robes... had her own clothing line. **Dorcas Jeans...** And from the sound of it, maybe she employed lots of the widows in town. And remember how critical that would be... The only Social Security for a widow was a compassionate community.

And the widows are vulnerable and wailing in this story... because Dorcas cared for them so... Apparently, she'd cared for everyone... **"She was always doing good,"** Luke says, **"And helping the poor."** That's just the way Dorcas was.

Luke says that she was a disciple.

We don't know why it happened and happened here... Because people who are good disciples die everyday... but when Dorcas died, the folks said, **"Peter is down the road a piece, let's go get him."**

Because every day things were happening that didn't normally happen. There is power, and power is flowing like a torrent through the Church... and through the Saints. So they go get him and he goes with them.

Peter goes, and the healing, this restoration of life, is reminiscent of the two Old Testament miracles with Elijah and Elisha... And Jesus did something just like this, too. Sent people out of the room... just like Peter does... and then said to a little girl... **"Talitha Cumi"**

Peter, having prayed on his knees, says... **"Tabitha Cumi."** It's just almost the same. And she got up and he called **"for the believers, especially the widows,"** Luke says.

And as Luke often says at the end of the drama... **"Word spread and people believed."**

I guess so... Miracles seem to have that effect and open the door of faith for folks. It's no wonder we'd like to see them. We've longed for the kind of power that was flowing in those early days.

And maybe wondering...

Could it be that way again?...

Is it ever???

There was great power in the church then and we're wondering if there is still. Maybe looking for it... hoping. Can it be now as it was then?

It was on every page of the story. And some of that was that God had been so present in Jesus... this flow of life had been so condensed and channeled; it was like a white water river... powerful like that. Not like the power of a Mississippi that changes the land over time.

More like a flood that changes everything in an hour. Condensed Spirit, and don't think you haven't known that. You have... an intensity of life in some situation or someone. That was the norm for the early Church... it was flooding and they were trying to hang on and let it carry them.

It was powerful... But there were other things. A profound sense of community. Luke always notes that... He'll describe some great drama and then say, **"They were gathering daily to eat together."** Or **"They had all things in common."** Or **"No one was lacking anything."** They created deacons, the diaconate, to make sure widows got food. The widows in the church at Joppa all had a job at the Dorcas Outlet. And there was this great power.

There was significant community... and such intentionality. No one went to church just because it was habit. You never knew where Jesus might show up... You went expecting and, I promise, your expectations change things. There was a kind of affirming attention to what was happening. And... there was great power.

And they were in need. These folks had been thrown into something they had no control over. There was no self-sufficiency. There were no church consultants running about telling folks what to do next. **“Do these four things and your church will be alive and invigorating.”** They didn’t know what the heck was happening... they just knew that had to rely on God. And... there was great power.

And something was happening that was so compelling. It was so real... and folks were living it... It wasn’t just some proposition... They lived it. Taking risks here and there. There was a vulnerability in the faithful... People were out on a limb with one another and with the world around them. Daily living in a way that was different because of the resurrection. And it was very powerful. Careful existence doesn’t ignite much of anything.

They were also so open. They weren’t closed off... and Luke often drops little lines to help us see that. It wasn’t just that power was healing people... it was changing people.

Philip finds believers down in Samaria of all places... Peter and John go down to check it out, and sure enough... those wacky Samaritans are becoming disciples of Jesus, too.... And Luke drops this little line... **“They returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.”** They were preaching in places just months before they wouldn’t have touched with a ten-foot pole. Just a little line to show us how open they were becoming.

And Luke does it again in our text for today. **“Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.”** And if you were a first-century Jew reading this for the first time, you’d say, **“Grosssssssss. Ugggghh.”** The first time it was read out loud at First Church Galatia, three people lost their breakfast.

See, a tanner... for an orthodox Jew... was as unclean as unclean could be. He worked with dead animal bodies all the time.

He was ceremonially unclean and therefore spiritually unclean and could contaminate other people. It was like a virus.

A woman could actually divorce her husband for being a tanner.

This was on par with being a leper...

it was, well, gross.

And Simon Peter goes home with Simon the Tanner, probably every fiber of being, body, and soul protesting. You know how it is, when your head’s a step behind your heart. When your “want to” hasn’t caught up with your “ought to.”

Peter doesn’t want to, but... But he goes... because in the church there is this openness.

It’s not hard to imagine that first night. They get home... the place smelled... as did his host. You ever cleaned and skinned and gutted a deer? Cleaned a mess of fish? The smell doesn’t leave. Scrub all you want... try to hide it with lemon juice... but you still smell. It’s under the skin.

Nostrils screaming, Peter steps across the threshold into something new.

And the tanner is so humble and so excited. **“Can I get you something to eat?.... The back porch is full; they just brought in some new kill this morning. I’m pretty sure we can find something fresh enough to eat.”**

**“Ah... well... okay.”** Peter has dinner... he spends the night and another night and another night... and it’s hard... but he does it. And Luke doesn’t say it there, but great power was flowing through the Church and being displayed. How could it not?.... Life is... it moves...

it's in us and in others. And when we live with open hearts a current begins to flow faster... and things happen. Astonishing things.

Like physical healings, which are astonishing... but so, too, are healings that involve all the habits we're enslaved to... It's no small manifestation of God's power for you to open yourself up to someone who is different than you... or to someone you've been hurt by, is it?

Healing relationships...

Healing a broken, frightened spirit...

Healing an angry mind...

... that takes the power... the life of God.

Healing the world of its hate...

Moving us beyond our shallow, self-centeredness.

Moving races out of their painful separation...

That's about the power of God. And the story of Acts tells us that power has been let loose in the Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reality of God... the life, light, love... creative presence that was among and is among us in the Church.

And especially where the Church really is the Church. Where there is no separation, and community matters, and folks sacrifice for one another. Power flows in the Church where people are willing to take risks and be real and show up, needy and all. Remember, the cross is a vulnerability that saves the world. Not all independent and self-reliant. In the early days of this church, whatever healing power was flowing... was flowing because we didn't know what we were doing and because lots of us were broken. Life always flows to a wound.

There is great power... where people are open to one another... to things that are new. Where there is some willingness to walk across a threshold, simply because it seems to be where God is leading you.

There is power summoned when transformation is the agenda. You start wanting change and something will start flowing to you... And maybe to you through us.

It can happen...

It does happen all the time...

People, by the power of God, are walking a new way.

It's real... just like it was in Acts. It's here this day and we can know it.