*This message was delivered by Rev. David M. Montgomery to the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church, Tontogany, Ohio on the fourth Sunday of the Season of Easter, Mother’s Day, the twelve day of May in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen.* *It is based on the following Scriptures:*

Acts 9:36-43  (CEB)

**36**In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need. **37**About that time, though, she became so ill that she died. After they washed her body, they laid her in an upstairs room. **38**Since Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two people to Peter. They urged, “Please come right away!” **39**Peter went with them. Upon his arrival, he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood beside him, crying as they showed the tunics and other clothing Dorcas made when she was alive.

**40**Peter sent everyone out of the room, then knelt and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. **41**He gave her his hand and raised her up. Then he called God’s holy people, including the widows, and **presented her alive** to them. **42**The news spread throughout Joppa, and many put their faith in the Lord. **43**Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with a certain tanner named Simon.

John 10:22-30 (CEB)

**22**The time came for the Festival of Dedication[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+10%3A22-30&version=CEB#fen-CEB-26492a)] in Jerusalem. It was winter, **23**and Jesus was in the temple, walking in the covered porch named for Solomon. **24**The Jewish opposition circled around him and asked, “How long will you test our patience? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

**25**Jesus answered, “I have told you, but you don’t believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, **26**but you don’t believe because you don’t belong to my sheep. **27**My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. **28**I give them eternal life. They will never die, and no one will snatch them from my hand. **29**My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from my Father’s hand. **30**I and the Father are one.”

Presented Alive
Acts 9:36-43

Here it is, the fourth Sunday of Easter and we get another resurrection story. The lectionary committee wants us to know that the resurrection is not a one-time thing. Ann Marie and I had a member of our church in Kentucky who came to church Christmas and Easter. When asked “Why do you only come on C&E?” he said, “Because it’s always the same message.” I guess that’s true. Our daughter-in-law, who is a Muslim, after worshipping with us every time she visited said, “You sure talk about Jesus a lot.” GUILTY- I hope I preach about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Prince of Peace, Lord of lords and King of kings often. So this story in Acts is another resurrection- it’s the story of new life, of new beginnings, of not letting death win.

So, yes, this is the same message. But Ann Marie and I also had a member of our church who never missed a Sunday if he could help it “Lest we forget” he said. “I come to be reminded of the Story! The same message that we must never forget!”

In our resurrection story today we have Peter. You remember Peter?

He is the one who Jesus said He would build His Church upon this Rock. This Peter, one of the inner circle with James and John who witnessed the Transfiguration. This Peter who denied Jesus and ran from Jesus’ side at the arrest and crucifixion. This Peter who walked with Jesus, traveled with Jesus, saw Jesus die and ran from Jesus and then met the risen Lord three time then as early as Act 3 this Peter, the Rock was healing people in Jesus’ name. Remember, “Silver and gold I have none, but such as I have giveth thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk”?

Now in Acts 9 Peter is in Joppa, 45 miles North-West of Jerusalem, way over on the Mediterranean Sea. In those days a long way from home. He is expanding the bounds of Jesus’ love and influence and is called in to help, to raise Tabitha from the dead. Now in our English translation we miss a lot. Tabitha, Dorcas in Greek, is the feminine form of the word we translate “disciple”. This is the only time this word is used. Tabitha, a female disciple has died.

Her work, which is recorded as she was always doing good.” Do you know anyone like that?

There goes that “Do-gooder, Margaret”, I would hear people say of my mother. Tabitha heads a welfare program among the poor of Joppa, the widow and the orphans and the immigrants and Peter is going to make sure that “Death will not have the final say.” But let’s be as clear as we can. It is not Peter who turns our history inside out by raising Tabitha from the dead. It is the Story, capital S. The Story of Jesus Christ proclaiming that our history is not closed and there is someone, some subversive reality, here for the widows, downtrodden, orphans, oppressed of the world. It’s that same story that is always new.

The raising of Tabitha stands as a witness to the power of the resurrection of Christ over all persons. Look through the rest of the Holy Scriptures. 1 Kings 17- widow’s son raised by Elijah who stretched himself out three times. 2 Kings 4- Shunammite’s son raised by Elisha who stretched himself out two times. Luke 8- Jesus raised Jarius’ daughter who simply said, “My child, get up!” John 11- Lazarus raised by Jesus. Jesus cried out, “Lazarus, come out!” New life all over the place.

Now Acts 9- Peter ushers everyone out of the room and says, “Tabitha, get up!”

Then he presented her alive! At this reading I am reminded of our Brief Statement of Faith that recounts, “In life and in death, we belong to God.” That comforts me every time I hear it.

This story is for those of us where things in our lives are fixed, closed, settled, and dead. This story is for those of us who grieve today. What is our mindset four weeks after Easter? Do we really want to think about the resurrection for that long? Does it start to sound like a re-run? Friends, we celebrate the resurrection every single Sunday- even through Lent we pause each Sunday to celebrate the resurrection.

From this Story the Church recognizes that the resurrected Christ possesses the power to bring new life to all persons and that power flows directly out of the new life God gave to Jesus on Easter Day. Where ever the risen Christ is present, there is a new power to overcome the handicaps of human existence.

Death will not have the last word! The Story moves on to a fresh affirmation of divine power. Peter’s “Tabitha, get up” reminds us of all the resurrections entrenched in the Story.

Jesus’ disciples have the same power over death that Jesus has. The Easter commotion continues.

Here, old Tabitha rises from death to life. We see Easter happening all over again. The poor, the broken, the downtrodden have someone who comes along beside them and boldly speaks a word of life. Death, in whatever forms it presents itself, is defeated. Do we believe it? Many people don’t think that resurrection is going to happen today- just talk to my college students. We don’t often think what resurrection might be in our own lives.

I have found an abundance of people who live in the scarcity mindset, that there is not enough for everyone. Yet the resurrection story is one of abundance, plenty, more than enough that even death can’t conquer it.

Acts was written to address questions of hope and faith: What is the hope for the future? How shall we be faithful? These are questions of the oppressed, arguments among those who have nothing left but the promises of God. The church was the misunderstood, persecuted, minority movement, fighting for its life…Acts is the world of faith viewed, in a sense, ‘from the bottom up,’

from the standpoint of a ridiculed, persecuted, ignored, religious minority hanging between life and death on the fringes of the dominant culture.” (Will Willimon p, 88)

I wonder if that’s the Church today. Did you know the fastest growing religious group in America are the “Nones”- n-o-n-e-s. Those with no church affiliation. For many, the institutional church has lost its Story, its meaning, its purpose, its impact, its relevance.

Melissa Wiginton, VP of Austin Seminary reports, One quiet, thoughtful young man said, “It’s hard. This generation (his own) think they have no sin. They have been so affirmed and protected by their parents, no matter what, that they really don’t think anything is wrong with them. It makes it really hard.” Another woman, feistier, said that the church offers an explanation for the injustice her friends get riled up about. “We can give them a frame: structural sin -- evil -- what it is and what it means.” Finally, one student said, “The other night I met my friend’s sister. We got to talking, and it dawned on me that she is lonely.

She really wants to be part of a community where she is accepted for who she is and she doesn’t believe she’ll find it in the church.

“She wants something like my Milk Truck group at the baseball game. Every game, this one guy parks his old milk truck up the hill and a bunch of people stand around and talk all through the game. Some of them are lawyers from the Capitol. One guy’s a mechanic. When they find out I’m a youth minister, they apologize for cussing. We’re all the same for nine innings around the Milk Truck. That’s the kind of thing she’s looking for.”

I want to shout, “Tabitha, rise up! There is new life offered to each of you THIS DAY!

When challenged about his faith, Jim Wallis responds, “I believe in the resurrection — the actual historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Both my faith and my hope absolutely depend on the resurrection of Jesus. I remember a conversation I had, many years ago, with some of the Jesus Seminar New Testament theologians. One of them asked me, “Do you actually believe in the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ?”

I felt the eyes looking at me. “Yes, I do,” I replied. “Well, the resurrection is more metaphorical for us,” they said. I silently pondered their statement, and whether to start up again the endless theological debates about the reality and meaning of the resurrection in the Christian apologetics. It has all been said before. Instead, another question came to mind, so I asked them, “Do you think a merely metaphorical resurrection would have been adequate for Desmond Tutu in South Africa?” The question brought silence to the table and ended the conversation.

Believing in this resurrection helps me more easily see the continuing signs of hope in our world, and our moment. Believing helps me to continue to trust that hope can indeed be greater than all the pain.”

Easter is not simply the most important day in the life of the church and Christians. It is better understood as a season that has the power and potential to bring forth rebirth and transformation — which continues to undergird and inspire our hope. When we receive and take in the Good News of the Story (capital S) then maybe, no not maybe, but certainly Jesus will present us alive.

For those who have ears to hear and lips to tell. Amen.