

Dorcas Sermon – April 21, 2013

My Grandmother made this quilt. She makes lots of them - using up scraps of material. In this one I can see bits of material from dresses and skirts that were my moms and mine. She also made mitts and socks for us every year (which frankly, as children we didn't appreciate one bit) but now this quilt and one other like it, are all I have that she made. It's very important to me. Gram died in 1984.

### **Read 36-39**

My question this morning is: what will it be that we leave behind for the people who come after us? At what was supposed to be Dorcas' funeral - the things they would remember her by - weeping - precious to them now that she was gone.

What will be the things people bring - in their hands or their hearts - to your funeral? What will their memories be? What "garments", if you will, are you making for others that will clothe them, protect them, warm them, after you're gone? (*pause*)

This is a bit of an aside, but it's amazing to me how emotional clothing is.

These people brought to the funeral clothing Dorcas had made for them. I don't know what it had meant to them before but now that she was dead (and of course they had no idea that she was going to be raised to life again) now that she was gone it meant a great deal to have something that she and touched that her hands had stitched.

It's like that with clothing people have worn as well - I don't know if you've ever had to take care of someone's clothing after they die - but cleaning out the closets is perhaps the most painful of all the things you have to do. Clothing is extremely emotional.

It was something like that last Tuesday evening. The UCW hosted an evening of fashions from the past. It was WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL! Part of what made it that way was the feeling of connection that you get from seeing and touching clothing that somebody special wore. A ski suit from the 1920's - a wedding dress from 1930 - someone's mother's going away outfit - your Sunday school teacher's prom dress. Those are important bonds.... sentimental, emotional garments that are much more

than yard goods stitched together - they bridge gaps and make bonds and speak of continuing life in a unique way - resurrection of sorts. It's no wonder scripture uses clothing as a metaphor so often: from Adam and Eve right through to the white robes here in Revelation - that would be an interesting study in itself sometime.... Those must have been some of the feelings they brought along with those garments to the upper room where Dorcas rested.

Again - what are you making in your life, what gifts are you giving to people that will remain with them when you're gone? And as a church - what are we making? What are we fashioning that will be handed on - a gift to the generation to follow us?

There is a lot of prayer and thought these days about the direction the church is heading - what will be our future, what form the church will take in coming generations and what will be our mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Good questions. What will we leave to the Christians who follow us? Some say there will be no future for the church - I can't believe that. Ask Dorcas if life can come out of death. Some people feel that we should pass on exactly what was given to us - no changes, no alterations - the church, exactly as it was in our parents' day. Is that a garment that will fit our children? Has it worn well for us? In any piece of clothing passed on down - especially if the material is sturdy and strong - there have to be alterations - take up a hem, let it out, take it in - in some cases remake the garment entirely.

What changes will need to be made so that this church fits a new generation? Protects them, warms them, lets them express themselves and empowers the as all good garments are meant to do? What changes? Are we will to make them? To refuse to change is to let the garment hang in the closet, yellowing and fit finally for a museum. Is that what the church will become?

When this generation of church people is gone what are the things our children will bring to our funeral - thankful that we made them?

The other readings today are about shepherds and sheep. We've dealt with them before from the point of view of leadership. In April a year ago we

looked at the same Psalm and gospel reading and asked if the image of shepherd and sheep is a good one for leadership in the church. Because we've dealt with it that way before, I don't want to dwell on that question again now - but this cluster of readings raises the question. What kind of leaders are right for the church in this day and age? For the church as a whole – for this church?

Always, always to answer such a question, we look first to God. What kind of leadership would we give? Well - first, what kind have we been given?

From Revelation - a fantastic vision of a God who is at the centre of creation and is the God of all people. ALL PEOPLE. This is the God who, with the Lamb is with the people in their deepest trouble - who has experienced that trouble too - to the point of death and who has become victorious over anything the evil in this world can do. That's who God is - the one who is the centre of every created thing and who will be with us until the end and beyond. Who stands with those who suffer and who shows that suffering will never have the last word.

From John - God, the one who knows us by name - who leads by going the way before us - who is willing to sacrifice everything to protect and defend us - and who wants us to be one flock, following only one shepherd.

And from Acts - God who entrusts authority to a scraggly band of uneducated cowards who turned into a Church - the Body of Christ - able to do what He did. Here we have Peter, by the power of God raising a woman from death - very like the raising of Jairus' daughter by Jesus - remember? He said to her "Tabitha cumi" which means "little girl, get up". Here Peter says the same thing.

Here is God trusting the Good News - the precious message of salvation - trusting it to ... to us! What kind of leadership is that? What can we learn about leadership from this cluster of readings today?

We could talk about that a long time - but we won't. I'd like you to think about it though - and talk about it among yourselves.

Whatever we do as far as our own leadership is concerned, we need to take our pattern and our cue from God. One who suffers with us and redeems that suffering. One who knows us by name and who is willing to sacrifice even God's very life for us. One who trusts leadership to others

and who raises up those who can carry one in faithful ways. Raises up leaders - disciples - like Dorcas. We could go a long way to find a better example of church leadership.

She was “full of good works and acts of charity” She was “a disciple”

She used her gifts to create things of beauty and usefulness. How very God-like –

- to make something from nothing
- to take a scrap of material - see in it possibilities and turn it into something unique and gorgeous
- to take many scraps not much good by themselves, that normally would clash when put together, but with the quilter’s skillful and loving hands they are turned into - a crazy quilt - or a church.
- to take something old and worn out - to remake it so that it’s like brand new again: a coat into a jacket: a dress into a skirt - Saul into Paul, the person you were yesterday into the person you are today
- mending the parts that are worn and not so strong anymore what is more God-like than that?

At work right now in the church are individuals and groups - Dorcas - who minister and lead in just those ways. As we face the future consider what things we will have, to leave behind as gifts to those who come after....

By looking in Dorcas’ direction we’ll not be far off the pattern. Amen.