

"Life-giving Acts"
(Acts 9: 36-43)
May 8, 2022

Are we supposed to do a better job than the health professionals then? Jesus brought his good friend Lazarus back to life. We don't know when, but Lazarus finally died. Dorcas in Joppa was known for her good works and acts of love for the poor. The people there loved her. However, she suddenly became ill and died. The faith community knew that Peter was in Lydda. So, they requested Peter to come to Joppa, probably to be in charge of her burial ceremony. Nobody was expecting that Peter could do anything else for Dorcas, even though Peter healed a man recently who had been bed-ridden for eight years. Dorcas' case was different. She had died already, and her body was bathed and placed in an upper room, ready to be buried. When Peter showed up at her place, all the widows showed him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas made, hoping that Peter would help everyone remember how much Dorcas meant to the community.

Peter miraculously revived Dorcas. But why did Peter do that? Why Dorcas? Why did it happen at the infant stage of the Christian community? There could be more questions that we can ask, but Luke didn't explain further. He just moved on to describe that a lot more of these unthinkable and unexplainable events happened after the Pentecost. The Holy Spirit made things happen everywhere and at any time as it wished. Do you think if Dorcas finally died, like Lazarus? Definitely! If she finally had to die, why did God use Peter to revive her? We can ask Jesus the same question: "Why did he bring Lazarus back to life?" or "Why did he work miracles at all?"

Miracles are not unique in Christianity. Rabbinic Judaism took their occurrences for granted. Buddha refused to spread his teaching by impressing his audience with miracles, but nobody questioned that he and hundreds of monks of his order had that power. Daoism in China, Islam, and many folk religions claimed to be able to work miracles too. Some people believe in it, and some don't. So maybe we should consider miracles as common religious phenomena but not as criteria for the trustworthiness of a religion. For modern people like us, we tend to rely on the health practitioners who work closely with our physical, mental, and psychological well-being and consider believing in miracles as irrational. However, do natural sciences answer all the questions about nature, medical sciences about life, and psychological sciences about the soul? In reality, they have revealed more questions than answers.

Miracles do not reveal themselves only in events when natural or scientific laws are interrupted. The emergence of a new life, various life forms, and the extinction of only some of them are all miracles. The feeling of the observers who observe all these happenings defines their significance.

The miracle performed in today's scripture could be seen as a life-giving act. Peter was the one who performed that act. The community in Joppa shared with him the works Dorcas did. Peter was the vessel that channeled the life back to Dorcas so that she could continue her work a little bit longer as a witness to what she believed and devoted. Peter touched a corpse, considered unclean according to their culture. But God changed the corpse through him. She became alive again, the holiest moment one could ever experience. Peter witnessed what had happened, saw how people celebrated and became more devoted. But God

has not done with Peter yet. Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon the tanner, whose profession dealt with dead animals and urine, an unclean business. God was preparing Peter to do another life-giving act, not on a corpse this time, but a dirty living soul. Cornelius was his name, the captain of the Italian Guard. (Acts 10)

Do you still think the subject of today's scripture was Dorcas? Are you still stuck with the questions about the possibility of a miracle? Why Dorcas? Why Peter? Remember, no matter how important Lazarus was to Jesus and Dorcas to the community in Joppa, their coming back to life was only temporary. The long-lasting impact was not on them but on Peter, who would lead the newly formed church, on us, who would follow the way of Christ, to perform the life-giving acts to others, the ones we might hate or the ones who might hate us, now, and in the future.

Jesus healed a royal officer's son who was sick and close to death at Capernaum. (John 4:46-53) If this boy lived long enough, he would become ill and face death again. Why did Jesus heal him? Well, the love and care of God were not only for the helpless and poor. Even for a man of high standing at the court of Herod, when he looked for God's help, God was there for him. Who would receive the call and perform the life-giving act?

Jesus restored the mental health of a demon-possessed man in the territory of the Gerasenes that belonged to the Gentiles at the expense of a whole herd of pigs, about two thousand of them. The people there asked Jesus to leave because the damage he had done was too much. Two thousand pigs in exchange for one person's health? It's not worth it. Jesus didn't just do the life-saving act and walk away, but he asked the once demon-possessed man to stay with his

people. The life-saving act on him was only a beginning. He should continue with it. God is calling us to do the same, to perform the life-giving act. There'll be resistance, but are we ready? (Mark 5: 1-20)

Life is short, and it's up to you to make it sweet. If we simply take care of what we are doing daily, e.g., looking good, eating well, living comfortably, or traveling with minimal hindrance, they won't last. However, suppose we focus instead on drawing people's attention to the characters of the persons we admire, an environmentally friendly lifestyle, a community of love we try to build, and freedom that would benefit all. In that case, we are performing the life-giving acts with results that will last.

You know what? We are doing the same things, not implicitly, though, but intentionally. So instead of seeing and hearing others praise God, we praise God ourselves. Instead of hearing the prepared sermons, we decide what we would like to know. Instead of being informed of what to pray for, we explore where our hearts lie. We shouldn't wait. There are so many things we can do together in our Sunday worship service that we haven't tried before. So it's time to explore what they could be and do ourselves a favor. Perform the life-giving acts on ourselves. Just think of ourselves as a vessel like Peter, and let the Holy Spirit be the leader. Amen.