

Zoom service – 8th May 2022 – Julie Barham

Acts 9: 36- end, John 10:22-30



In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Today's quiz question – who are you? Don't worry, I haven't got the wrong readings – it is just that I am fascinated by the names in the reading from Acts. I thought about the things I have been called. Hannah and Harry's Mum. Peter's wife. The Vicar's wife. Online I am addressed as Joules, or Northernreader. When I was teaching it was Miss. Or accidentally Mum. Or Mrs Barham. When I began a new voluntary role recently I was told I could go under another name, and I even chose one, but decided I couldn't remember to carry it off. Think about some of the names you have been or are called by. Are they significant? Do they attract your attention? Do you think it doesn't matter?



In the Acts reading we are told of a woman with two names, which are both used in the passage. She was called Tabitha, or Dorcas in Greek. Maybe her friends called her one, and for official purposes she was known by the other. We do know that she was known to the disciples in Joppa; we know she was devoted to good works, and the reaction to her death shows that she was known to the new Christian disciples there as a believer. A deputation is sent to Peter who had also been known as Simon to fetch him. Why? He had probably been speaking and proclaiming the news about Jesus in the area, but we have to look among the sayings of Jesus pretty hard before we read about the possibility that he would be able to raise people from the dead.



Peter comes, and the widows – probably Tabitha’s friends – are weeping and showing him the tunics she had made. Presumably that was part of her good works, making clothes for people in her community. Peter puts them outside, prays, and then speaks to the body. “Tabitha, get up”. At this most important sentence in her life, he calls her Tabitha. It is an important thing to say, because she does get up, does appear to everyone as alive. It is a miracle that always reminds me of the story of Jesus raising Jairus’ daughter – a jaw dropping event that Peter seems to achieve in his ministry without huge fanfare, but has a terrific effect not only on Tabitha, but also on those who were there to witness it, those who were told about it, and even those who read about it today, about 2,000 years later.

Tabitha was known for her good works in the community, and probably her faith – one naturally flowed from the other. In our other reading today, Jesus is challenged as to what people should call him, what status he should be accorded. Jesus of Nazareth, a preacher, leader and teacher, or Messiah, the long awaited person that will change lives, even history, the one that the Jews had been waiting for over generations, the promised Saviour. Jesus doesn’t claim the role in a straightforward manner, he speaks about his works that testify to him. He suggests that they look what he has done if they want to know he is, what to call him. Moreover, he wants to point out that he is close to his Father, close to God.



These passages also make me think about how we label other people and perhaps what that means to what we and others think about them. “The Disabled” may conjure up pictures of people using a wheelchair, like on the

logo, but it can cover so many more people. People with sight, hearing and other sensory problems. People who have learning disabilities. So many people, lives affected by something that makes their lives different, often more difficult. That's why the idea of accessible is so difficult – accessible because it's a wide door, or because there's a hearing loop, or because there is an audible description of what is going on. In churches we can and do make sure that we have flat access and even a ramp, but that will not help everyone. We label other people as homeless, but they may not be just lacking an actual roof, but also heating, lighting and other necessities of real shelter. We label people as poor, but they may well be working in low paid jobs, or unable to find work they can actually do for various reasons, to be able to afford sufficient food for themselves and their families. We label people as refugees, but they may include someone who is fleeing danger in their homes in this country as well as from other places in the world.



Sometimes we can despair of anything being straightforward and simple, anything making a real difference in our broken world, our broken country. We can find faith, have faith, that God will make a difference. We can believe that God will make a difference in lives, a difference that will help. We can believe that we can make a difference in people's lives by our works, not maybe by running up a few tunics, but by being available to listen, to help as and when needed, contributing to food and other collections, by praying for particular situations. Because we can be sure that God loves us, whatever we are called, whatever our works, however we are labelled, because God knows us and cares for us, and we can be sure of that, today, tomorrow and forever. Amen.

Julie Barham, 6 May 2022