

8am sermon - Acts 9:36-end

Sometimes innocence is destroyed and good people suffer bad fates. It's is unfair and we rightly reel against it. But what does it look like to be a follower of Jesus at such times?

In our reading from Acts today we have a simple story of Peter raising Tabitha from the dead. It demonstrates the power of God given to the Church, and it challenges our faith in a God who lives and acts even today. But while reading this passage my mind was taken back to Luke 8 where Jesus raises a little girl from the dead.

You see, in both cases, it was unfair. Death should not take little girls. It just shouldn't happen. Death should also not take such good people as Tabitha before their time. Both deaths left gaping holes in their family and community, and both were symptoms of a broken and disordered world.

When Jesus arrived in Luke 8 he took only Peter and a couple of others into the room and he tenderly commanded the girl to get up. When Peter arrived at Tabitha's house he also sent people out. It was not to be a crowded moment. He prayed, and then, using the same sort of words as Jesus had done, he commanded Tabitha to get up. He took her by the hand, just as Jesus had done. In fact the only difference was that Peter used the woman's name, probably since she was an adult, whereas Jesus addressed the little girl in Luke 8 as Talitha - Little Girl. Ironically, the two commands would therefore have sounded very similar!

So what am I trying to say? I'm not saying that there is a magic form of words that can be used as an enchantment to bring people back from the dead. I'm not saying that God will right all the situations in our lives which we perceive as wrong or unfair. I'm not trying to get you all to start visiting dead people to pray for resurrections, although obviously I leave the option open since we serve an almighty and amazing God.

What I am trying to do is show how Peter drew upon his experience of Jesus, and when faced with a situation where the world seemed broken, his response was to mimic Jesus, as a faithful disciple. When faced with a problem he couldn't solve or a situation he couldn't navigate, Peter's instinct was to do what he had seen Jesus do.

It is very easy for us to get drawn in to theologising situations, or rationalising how our situation differs and how our world is different from the world of Jesus, and so on. For me, I get drawn very quickly into discussing doctrines of suffering, or simply giving platitudes. When Jesus came to earth, he did so, not so we could interpret everything he did and produce a set of religious sounding structures; he did so in order that we can follow him, be his disciples, and do what he did. We walk in his footsteps; we don't analyse his feet! And sometimes that will feel uncomfortable and scary. Sometimes, that will put us outside our comfort zones and risk failure and embarrassment.

And yes, of course we need to be sensible and discerning, but we also need to be careful not to shackle our following of Jesus by boxing him into our cultural norms and our rules of what we think should happen. We are following Jesus, not walking him on a leash!

And so, my challenge to all of us, me included, is like Peter, to really follow Jesus: to do what he does, to follow where he leads, and to be faithful with that in all circumstances. Amen.