

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • FEBRUARY 2, 2020 • EPIPHANY**  
**GUIDING LIGHT SERIES**

**The Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 16:12-19**

*Lord, you have done good things for us! What can we give back to you?*  
In the presence of God's people, we will keep the promises we have made.

*Lord, you have done good things for us! What can we give back to you?*

In the presence of God's people, we will be your servants.

*Lord, you have done good things for us! What can we give back to you?*

In the presence of God's people, we will give thanks and praise to you, Lord.

**The Scripture**  
**Acts 9:36-43**

*Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.*

**The Message**  
**Guiding Light: Service**  
**Mark Briley**

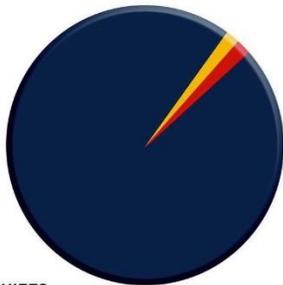
**Synopsis:** Dorcas is the first woman in the book of Acts specifically named as a disciple, and she is beloved. Acts says, "*She was devoted to good works and charity.*" The actual expression of this phrase in Greek is more closely, "*She is full of it!*" It was often a way people referred to being full of the Holy Spirit. Dorcas was full of it... and it was a beautiful thing. There are shiny lures in life that often distract us from our purpose. An act of service, however, can be a focused guiding light like nothing else.



There's a little football game today. It's just a game. It will come and go, and the problems we have now in the world will still exist when the game is over. Let's just keep that perspective, okay? That said, I have a little interest in what happens in the game. I've been watching the Chiefs since I was old enough to say, "*We lost again?*" We were optimistic every season but would falter in crunch time. We'd go to Sunday School and worship on Sunday's, stop by Kentucky Fried Chicken on the way home and get ready for kick-off. My dad, who was the minister at our church, was always the last one home. He'd rush in, and we'd all be cheering, and he'd get all excited and hoot and holler "*Let's go Chiefs!*," and then he'd sit in the recliner and fall asleep. Sunday's can be exhausting for pastors, you know? But he'll be up today and we're stoked.

I was surprised at the results of a poll taken to see who America would be cheering for this afternoon. I have this fancy pie chart that shares the results. Maybe you've seen it. It shows 5% are rooting for the Niners, 5% are rooting for the Chiefs, and 90% are just

#### WHO PEOPLE ARE ROOTING FOR IN THE SUPER BOWL



THE CHIEFS  
THE 49ERS  
PEOPLE JUST HAPPY THE PATRIOTS AREN'T IN IT

glad they won't have to watch the Patriots play today. Can I get an "Amen!" After the Patriots lost in the first round of the playoffs, I had several friends who marked themselves "*Safe from having to watch the Patriots in the Super Bowl*" on Facebook. Truth.

You may not care a lick about this game, and I understand that. You may watch anyway, however, because you like the commercials... just as big a deal as the game for many Americans. Would you believe airing a 30-second commercial in today's game will cost your company 5.6-million-dollars? Math wasn't my best subject but if you carry the four and subtract

the two and... well... it's a lot of money. Some of you will go to a party just to socialize or enjoy the festive food. Even our youth will gather here tonight to watch the game. Everyone seems to find their way into the moment.

I'm not sure the woman we meet in Scripture today would have been all that into something like the Super Bowl. She probably would have made her famous guacamole dip for the Youth Group Party to be supportive, because that's just her nature. We all

know somebody like that, and it's impossible not to love them because they love others so well themselves. This beloved woman's name is Dorcas – Tabitha in English. It means “Gazelle.” Not sure if that was the inspiration of her own parents when she was born, or if she embodied such graceful and elegant movement in her life. A dancer perhaps... or hurdler. Who knows? But...here she is. She's the first woman in the book of Acts specifically named as a disciple, and she is beloved. Acts says, “*She was devoted to good works and charity.*” The actual expression of this phrase in Greek is more closely, “*She was full of it!*” It was often a way people referred to being full of the Holy Spirit. Dorcas was full of it... and her death hit the community hard.



Rachel Held Evans<sup>1</sup> may be a name you've heard – and maybe not. She's written a number of honest books about her journey in faith. Every year of middle school she was awarded “*Best Christian Attitude*” at her Christian school, so she felt pretty full of it, herself. An over-achiever of the faith. But she had so many questions that easy, pat answers and Christian clichés just

wouldn't satisfy. She was in a church culture, however, that didn't welcome the questions. “*Memorize the standard answers and be satisfied with them,*” was the sentiment. But she believed the Christ mystery held so much more. As she wrote of the breadth and width and height of God's love in Christ and the extraordinary grace of Jesus some said she went too far. She didn't understand the fear. “*Perhaps we're afraid that if we get out of the way, this grace thing might get out of hand,*” she said. “*Well, guess what? It already has. Grace got out of hand the moment the God of the universe hung on a Roman cross and with outstretched hands looked out upon those who had hung him there and declared, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Grace has been out of hand for more than two thousand years now. We best get used to it.*” She would write these kinds of things. She imagined a church that was full of it. She dreamed: “*Imagine if every church became a place where everyone is safe, but no one is comfortable. Imagine if every church became a place where we told one another the truth. We might just create sanctuary.*” And her faith was tested. But she also said: “*I am a Christian because the story of Jesus is still the story I'm willing to risk being wrong about.*”

Rachel died eight months ago; 37 years old. Got the flu, had a reaction to the antibiotics. And gone. She and her husband Dan have two young kids – ages 3 and 1. And so many were... are... grieving. I was with 40 young ministers the week she died, leading them in retreat, and so many carried her books and held them in their grief as if to say, giving witness to her life: “*This is what she did. This is what we have. This mattered so much to my faith.*” And there was grief.

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<sup>1</sup> The quotes from Rachel Held Evans were pulled from those sharing her words via Social Media following her death. You can learn more about her work at <https://rachelheldevans.com/>.

This is the spirit of the room in our story from Acts today. Dorcas has died. And the people are grieving; for she was full of it... good works and acts of charity. She made things, clothing and the like, for the widows in particular – a forgotten contingent of society – for whom Jesus instructed to give care.

Word was that Peter wasn't far away. Word was also out that Peter had done some healing and worked some miracles, and it was worth a shot. Jewish tradition was to have the body prepared and buried by sundown, so time was of the essence. They cared for Dorcas' body but took her upstairs (*in a cold room as some translations say*) and sent an entourage after Peter. This is a sweet maneuver of the faith movement in this town.

And we've all known that saint who we longed to hold onto... full of the spirit... so influential in our lives. It's worth asking ourselves, "*What are we full of?*" You've got to be careful with your answer, but it is worth a thought. What is your spirit full of that the world would so miss if you weren't here? Do you know? If you don't, perhaps we need to think more intentionally about what we're cultivating in our lives. Theologian Dallas Willard says, "*The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.*" Full of it. And this just isn't the big stuff... it's the daily stuff.

Dorcas stands... "*for all those unsung heroines who have got on with what they can do best and have done it to the glory of God. Had it not been for Peter, she might never have made it into the pages of the New Testament, and we have to assume that there were dozens in the early years, and thousands in later years, who, like her, lived their lives in faith and hope, bearing the sorrows of life no doubt as well as celebrating its joys, and finding in the small acts of service to others a fulfillment of the gospel within their own sphere, using traditional skills to the glory of God. Luke is right to draw our eyes down to the small-scale and immediate, in case we should ever forget that these are the people who form the heart of the church. [Their gifts to the whole go uncelebrated too often.] But when you have the pleasure of meeting a Dorcas, you greet them as what they are, the beating heart of the people of God.*"<sup>2</sup>

We see this beautiful expression of church often around here. I'll go to visit one of our home-centered members and arrive to find a vase of beautiful flowers – one of our volunteers with CareLink has already been by, bringing cheer and the love of our church family. Without the bat of an eye, one of our deeply committed shows up for worship having spent the night with our *Room at the Inn* guests in our Christian Life Center, because there was a need and, well, checking his calendar, he "*wasn't doing anything else in the middle of the night,*" he'd say. Another crew prepped communion

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<sup>2</sup> —N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (SPCK, 2008), 154-55.

for us today. Another group is planning new and sacred worship experiences for our children. Another said, *"If you ever know of someone struggling with this or that... feel free to call on me. I'll be there for them."* Church, my friends. Church. This is what Dorcas was all about... unsung... but hero nonetheless.

So, Peter is sought: *"Come quickly,"* they say. And whether Peter knew Dorcas or knew those who summoned him to come, or he was simply moved to move... he does. And it's a ten-mile hike, so we're not talking a five-minute ride to Boone Hospital in his Ford F-150 Raptor. I see Peter driving a big truck, you know? Peter goes and as he climbs the stairs of this home where Dorcas' body lay cold, it is lined with widows who hold in their hands the legacy of this woman who touched their lives... steady and faithful. No pressure, Peter. So he clears the room. And I'm not sure how it really happens from there. We get a little bit from the text but let's remember – Peter did not go to Med School. He was a fisherman of all things. Sure he could pull a hook and clean a fish, but this was a little different. He knelt and prayed. He doesn't want to walk back down those stairs by those widows simply shrugging his shoulders, *"Ma'am; ma'am. 'Scuse me, ma'am. I'm sorry, Ma'am."* He's praying, *"Lord, Lord, please."* And after his prayer, which may or may not have done the trick, he simply says, *"Tabs? Get up."* She opens her eyes. And Pete's eyes surely got really big, too. *Whoa.* He extends a hand. And finally, my favorite line of this passage and his greatest relief: *"He presented her to them alive."* Isn't that all Jesus wants? That we might be presented alive to the world – full of it – vibrant and active and doing our part for the kingdom.

Just imagine that's the line for you today as the doors of this sanctuary are opened and you're released back into the wild: *"He presented her to the world, fully alive."* *"He presented him to the world, vibrant, active, serving as only he uniquely could."* That's church. That's why we're here. To catch another glimpse. To fill up with the Spirit again. To get back out there and be church for real. We don't always catch it the first time around... or the second... or even a dozen years into it. But don't quit calling for it. Don't settle that it will never come for you. You never know when it's gonna take.

There's a great healing story where Jesus heals a guy's eyesight twice. After Jesus' first try, he asked the man, *"What can you see?"* The man told Jesus, *"I see people, but they look like trees walking around."* Jesus tries again and says, *"What about now?"* It was only after the second time that the man could see things the way they really were. First attempts like first impressions can be great but many times we need that second touch, that second look, another try. This happens in the faith, too. Many have bumped into Jesus along the way but it didn't stick. It's not a failure or anything anymore than Jesus' first attempt at the guy's eyes, but God does long for us to be real about how we're being transformed.

Bob Goff, lawyer, author, honorary counsel for the Republic of Uganda to the United States, says about this very biblical story<sup>3</sup>: *“I’ll level with you; if I were the blind guy in the story, I would have been tempted to lie to Jesus after the first touch and tell him I was healed. You know, just so Jesus wouldn’t look bad.”* He says, *“but what Jesus is looking for are honest answers about what’s really going on in our lives, not a bunch of spin. If the guy without sight had faked it and said he could see everything just fine after the first touch, he wouldn’t have been actually healed.”*

We don’t get to know how life always works. Sometimes, the miracles of God may happen in stages. You see a little more the next time and the next time and after the next grace, the next study, the next prayer, the next worship service, the next time you tear a little piece of bread from that common loaf. Even though we’ve been touched by God, we still don’t see people for who they are until something more happens in us. Goff says, *“It’s not trees we confuse them for; its opinions and positions, social issues and status, titles and accomplishments and behaviors.”* We won’t always get answers for these mysteries. Sometimes when we ask for an answer, God sends us a companion. Has that happened to you? You’re struggling with an issue or you’re unsure of your faith or your childhood doctrine that has more holes than you’re now comfortable with – and then someone comes alongside and you can’t explain it but you just know that person is full of it – full of spirit – full of perspective and experience and wisdom and faith. It’s a prayer to see again and maybe that’s why you got yourself back to church today, even when you were thinking about skipping to get ready for the big game. Who knows? Our stories are always unfolding, and we can’t predict it all.

Just look at Dorcas. The text never says what happens to Dorcas next. Did she go on a speaking tour – *“Come hear the woman who was raised!”* -- Maybe she cashed in on her new fame and became an illusionist on one of the side roads off the Branson strip. I mean, she’s got some notoriety now. The text even says, *“Many came to faith because of her.”* But you know what I think? I think she made some more tunics for widows that had been forgotten. I think she did the tasks that many wouldn’t notice She folded the bulletins for worship and cleaned up the communion cups after. She laughed about her second life joking, *“I’m only 3. I’m only 7.”* However long she lived the second time around. You start to count time differently once you’ve been raised... once you start to see life more clearly. I think she oozed of the Holy Spirit and encouraged the others to serve as they were gifted to serve... becoming the best versions of themselves. I think she was a guiding light. I think she was beautiful. I think she was *full of it*.

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<sup>3</sup> From Goff’s work, *“Everybody, Always.”* Nelson Books. 2018.