

American Lutheran Church of Sun City

First Lesson: Acts 9:36-43

Second Lesson: Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 23

Gospel Lesson: John 10:22-30

Fourth Sunday of Easter

May 8, 2022

“Compassionate Gazelle”

Sermon by Pastor Paul Campbell

Grace and peace to you from Him who was, who is, and who is to come, Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen. So in the church year you probably figured this out, this is Good Shepherd Sunday. You get that in the scriptures, you get that in the music. It's obviously about Jesus being the Shepherd, and I'm not going there this morning. We are going to go a little different route. So happy Mother's Day. Raise your hand if you are a mother. Raise your hand if you ever had a mother. So that's all of you. So you're all here for Mother's Day, that is great. So we are going to talk about Tabitha, and she was the story in the book of Acts, Tabitha and Dorcas. And it's in another Easter story of sorts. The gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are written by the same person. And many scholars believe that Acts is actually a second volume of the Gospel of Luke, we can tie that together as we go through here. But specifically we are going to talk about Tabitha and what made her so special that Peter was able to raise her from the dead. And why does Luke include this story in his second volume of his Gospel? So the word Tabitha is Aramaic, Dorcas is Greek, and it's interesting that Luke felt the need to include both the Aramaic and the Greek in this story. It's interesting isn't it. It's a point of emphasis because he sees this as a very, very important story in the Gospel and also the book of Acts. So, being as this is a Mother's Day weekend, we can wonder if she was. There is no indication in the Gospel or in Acts or in any other historical books that she was or she wasn't, but we know that she had many qualities of a mother. So the title of my sermon is the compassionate gazelle. So I hope none of you that are mothers are offended by me comparing you to an animal, but let me tell you why I am doing that. Tabitha's name and Dorcas, in Aramaic and Greek is the word for gazelle. So that's how it's translated. Gazelles are small antelopes, they are very very fast, they can run up to 60 miles an hour. They are social animals, living in a group, sometimes the group is up to 700 antelopes, and they are vegetarians. They are not predators. And they are basically part of the group to be part of the group. They are very congenial, they are happy to be part of the group. Tabitha and gazelle is a very apt comparison. Because mothers as you know often have to be fast on your feet, or fast in your minds, moving all forward. And you have to be compassionate, you have to be part of the herd, you have to be part of the group. And so I think this is fitting for Mother's Day. It's interesting in our text, with Tabitha that she is called a disciple. It's unusual. She was devoted to good works and charity. The fact that the women in her house showed Peter the clothes that Tabitha made them, when he came to raise her from the dead, means that she was very caring, very compassionate, and for some reason she had some money, because material back in those days was very expensive. So she was gracious, she was loving, she was a supporter of the least and the lost, and the lonely. A very fitting description, because the widows in that society had absolutely no status. Because Tabitha's friends were widows, we know that they were poor, because they could not make money. Back then, only men could make money. She was supporting them, she was supporting her community, her herd. She was a grace filled woman, who loved these women, and in spite of the culture, embraced them and loved them in a very special way. In a word Tabitha was full of compassion. I've used this book of joy before and it's a great book and a good summer read for you I hope that you read it. But in it is a story about a conversation of the Dalai Lama and Bishop Tutu. And it's a great read. But here's what the Dalai Lama says; self centered-ness is a source of suffering. A few weeks ago I mentioned a true story about two women who were part of another parish, and they were single. They were lonely, they were sad, sad, people. And they were well known in the community of being very selfish, and being very self-centered, and not liking anyone else. They were self-centered people. Well in this church every month, I would take communion to all the home bound people. And Della and Florence were home bound. Della was actually home bound; Florence thought she was home bound

but she wasn't, but that's a whole other story. But I would always go there, and you walk into the house, and the negativity was dripping off the walls, I mean it was just a horrible place to go. But I was committed to giving them communion, hopefully thinking that the Eucharist would brighten their life. It never did. But at least I felt that it was my calling. I got to the point though, and this is a confession, I'll grant you that. I would park my car down the street and I would go up to the house in the shadows, and I would tap lightly on the door, thinking that maybe they maybe didn't see me, and they didn't hear me. These women were bats; they had incredible hearing and they knew exactly when I was tapping on their door, and they would give me everything. And of course the pastor was fair game in this whole scenario; so I usually got downloaded upon. So, they were so unhappy, they had so little self esteem, but also were so selfish with themselves, that no one wanted to be around them. Everyone around them suffered. The Dalai Lama says compassionate concern for others is the source of happiness. So let that soak in a little bit. Compassionate concern for others is the well being and the source of happiness. So I think about this quote when I have a bad day. So maybe I need to go do something for somebody else. Think about that. And he goes on to say that love is the theme for every church, every denomination over the last three thousand years, and now even scientists are saying that compassion is hard wired into who we are. So the Dalai Lama, Tutu and scientists are now saying that we are hard wired to care. We are hard wired to be the seed of compassion, as Tutu says. Think about a seed, a seed just doesn't grow on its own, a seed has to be nurtured it has to be watered, it has to be fed, has to have sunlight, it has to have brightness. That we are the seed of compassion. Compassion is part of who we are, and that cultivation of that seed is compassion, is nurture. So back to Tabitha now, she could have been miserable, she was born poor, she had no status in society, she was a widow and we know that as a widow she had really very little money. Somehow she had the money that she could help others. She gave them all her compassion. Because of her understanding of God's gift of love, she made the decision to not be selfish. And we have that decision don't we. Even though we are hard wired to be compassionate, we can decide to be compassionate, or be like Della and Florence and be self centered. We have that choice. She gave money to the poor, she made clothes for people, not because she had to but that's who she felt like she needed to be. She lived up to her name as a gazelle, graceful, full of grace. God's love freely given. She cared about the herd, the community. She cared for them she fed them made clothes for them, she was a child of the living compassionate Lord. Forgiving and willing to give to the needy. She was a compassionate woman. She had mother like qualities, whether she was a mother or not, you mothers understand that. And you people who have had mothers understand that. That there has to be compassion in the family for this to work. I want to read another quote from the book of joy; and they were talking, Tutu and the Dalai Lama were talking about doesn't this being compassionate expose us, because it's a dog eat dog world, doesn't it make us vulnerable? Why is being compassionate in their self interest, how does that help the rest of their goals in life.? Here's a quote. "I would hope they would try it out because it's very difficult just speaking about it theoretically. It's something that you work out in actual life. Try out being kind when you are walking in the center of the street, or in the sidewalk, and say good morning to the people who are passing, or smile when you don't feel like smiling." I'll bet you my bottom dollar in a very short period of time this cloud of self regard, which is a bad regard, lifts. It's universal, when you try it out why does it work? We really are wired to be caring for the other, and when we go against that fundamental law of being, whether we like it or not, it's going to have a harmful consequence for us. American Lutheran Church is a compassionate body of believers, it's a compassionate herd. Can we do more? Of course, and we will, but we have that sense of love. We understand that compassion brings joy. Many of you are traveling this summer, you are going to see friends and family, or even if you stay here you are going to be around people, but practice this, practice compassion, practice being this loving person. I am going to read a quote from Holden Village, when we did our Lenten evening prayer. It's a retreat center up in Washington, the bus is outside, we are going to go right now. But it would be a wonderful place to go, I've taken youth groups there, it's a wonderful place. But this is the Holden prayer, and it's a prayer that can lift us up, as we go into whatever journey we're on. "Oh God, you have called your servants to ventures to which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." So think about Tabitha, think about how she is a model of compassion. Think about being a gazelle, maybe you're not swift on your feet, I'm not, but we can be swift with our Love. Think about all the compassion that God has for us, and that's the good news. Amen.

