

Sermon: Like Jesus

May 8, 2022

Acts 9:36-43
John 10:22-30

by Eric Anderson

Simon Peter found himself in a curious place. It was not entirely unfamiliar – he'd been at bedsides of the dead before – but for the first time it seemed people expected him to do something about it. What was he to do?

Here at the end of chapter nine of Acts of the Apostles, there have only been two stories of healings related to Simon Peter. The first is in Acts 3, and the second is in... Acts 9. It's the story just before this one. There are a couple of times that Acts says that "wonders and signs" were being done by the apostles, but nothing of what those signs and wonders were. I think, myself, that when the friends of Tabitha summoned Peter from the nearby town of Lydda, they had more confidence in him than he had in himself.

Simon Peter had come a long way since the night of Jesus' arrest, when he'd denied knowing Jesus three times. He'd come a long way from the first meeting with the risen Jesus, a meeting that's not described in any of the Gospels. I have to wonder if he ever told anyone what Jesus said. He'd come a long way from the breakfast by the sea, when Jesus asked him "Do you love me?" three times – Peter had denied knowing him three times, of course, and you know that had to sting. He'd come a long way in faith, and in leadership, and in preaching the good news.

As a healer? That's harder to say.

What did he do? Well, there are some strong parallels between this story and one found in the 8th chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the raising of Jairus' daughter. Peter began to imitate what Jesus had done. As Raj Nadella writes at Working Preacher, "In both stories, the miracle occurs in a private setting. Just as Jesus sends everyone except Peter, James, and John out of the room prior to the miracle, Peter sends everyone out in this story. In both accounts, the deceased comes back to life after being ordered to get up. It is as if Peter, who was present when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, replicates a similar miracle at Joppa."

Uncertain what to do, Peter fell back on the best example he could think of. He chose to act like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

Incidentally, the same thing can be said of Simon Peter's other two healings before this in the book of Acts. In the third chapter, he told a man to stand up and walk – as Jesus had. In the story just before this, he told a man who had been bedridden for eight years to get up and make his bed – which is pretty close to Jesus telling a man to pick up his bed and walk.

When in doubt, act like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

I wish that all I had to do was say, "Act like Jesus," and everybody would go, "Oh, right, that's easy," and the world would become a paradise. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to work.

Part of it is that we're not quite sure what Jesus would do in some situations. Life is complicated. I can say, "Jesus would ask how do we prevent harm, or end harm," but that's not always clear, is it? We don't always know the best approach to a situation or a problem. Even when we work hard to find out, the complexities of life mean that things may happen we didn't intend.

We may also find it difficult to set aside our own preconceptions and prejudices. As I noted about Saul of Tarsus last week, in persecuting the followers of Jesus he acted out of deep piety and with full commitment to what he believed to be right and good – and in so doing, he brought enormous harm. I'm sure you can think of numerous instances where deep piety and full commitment to what people believe is right and good has led and is leading to enormous harm. The examples are global, national, state-wide, and as close as the next member of your family. Right?

And we also find ourselves in Peter's shoes – well, sandals – when it comes to some situations. Times when we are confronted with a need we aren't at all sure we can meet. Tabitha's friends summoned Peter apparently in the belief that he could do something. Maybe they just wanted him to share their grief – that wonderful detail about the widows showing him the clothing she'd made for them suggests that – but the urgency of the summons, "Please come to us without delay," makes most readers assume they wanted action.

Simon Peter probably couldn't have known whether he had the ability to give them what they wanted, what they asked, what they needed. He didn't know if he could act like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

Jesus had the ability to turn the world upside down, didn't he? He stood humble yet fearless before governors and judges. He extended healing to the children of important leaders, to desperate women who tugged on his clothing, to women who wouldn't take "No" for an answer, to foreigners, to people nobody would touch. He wouldn't accept death as a final word. He wouldn't lead a rebellion of this world, but he would lead a movement that could both heal this world and equip us for the next.

For an i'iwi, feeding upside down is natural, if perhaps a trifle difficult to imagine at first. For people, turning these things upside down is a lot harder to conceive, and even more difficult to do, but it's what we need to do if we're to be like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

As Jennifer T. Kaalund writes at *Working Preacher*, "It is not enough to simply know. Once we become aware, it is imperative that we, too, act to improve the conditions of those who are suffering. Our actions can be the difference between life and death."

Like Jesus. Or even like Simon Peter.

We cannot know whether our efforts will succeed, any more than Simon Peter did when he sent everyone out of the room. We cannot know whether we will achieve equity for men and women, or justice for people of all races, or a common experience of doing meaningful work and receiving a living wage. We cannot know whether we will see the end of war and coercive violence. We cannot know whether we will see good news for the oppressed, treated wounds for the brokenhearted, liberty for the captives, release for the prisoners, the proclamation of the Lord's favor. Like Simon Peter, we cannot know. We can just act like Simon Peter and act like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

It was not just Simon Peter who acted like Jesus in Joppa. It was Tabitha herself. She was a friend to the widows, the women at greatest need in a male-dominated society. She made a difference to them. Without the benefit of a summons from Jesus, without the benefit of three years of Jesus' teaching and coaching, without the benefit of a post-resurrection appearance, without the benefit of being told three times to "Feed my sheep," she did the work. Like Jesus.

One of the strengths of Christianity is its assertion that the followers of Jesus can emulate Jesus. We can bring healing. We can restore relationships. We can renew communities. We can advocate for lives worth living as well as bring comfort to the grieving and the dying. We may not achieve everything we want, or everything we hope for, no. But when we act like Jesus, we do more than we know. Like Tabitha. Like Simon Peter. Like Jesus.

Like Jesus.

Amen.