

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. Acts 9.36.

I'm delighted that this morning we have members of our 11+ group staying in with us throughout worship, and also two students from St Aidan's School who will later tell us about Zawadi in Tanzania. You youngsters might wonder what I am doing up here in the pulpit. This is traditionally where the minister drones on for twenty minutes. I think I have said before that the clergy are the only people who talk in other people's sleep. Let me explain. We come to church obviously to worship God and to thank him; that's why we sing songs and hymns of praise. But we also come to *listen* to him. How do we hear God? It's by reading the Bible, which is his Word. That's why we see the Bible brought into Church, an *open* Bible. But parts of the Bible are difficult, and it's the minister's job to explain it and to apply it to our lives. So from this 9th chapter of *Acts*, let's see what God is saying to us.

In our study Sunday by Sunday of *Acts* we now meet a new character called Tabitha. Her name means 'gazelle'. She must have been very nimble, graceful, and with those lovely big eyes that deer have. Today we would have called her 'Bambi' Tabitha is her Jewish name. 'Gazelle' in Greek is 'Dorcas'.

(By the way, people years ago must really have known their Bible. Look at this picture of a tin of Lyle's Golden Syrup ... and now this one of a box of needles ...)

Tabitha/Dorcas lived in Joppa, modern-day Jaffa. She was a dressmaker, a tailor, not to the rich, but to the poor. But suddenly this lovely, graceful Christian woman, who did so

much to clothe the poor and needy, died. All her friends were consumed with grief, v39... Now Joppa was near Lydda, and St Peter was staying there. So they sent for him, v38...

Peter went up into the upper room where Dorcas was lying, sent everyone out and began to pray. And then he said, 'Tabitha, get up'. Of course, being a Jew, he said this in Aramaic which is *Tabitha koum*. Remember those words. Turn back now to p1008, to *Mark* 5.21-43, where Jesus raised Jairus's daughter from the dead. Now the Aramaic word for a little girl is *talitha*. Let's read from *Mk* 5.40b... Jesus said to the dead girl, *Talitha koum*. What did Peter say to dead Tabitha? *Tabitha koum*: 'Tabitha, get up' - only one letter different!

What's the significance of this? We know that Jesus, as the Son of God, exercised God's authority over nature, illness and even death, by healing the sick and even raising people, like Jairus's daughter, from the dead. The disciples had seen some pretty amazing miracles by Jesus. But in *John* 14.12 he promised them that they would do even *greater* miracles if they had faith in him. Let's go back now to *Acts* 9.32ff on p1103. There in v32 we meet Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter tells him, 'Jesus heals you, so get up and roll up your bedmat'. Jesus had said exactly the same to a paralysed man in *Mk*2.9: 'Get up, take your mat, and walk'. And now Peter tells Tabitha to get up: *Tabitha koum*, almost exactly the same as the words Jesus said to Jairus's dead daughter - *Talitha koum*. Jesus has kept his promise to the disciples: 'you will do even *greater* works than these'. These miracles proved that God was with the disciples.

But let's go back to Tabitha, to Dorcas, who, we are told, was 'full of good works'. What a week, we've had! Russell Brand, and Jonathan Ross have been bad boys and the once-revered BBC looks awfully foolish! I don't want to get into all that now, but among all the many comments passed last week, there was something which really startled me. On Tuesday's Radio 4 'Today' programme Steve Hewlett, a former senior director of programmes at Carlton TV, said something astonishing in defence of the puerile, filthy comments of Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross. Before we got too po-faced about their smutty behaviour, he reminded us that the BBC had to make contact with younger listeners. I was aghast! Do the BBC think so little of young people, that they think the only thing that will appeal to them is filth? Now who is Steve Hewlett? you might ask. But on Thursday's Today programme, no less a figure than Sir Christopher Bland, a former Chairman of the BBC governors *also* defended Brand and Ross by arguing that the BBC must appeal to a younger audience. Why do they think the only way to appeal to young people is to give them filth? Do they think that the only way to young people's hearts is through filth? I never heard such patronising nonsense.

I don't recognise this description of young people. I see our 11+ group here in church. I see students from St Aidan's School who are so keen to support the work of Zawadi in Tanzania that you are prepared to give up your Sunday morning to tell us about it. When I look at you, I see that you are like Dorcas, 'full of good works', not like Ross and Brand, full of trash and filth. Thank you for helping us today.

Dorcas was full of good works. You have to remember that in the Roman Empire there was no welfare state, no benefits, no social security. Hungry people scavenged or died. If people like Dorcas didn't make clothes for the poor, they went in rags. There was no-one else to help them. When these first Christians started to care for the poor and needy, that was something entirely new and unheard of. People must have wondered, 'Why do these Christians care?' No-one else did.

I remember being driven through Cairo by our Egyptian guide. Though he was a Muslim, he pointed out a large white building which was the Christian Coptic Hospital. With some pride, he said, 'Anyone can go there, no matter how poor'. I said to him, 'Do you Muslims have a similar hospital?' 'No,' he replied. 'So what happens to sick people who can't afford hospital care?' 'They die', was his brutal answer.

Christian caring must never be taken for granted. The world is a selfish, hard place. Caring for the poorest is *not* a natural thing. What Susie and Andy Hart are doing among the disabled of Tanzania is *not* natural. *Selfishness* is natural. What Andy and Susie are doing shines like a light in a naughty world. They are like Dorcas, full of good works.

That is how we tell others about Jesus who loved everyone. We quietly get on with the good works which *Jesus* did. We quietly say our prayers, and put our confidence in the Bible, God's Word. We don't need to ram Christ down people's throats, or threaten to kill them if they won't believe. *2 Corinthians 10.4* says we don't use the weapons of the *world*. People come to Christ because they are persuaded by *love*.