

May 12, 2019

Acts 9: 36-43

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“What Being Alive Looks Like”

Yesterday Kelly and I spent some time with my mother. The schedule allowed our drive down to Lebanon, Ohio, where my folks live, and we delivered our traditional Mother’s Day gift, a large planter of flowers that now sits outside my mom’s small condo. She will enjoy the flowers throughout the season, I know, and hopefully they will remind her of how important she is to our family. We have mothers with us today but for just a moment I want to speak to the children and grandchildren who are here. In other words, I want to include all of us. We are all children today. We’re children of God, to be sure, and we’re children of those who have nurtured us and cared for us along the way. No matter if you are young or old, no matter if your thoughts connect to the loving memory of a woman who has died or connect you to someone you’ll spend time with today, no matter if the mother or grandmother you are thinking of is a biological family member or a woman who has nurtured you and cared for you in motherly type ways, Mother’s Day honors relationships of love and how that love impacts our lives. Mothers, or those who have been like mothers to us, provide what we need in so many ways. We often mention the critical role First Responders play following challenging events in the world. For many of us, our moms were First Responders long before we even knew that phrase. Moms are often the first on the scene. Because of this, moms have to know about First Aid as well as other nursing skills. Moms need to know something about psychology in order to counsel us through life’s decisions. Moms have to be able to coach or supervise and comfort and encourage. To be honest, we take them for granted and that’s why a day like this one helps us be intentional about acknowledging our appreciation. There are few, if any, aspects in life that have not been influenced by a mother, grandmother, or a special woman who filled these roles in our lives. Saying “thank you” doesn’t seem to be enough today but this is what we want to say, “Thank you.”

One of the roles my mother fulfilled in my life was being my alarm clock. I know that sounds funny but I’m serious. When I was growing up, and especially through my teenage years, my mom made sure to get me out of bed on time. If it wasn’t for her I don’t think I would have made it through school or achieved any of the other things I was able to do as a young person. I might have slept my life away, if not for her. She had a particular way of calling me from my bed that I hated at the time but now I look back on it with fondness. Mom would come into the bedroom, turning on the light and pushing open the blinds. Through the harshness of that morning light she would say with a loud and sing-songy voice, “Rise and shine. It’s time to get up. A new day is starting. Let’s get moving. Rise and shine.” The last thing I wanted to do was rise and shine. I would pull the covers over me head and try to drown out the sound but mom’s overly cheerful voice but she would not stop. Her singing continued until I pushed my feet to the floor and started moving. I’m grateful to my mom for insisting I got up to face another day.

Our scripture reading is a dramatic *Get Up* kind of story. We’ve read from the Book of Acts and usually we think of this book of the bible as the Acts of the Apostles. The stories focus on the early leaders of the Christian movement, and while the actions of the early followers of Jesus are important this book is more accurately focused on the action of God. In the way our congregation’s mission statement points to our response to God so, too, the early church responded to the ways the Holy Spirit was moving in their hearts. They believed Jesus had been raised from the dead on the first Easter morning but they also experienced his risen presence in their lives. For them, resurrection was more than a historical event to remember. Resurrection was a way of life. This meant that when they were down or out, when they were defeated or threatened, when the darkness of life’s struggles wrapped around them God’s voice through a living Christ demanded they get up and move. It’s not a stretch to think of it this way. The Apostles and others in the early church were able to act because God was constantly singing this resurrection song, “Rise, shine. Get up. Get moving. Christ lives and you live. Death has no hold on you and it never will.”

The *Get Up* story we’ve read today is about a woman named Dorcas. We know some things about her. She lived a loving and giving kind of life. Her special mission was to care for the widows. In that day, widows were often forgotten. It was a male dominated culture and when a woman lost her man she lost her security and often her future. In the most desperate cases, widows were like the walking dead. There was no life available to them. The mission of Dorcas’ life changed that. She cared for them. She made clothes for them. She stayed in relationship with them and gave them hope. The story says that Dorcas became ill and died, and with her death came a deep loss to those who depended on her. There is weeping and deep grief in this story, and many of us can relate to that. Life, for all of its blessing and goodness, also brings experiences of great sadness and loss. It was in response to that kind of reality that the Apostle Peter was summoned. Could he do anything to help? Could he say some word or offer some kind of action that would ease the pain and heal the hurt? What Peter said and did absolutely made a difference but let’s be reminded, Peter’s action conveyed the action of God. Peter took the hand of the lifeless Dorcas and he said,

“Get up. Rise.” And she did. What happened was a miraculous expression of the power of the resurrection but we come up short if we only focus on what happened to the physical body of the woman. God’s voice was singing the resurrection song all over the place. To those who were weighed down by their grief in the face of death, “Get up.” To the widows, who may have thought their futures were gone once more, “Get up and get moving.” To all those who hear the gospel in the midst of whatever is cutting us off from the hope of a new day, “Get up to live and serve and share the grace of the gospel with a hurting world.” God acted through Peter that day and God is acting every day of our lives to bring the power of the resurrection to our experience. This is what life with Christ looks like, feeling the hand of God lifting us up, hearing the song of God when we need it most, “Rise up and live into a new day.”

Many of us know of the historic figure of Winston Churchill, who championed the cause of England and the Allies, bringing an end to World War II. One of my favorite Churchill stories is how he meticulously planned for his own funeral. Upon his death, the funeral service took place in the great St. Paul’s church in London. The high liturgy of the Anglican Church was followed throughout the funeral but then, at the direction of Churchill, himself, a bugler was instructed to play Taps from one side of the walkway at the top of the great dome in the church. Taps, the universal military salute that day is done. And so, just as the benediction was spoken the bugler played on cue, day is done. Then, just as the echo of the last note sounded, and just as Churchill had insisted, another bugler on the opposite of the dome began to play Reveille. This is the song that says it’s “time to get up, it’s time to get us, it’s time to get up in the morning.” When death lays us down, God lifts us up. Churchill wanted those gathered that day to carry the resurrection song in their hearts.

This is the life God wants us to live. We don’t have to wait for our bodies to breathe our last breath in order to experience the touch of resurrection power. This week, be aware of the times when the weight of some moment, or the heaviness of a situation pulls you down. Be aware of God’s touch lifting you up, to live the life Christ is making possible in you. Amen.