

**“Home Front, Mission Front”**

**Acts 9:36-43**

**Third in Series on *God @ Home***

**June 21, 2020**

**Pastor Andy Kinsey**

***“Dorcas was devoted to good works and acts of charity.”***

**- Acts 9:36**

**Prayer of Preparation**

O Lord, may you open our hearts that we may sit up and receive the healing of Jesus Christ: may we realize the overflowing nature of your grace and so devote our lives to good works and acts of charity. Amen.

**Message**

I can recall as a young child listening to what my two grandmothers did to help with the church’s mission and outreach.

One of my grandmothers would put together clothing and bandages for missionaries in Sierra Leone, in Africa. She was part of a group that would take time to share in fellowship and prayer, and then they would send off the material to Africa. Often times my grandmother would make and sew things for others as well. I can remember how she was always knitting and crocheting.

I also had a grandmother who taught home economics to young women in Florida. There, she would teach women the basics of home care and instruct women at that time how to provide for children. It was part of the Methodist church’s mission in that state.

Perhaps you may have stories of persons whose work of serving others and doing “good” took place close to home, if not in home or in your family. Perhaps you have memories of those whose lives made a difference through sacrifice or service.

Perhaps this is why I like to study the period of World War II. Though I was not alive during World War II, of course, I am aware of the different ways people

helped to pave the way to victory. These efforts were not glamorous by any means. In fact, they often took place at homes, behind the scenes. Sometimes families had to do without certain things, as the government had to ration gasoline and sugar, and other foods like butter.

At other times, families only received a small stipend of money, or were encouraged to buy war bonds. There were also efforts to recycle as well – e.g., old tires, tin cans, and paper products. In short, many families did more with less. It was one of the reason things like gardening and handcrafts, and sewing and canning, and other kinds of work around the home – were popular.

During this period of history, most people operated out of what Tex Sample, a social ethicist, was an ethic-of-self-denial. People sacrificed in ways to help the greater good.<sup>1</sup> *After all, the home front was a mission front.*

### **God @ Home Series**

That is a short way of capturing what we are seeking to share in our sermon series *God @ Home*: since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, our homes have become places where we are doing more and more. Home is where we are to shelter in place.

What I find ironic, however, is how history seems to have gone in a kind of circle. By that statement, I mean, before the industrial revolution, our homes were the places where we combined work and family life. We did not go to work, because we were already at work in our homes! Before the industrial revolution, most folks worked and lived at home. After the industrial revolution, home and work became more and more separate. People left home and went to work somewhere, often in a factory or a business. People took on different jobs and occupations, outside the home.

What is interesting, though, is that it has not been too long ago that our homes were places of production. That is to say, how many people here remember sewing machines? There were times when we would make our own socks and when we would make our own clothes. I know there are several people who still do these things, but I don't think most do. We go out and buy things, rather than take time to make things.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tex Sample, *U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).11-14.

And yet, during the pandemic I have noticed more and more people making things. Because many patterns and habits of work and family life have been disrupted and altered, we are having to “make do.” Only time will tell, of course, how these changes will affect us, if people will continue to work from home more and more.

It is one of the main reasons that we wanted to offer this sermon series: when we think of the *home front as the mission front*, we want to find ways of understanding our homes as places where we can serve God and make a difference.

For example, when I googled this week “mission ideas for families at home,” I discovered an incredible amount of information. There were all kinds of ideas on what families can do for others – all from the home.

For instance, at home families can make cards and send them to people. Many folks in this church have done this, and it has been a great mission project. In fact, I would put our “card” makers at Grace Church in line with the best of the best “card” makers at Hallmark. The creativity has been wonderful.

Others have gotten out the sewing machine and have made masks to wear, and then have given the masks to healthcare workers. Persons have also sent notes to people, sharing in prayer. Others have taken chalk and written notes on driveways. We can do a great deal of “good” from home.

### **Dorcas as Disciple of Jesus**

I think this is what caught our eyes about our passage from Acts about Dorcas, a disciple and follower of Jesus (9:36). It is a very interesting text of Scripture, as it comes just after the conversion of Paul in Chapter 9 and right before the conversion of Cornelius, a Gentile, in Chapter 10.

Peter is the apostle at the center of the story, but on closer inspection, it is not a story about Peter, but about the love and witness of a woman named Dorcas, whose work from home made a difference among the most vulnerable people of society at that time: widows.

Last week, if you may recall, we also discussed the plight of widows in the church (Acts 6:1-7).<sup>2</sup> We shared how some widows were not receiving the daily food distributions. It was a problem the apostles had to address.

This week, we read about Dorcas, a woman whose own life stands out as an example of compassion on behalf of the poor.

Apparently, Dorcas was a person who made all kinds of handcrafted items for people. She was a woman who sold and gave these items to others, weaving tunics and pieces (v. 39). She must have been an extraordinary leader as well, because, as Luke writes, when she died, all the widows came and stood at the side of the bed weeping (v. 39). She must have had a profound impact on others.

What I find interesting, though, when we read this passage, is that we don't hear anything from Dorcas herself. Instead, we hear about Dorcas. All Luke tells us is that she was a person "devoted to good works and acts of charity" (v. 36). He goes on to say words about the widows who had gathered in grief over the great loss they had experienced and the kinds of crafts she had made.<sup>3</sup> He also tells us about Peter coming and raising her to new life (v. 41-42). But when we read the passage, we don't hear what Dorcas said or thought!

### **Doing of Good Works and Acts of Charity**

Maybe that is because the "good works and acts of charity" that we read about were not about her! Dorcas was not interested in receiving applause. She was not interested in receiving "kudos." She was simply interested in serving Christ! Period! She was a person who knew her passion, her gifts, her talents, her mission, and she desired no more than to do her thing: "good works and acts of charity." [By the way, she is also the first woman in the New Testament to be called a disciple (v. 36)].<sup>4</sup>

But there is *more* to Dorcas' story, and by *more* I mean literally "more"! I mean that there is something lost in our translation because the word in our passage "devoted" really means "*more than,*" or "*full,*" or "*complete.*"<sup>5</sup> The actual

---

<sup>2</sup> Pastor Andy Kinsey, "Manners at the Table" based on Acts 6:1-7 at [www.franklingrace.org](http://www.franklingrace.org).

<sup>3</sup> *Homiletics* "Handcrafted Christians" (May 12, 2019) at [www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

translation is that Dorcas was “*completely focused more and more on good works.*” That is, she was “*completely, overflowing with goodness.*”

The New Revised Standard Version does not quite capture what Luke is trying to say.<sup>6</sup> Dorcas did not just dabble in good works. What she did was not just a hobby.<sup>7</sup> No, her good works and acts of charity were her life! She was “completely occupied more and more” with what God had called her to do. She had no room for anything else because it was God’s grace overflowing in her life.<sup>8</sup>

No wonder the widows were upset. Here was a true disciple and leader. Maybe this is why Peter stayed over in Joppa, because he wanted to learn more from Dorcas about leadership (v. 43).

### **Closing Invitation**

Maybe this is also why the apostle Paul was able to say in Ephesians that the Christian life was about goodness – that *God has made us, created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life*” (2:10).

Maybe Paul knew of people like Dorcas – of people who demonstrated a way of life, a ways of life with God, at home, or wherever they were. They demonstrated goodness in action, love in action, and compassion in action.

Put differently for us: Dorcas’ life reminds us that in the midst of this world, there is always *more* of life than death, always *more* of love than hate, always *more* of kindness than scapegoating. The good thing about Dorcas is that she embodied this way of life. Yes, she worked from home; she made things at home; but she also made her home into a launching pad for mission, for service, for helping the most vulnerable. She was “completely occupied” with following Jesus – more and more!

It is why I believe, near the end of our passage, when Peter raises Dorcas from the dead Peter is not just raising Dorcas back to life, though he was. He was also giving hope to those whose lives society devalued. He was participating in what *God* was doing to bring about a new age of righteousness.<sup>9</sup> He was serving in such a way that communicated that death does not have the last word. He was

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 86.

reminding us all that that every community, every home, every congregation exists to share with others that the good God calls us to do is done not to gain applause, but to bear witness to the Word that breaks the power of sin and death and to knit us together into a new family (Eph 4:16).

This is the Word we are wanting to share today – of being completely occupied with following Jesus more and more, and of praying our homes will embody such a way of life. This is the Word we are wanting to offer to every home, and, so share in good works and acts of charity. Amen.