

Adult Teaching Resources

May 12, 2019



Easter Season (April 21-June 2)

Resurrection Realities

Acts 9:1-20 (RCL 1-6, 7-20) – “Blind Devotion”

Acts 9:36-43 – “Shocking Faith”

Acts 11:1-18 – “Stunned Silence”

Acts 16:9-15 – “Eager Acceptance”

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Shocking Faith

Acts 9:36-43

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.” Acts 9:40

As people of faith we are often asked to believe the unbelievable. Sometimes, believing in a story is all the foundation we need. Today, we explore one of the unbelievable stories of Faith.

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep your group together in a large group. Move to the board or to a large sheet of paper on the wall so that you can make a list.

Ask your group to share stories from the Bible they have trouble fitting into their understanding of reality. Which stories of faith are just too unbelievable?

Make a list with the name of the story and a short description of what is so difficult about that story to understand.

As the list gets longer, talk about what parts of the story are troubling, what parts of the story seem impossible, and what parts of the story are unbelievable. Spend time comparing the struggles.

Ask the group to answer this question:

How do you read a story from scripture and process that story if it troubles you or if you find it unbelievable?

Reading the Bible

What was the name of the disciple in Joppa? (Tabitha or Dorcas)

What was she devoted to? (Good works and acts of charity)

What did the disciples in Joppa request of Peter? (“Please come to us without delay”)

What did Peter do when he got there? (He put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What did he say to the dead disciple? (“Tabitha, get up.”) What happened? (She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up)

Who did Peter call? (the saints and widows) What did Peter do? (He showed Tabitha to be alive)

What was the effect of Peter’s actions? (Many believed in the Lord)

Making Connections

How do you reconcile a story that is scripturally true, yet seems unreal?

Who do you know who does good deeds and is kind to people? What is special about that person?

Who in your life has died and the first response you had was, “What will we do?” What did you do to help with your hopelessness?

When in your life have you refused to give up hope? What role did you give God? What happened?

Have you ever been asked to provide hope in a difficult situation? What was the situation? What was needed? What did you do? What ultimately happened?

Have you experienced what you would consider to be a miracle? Share your story.

So What?

Remaining in the large group, share these words from our Lesson Writer,

“Do *we* believe that story, that God works through Peter to bring a dead woman back to life? That notion flies in the face of all we know to be true. Dead people stay dead

Still, most church-going Christian would probably affirm the story. We believe it because it is in the Bible, where we assume the normal rules governing the universe must have been suspended for a while, and it really seems like another world altogether.

It may not be that hard for us to believe that God could raise dear old Tabitha to life, but the important question is, do we believe that God can bring new life to us?”

Ask the large group to answer these questions:

What do we say about the truth of the story?

What do we say about faith and what we know to be true?

What power do we give God?

Can God bring new life to us? Why do you say that?

The Challenge

This week, pay attention and look for the unbelievable ways God is at work. Every time you experienced one, write it down to share with your group next week.

Prayer

Loving God of all things believable and unbelievable, help our unbelief. There is so much we don't know and so much we try to believe. Help us to trust you and rely on you with everything we have. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Peter takes the stage—Most of Acts 9 is devoted to the conversion of Saul, the beginning of his ministry, and his move to Antioch (9:1-30). With Saul’s conversion, persecution of the church appeared to decline: v. 31 says “Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

Luke’s account shifts to Peter as the main character at 9:32, reporting that he visited the village of Lydda, where he prayed for Jesus to heal a paralyzed man named Aeneas, a miracle so impressive that “All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord” (9:35).

This brings us to today’s text, in which Peter remains the main character.

Joppa—Ancient Joppa was an important port on the Mediterranean: recall that Jonah reportedly set sail from Joppa (Jonah 1:3). The town still has a small port to serve yachts and fishing boats; the concrete breakwater is built over ancient underwater foundations. Joppa’s location is just a few miles south of modern Tel Aviv. Known today as



Jaffa (Arabic) or Jafo (modern Hebrew, pronounced Ya-fō), the town has grown to become a large southern suburb of Tel-Aviv, so integrated with the city that the area is now called Tel Aviv-Jafo. The picture above is taken from modern Jaffa, looking north toward the high-rise buildings of Tel-Aviv.

Not for men only—Luke describes Tabitha as a “disciple,” using the feminine form (*mathētria*) of the term used for male disciples (*mathētēs*). This is the only time the female form is used in the New Testament, but not the only instance of women being portrayed as disciples of Jesus.

Luke typically gives more attention to women and the poor than other New Testament writers: Tabitha was both a woman and a widow.

Digging Deeper *continued*

An unusual miracle—The story of Peter raising Tabitha from the dead is unusual in at least two respects. First, there is no mention of Jesus, as in earlier miracles involving Peter, who typically made a point of calling on the name of Jesus when seeking healing for others (Acts 3:6, 9:34). Second, the emphasis on Tabitha's goodness is unusual. No other miracle story elaborates on the character or good deeds of the person in need of healing. This story is told as if to impress the reader with Tabitha's generosity, as if she were healed because she was worthy of it.

Setting the stage—The story of Tabitha's resurrection closes with a note that Peter remained in Joppa at the home of a man named Simon, a tanner. This strikes us as unusual, because the work of a tanner was smelly and not considered kosher. This sets the stage for the next chapter, in which Peter receives a vision regarding what foods are considered clean and unclean.

It is interesting to note that Jesus had referred to Peter as "son of Jonah" in Matt. 16:17. In the story of Jonah, he was instructed to set out from Joppa to go and preach to the Gentile residents of Nineveh. In chapter 10, Peter will set out from Joppa to preach to Gentiles in Caesarea.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Who is the main character in this story?

When reading Acts 9:36-43, who strikes you as the main character? We might argue for Tabitha/Dorcas, who stands out as a pillar of the church in Joppa, a generous and charitable woman of the first order.

We might also consider Peter, who is brought from Lydda in hopes that he might bring healing to Tabitha's lifeless body and succeeds in doing so, with the result that many believe.

One might also contend that the main character in the story is the believing community, first introduced as the beneficiary of Tabitha's good and important works, then as united in mourning over her death. Members of the community then took the initiative of sending for Peter, and after Tabitha's resurrection, Peter called for the "saints and widows" to witness her renewed health. No doubt the community was then involved in spreading the word, so that many others came to faith.

Looking at the story this way reminds us that the church is called to be a community of healing for each other. Whether we are responding to the physical needs of poverty and illness, the emotional needs of loneliness and loss, or the spiritual needs of confusion and failure, we can bring hope and healing and renewed life to persons both inside and outside of the community of faith.

Miraculous healings are few and far between, but when our family of faith surrounds us with love, fewer miracles are needed.