

“Get Up and Move”

Acts 9:36-43; Revelation 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

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From the Pulpit

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A Baptismal Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Mothers' Day, May 12, 2019, Easter 4, dedicated to Audrey Alberta Bohnert on her baptismal day, to the 2019 Schumacher Award winners, Gabbrila Johnson, Jazmyne Robinson and Brittney Valentine, to Laurie Maynell and the Schumacher committee, to my mother Lorene Kellermeyer Ahrens on her 91st Birthday, and to all the mothers of First Church and the women in this congregation who have served as mothers to all of those who were not her children and always to the glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“If you think getting up on Sunday morning is hard, try rising from the dead.” So read the poster sent out by our denomination - the United Church of Christ - many years ago. Those words resonate for me each Sunday morning when I am working on waking, but especially this Sunday as Tabitha rises from the

dead through the prayers and presence of Peter and the power of God.

Tabitha's resurrection is the church's first resurrection story - outside of Jesus our Savior rising in Easter glory. It is so significant in the body of our Christian scriptures; we need to look more deeply into how hard it is to rise from the dead – especially on a Sunday morning.

First, who was this woman? Tabitha or Dorcas in the Greek, whose name means “Gazelle” in Hebrew and Greek, is only woman in the New Testament who merits the use of the feminine form of “disciple. In other words, scripture places her alongside the 12 apostles when speaking of her. Joppa's “Gazelle” is like the Captain Marvel of the New Testament. She has a superpower of compassion and love for the widows and the poor.

Like others in this new community called “little Christs” (which is the meaning of Christian), no one stays in their place. Common fishermen are preaching to the religious leaders in the Temple, paralyzed old men, like Aeneas, are up and walking about changing lives, and a woman called Gazelle is running the welfare program among the poor of Joppa. She is busy reconfiguring the power grid of life by taking the poor and lowly and despised in the world and shining God's light and love (I Corinthians 1:26-31).

In the first century, widows by definition were poor. They sat at the bottom rung of society. There was no one to represent them or protect them. They had absolutely no share in the wealth of the patriarchal system. Among the poorest of the poor, Tabitha pitches her tent and serves God. Here is where the Gazelle dedicates her life's work. As I was listening earlier, I feel like the heart and soul, the humility and love shown by Tabitha feels like the same heart and soul that God has granted our three Schumacher Award winners - Gabbrila, Jazmyne and Brittany.

When Tabitha dies, her life-giving work dies with her. Her death has caused a crisis in the community. Now the most vulnerable ones have no one. As Peter walks into the room where Tabitha is lying, the widows show him their coats and garments that Tabitha made for them as evidence of the life and compassion their Gazelle delivered for them. None of these widows is interested in the theology of resurrection, nor are they wrapped up in concerns about eternal life. They are too poor to worry about such things. All they know is – their Captain Marvel is gone. How will they survive? Who will be their superhero now?

Peter? Will he be their Iron Man? While he brings the love of God into this story, Peter is not the hero of this story. Rather it is the Spirit of the Risen Christ and the power of God, working through him, that causes one more to Rise. After praying, Peter says to the body in front of him, "Get up." He raises the

dead like the fisherman that he is. Two words. Simple. Clear.
“Get up.”

Tabitha rises – filled with new life.

“Get up” Tabitha, these widows need you. “Get up” Tabitha, the poor are without their superhero. “Get up” Tabitha so you can get back to work making garments and feeding and housing the poor. Tabitha is saved to serve. She is raised to deliver daily hope to those around her. Captain Marvel is Back!

Peter’s wizardly words are deeply moving - **“Get Up.”** They are words that call to each one of us across 2000 years. They call each one of us to rise. We are called to “GET UP!” too. The fisherman of Galilee calls us still to “get out” of our little worlds and “get up” and move into the world that needs us. “Get out” of your self-absorption and “Get Up” to serve! “Get out” of your criticism and critique of systems and theology and “Get Up” present to others. “Get Out” of your over-analyzing and over-criticizing and “Get Up” and see someone else is need. “Get out” of your finger-pointing and realize one pointed out at someone else leaves four fingers pointing back at you. Instead, “Get Up” and – with hands wide open – give yourself to others. “Get out” of your heads and “get up” and give your hearts to someone.

Let me ask a question - How many of us suffer from sleeping in? How many of us think it is hard to rise on Sunday

mornings? How many of us, roll over and “play dead” while we know those around us are in need of help and support? I once had a cartoon that showed a man with the covers pulled up to his nose and peeking out at a woman standing at the end of the bed. She says to him, **“But, you have to get up and go to church. You’re the pastor!”**

We all get stuck in our own stuff and “play dead” while those around us are faced with real life and death situations. I learned long ago from my Mom that getting up and moving is the most important thing of all to do each day. Showing up and serving others is what happens after we get up and move. Today, on Mothers’ Day – of all days - it is time to “get up and move.” In the old African-American spiritual, “Ain’t Got Time to Die,” the refrain keeps coming back:

*Lord I keep so busy workin' for the kingdom,
Keep so busy workin' for the kingdom
Keep so busy workin' for the kingdom
Ain't got time to die*

*'Cause it takes all of my time workin' for my Jesus,
All of my time praising my Lord,
If I don't praise Him the rocks are gonna cry out
Glory and honor, glory and honor
Ain't got time to die.*

I can hear Tabitha singing “*Ain’t Got Time to Die*” as she gets up and moves out serving her Savior. May this become our refrain as we get out of ourselves, get up in the spirit of the Lord and move out to serve our Savior. Glory and honor. Glory and honor. Ain’t got time to die. Amen.

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