



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 17, 2009
6th Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:36-42
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 9:36-42
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 98
Second Lesson: 1 John 4:1-11
Gospel: John 15:9-17

Display Your Discipleship

Tabitha's display

Peter's display

All your life you've probably been used to the concept of displaying things, haven't you? From your first days of school, whether it was Preschool, Kindergarten or First Grade, when you stuck your fingers in paint and squiggled them all over the paper and then brought them home to your mom or dad, they grabbed a magnet and stuck them on the fridge, right? Your handy work was on display because mom and dad wanted everyone to see it, right?

As you get a little older, you sit every year as a kid, don't you, and get your picture taken at school. Every year your parent sticks it up some place in the house, so you are reminded of how you didn't listen and got dirty before the picture was taken, or forgot to comb your hair or whatever the case might have been, but it's displayed there. Then comes that moment, that moment that is frozen in time forever when you are going to graduate from high school, right? You get your picture taken and your parents stick it on their wall. For the rest of your life you have to go back there and be embarrassed by what you thought looked cool at the time, right?

Then, you get married. The Lord blesses you with a spouse. He also blessed you with a sore jaw as you stood and smiled so long your teeth hurt and your face hurt from smiling over and over. Then you have to display those pictures. Then if the Lord blesses you with children, the cycle starts all over again, only this time you are the one sticking the magnet on the fridge and displaying those pictures for everyone to see. Things that are important to you, or important to your parents, are put on display. It's the cycle the keeps repeating itself over and over and over.

This morning in what I read to you from the Book of Acts, the Lord is talking to us about what he wants us to stick on the fridge of our life, what he wants us to take a magnet and stick it up there for everyone that walks in the door of our life to see. He wants us to display our discipleship, our following in the footsteps of Christ because he loved us enough to take away our sins even when we were unlovable. He loved us enough to take on human flesh, live in our place, and die in our place. He loved us with a love that is not comprehensible in reality for you and me. It's only believable. It's not necessarily understandable. He wants us, in response to what he has done for us, Christ for us, to live for him. It changes us. It changes our lives. It changes how we do things. It leads

us to do things that we know are according to his will and out of love for him. He wants that put on display. He wants that stuck on the fridge of our life.

We see it today in two disciples. I suppose two disciples you would say that are on opposite ends of the spectrum. Maybe you've heard of the name "Dorcas" and "Tabitha." Maybe you haven't. But I'm guessing that the people in the southern part of Judah probably didn't know who Dorcas or Tabitha was. Peter, on the other hand, many people, Christian and Jew alike, knew who Peter was because he was the guy that they were always arresting and throwing in prison about this time. He was one of the followers of that guy they had all probably heard about by now, that "Jesus" fellow. So you have one that is well known and maybe one that is not so well known; one that serves in what we would say is spectacular ways and another that serves in what we would say is ordinary ways. Yet both of them displayed their love for Jesus in their life so that others could see it.

We are told that Tabitha lived in Joppa. It's along the coast, the northern part of Israel. She lived there and had served her Lord as a believer in Christ faithfully by helping, we are told, the poor and the needy. Evidently one of the ways she helped them was by making things with her hands. After she had died, they had washed her body, prepared it for burial, and they had it there where they could gather together and mourn, as was the custom. They had sent for Peter, who was in nearby Lydda. When Peter shows up, he goes up there, and did you notice what he is confronted with? He has all these women and all these mourners that are there wailing and crying that are, it sounds almost like tackling him and showing him the stuff that Tabitha had made. "Here's what she made for me when I was down and out." "Here's what she made for my brother, my husband, my friend," whatever the case may be. The pictures of her discipleship that were stuck on her fridge, these women took off and brought it and showed it to Peter and said, "Look how she loved the Lord. It was obvious for all of us to see. She loved her Lord and she served her Lord in this way." The love of Christ was evident in how she lived her life.

That's an amazing testament to a simple, child-like faith that says, "How can I serve my God? How can I thank my God, the God who has done all this for me? How can I live in a way that gives him the glory?" You see the results.

So Peter goes upstairs, and I wish the Lord would have saw fit to tell us a little bit about what Peter said and what God said back to him, but the Lord didn't see fit to do that. We are just told that he sent everyone out of the room. He prayed. Then he turned and looked at Tabitha and said, "Tabitha, get up." I'd like to know what he prayed. I'd like to know if the Lord told him, "Hey, turn to her and say 'get up.' I want you to bring her back from the dead." Something must have been communicated. Something must have happened, but God doesn't focus on that for us. Instead he simply focuses on how Peter displays his discipleship by following whatever it was the Lord had told him to do. He does what seems to be the incredible work of being the instrument in God's hand that raises Tabitha from the dead.

This is a picture that was stuck on the fridge of his life that the people all over the region heard about. Then they wanted to know, "who is this God that led Peter to do this for this woman that so many people had dearly loved?" Then the Holy Spirit used that as opportunities for people to tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that people might believe and be saved.

In small things, in great things, discipleship was displayed. God was glorified. Lives were touched. And opportunities to share the Gospel were created by our God. If we learn anything, we ought to learn that whatever you do out of love for God and according to his will, God will use in ways that bring him glory. So that ought to be telling us that we don't seek out for ourselves our own ways to glorify God and then think to ourselves, "Well, if I'm not doing what so-and-so is doing, my service isn't that important so I'm just not going to do it. Someone else should be doing that. Someone else can take care of that." God tells us that if we have the ability, we are to do it because it is a way that we glorify him. It's a way that we display our discipleship.

We do it out of love for God because he loved us first when we were unlovable. We do it because he loved us so much that he took away our sins. We don't do it so that we get a pat on the back. We don't do it so that we get noticed. We don't do it so that we get thanked. We don't do it so that we get acknowledged.

But by all means, as a fellow Christian, one of the ways we serve God and show our love for God is to thank those who serve us and acknowledge them and appreciate their work. That's one of the ways that we acknowledge and display our discipleship and put that picture on our fridge as we thank and acknowledge others. But don't ever let Satan convince you that's the motivation for doing it. And don't ever let him convince you that if someone doesn't gush and make a big commotion about what you have done that "that's it. I'm never doing that again. To hell with that; I'm not putting myself through that." Then Satan wins and you're not displaying discipleship, but you are displaying something that some people will notice.

Think about it as an adult. If you come back and complain and whine and moan about no one paying attention to you or thanking you for the service you did, who do you think is listening to you? All those little pictures that you have on the fridge that they drew, they are drawing one on their mind right then and there, aren't they? They will decide you only serve God when people thank you and if they don't thank you, you don't serve God.

Unfortunately, you and I don't only display discipleship. We also display our sinful nature. We also display all the times that we make poor choices that other people observe and we put on display for them the idea that God's Word isn't that important, that making time for God's Word isn't that important, that you only do it when there is some other thing that you have to do along with it; not because you love your Lord and you want to know him better. If the Lord has blessed you with other people in your household, you are displaying something. The question is, are you going to display

your discipleship, or are you going to display your sinful nature? The answer is, Lord willing, you'll display both.

So now the question becomes, after you have displayed your sinful nature, how are you going to use that as a teaching moment? Are you going to make excuses? Are you going to point fingers? Are you going to lay blame? Or are you going to teach what discipleship looks like when you just say, "I have sinned. I'm sorry. I've done wrong. Forgive me for setting a bad example for you. Forgive me for whining and moaning and focusing on myself instead of my Lord. Forgive me, because I was wrong."

Over the past week, picture it. Picture your past week; can you picture anyone that has sinned or done things wrong and has hurt you? Now can you picture how many times they've come back and said, "I'm sorry. I was wrong."

Now picture yourself. How many times this last week did you display your discipleship by going back to the people you hurt and saying, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please, for the sake of Jesus, forgive me." Think about that picture that you can display on your fridge.

When you and I learn to live this way and acknowledge that we aren't perfect and confess our sins one to another as God directs us to, think of how we are going to be passing on to each other the encouragement to continue to do this, how we are passing on to the next generation the opportunity to display their discipleship in this way. Think of how we will become a stronger body of Christ in our spiritual community when we get over ourselves and are willing to admit that we screw up and are willing to put ourselves on the line and ask each other to forgive us.

Then the love of Christ will be displayed among us, maybe not in coats and robes and other blankets that we have made, but in the love we have shown, and the lessons we have taught as we have lived to display our discipleship. God will strengthen us through his Word and Sacrament to do this.

Sometimes we have to do like he said to Mary when Martha was whining about no one helping. He didn't exactly say it, but it's pretty close to "suck it up. Shut up. She chose what was better." So maybe we also can start choosing what is better and live our faith strengthened by Word and Sacrament.