

Normal, Everyday Resurrection (Acts 9:36-43)

What happens when your story gets lost between the headlines?

It happens, doesn't it? Sometimes, the "important" stories suck all the oxygen out of the room, leaving everything else to seem like a footnote.

Think about our text today. Acts is packed with major plot points. In chapter eight, we're cruising with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Chapter nine opens with Saul—hellbent on violence—blinded by the light. Then chapter ten unveils Peter's vision and his journey to Cornelius, a gentile soldier. Three chapters. Three seismic shifts in early Christianity.

Three chapters. Three big narratives. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul on the Damascus road. And Peter

goes to the house of Cornelius the gentile. A lot going on there.

Pretty heavy hitters, wouldn't you say? Lot of history tied up in those three stories. And not just

"boring-we-learn-it-because-it's-going-to-be-on-the-test" history, either.

No, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the conversion of Saul into Paul, Peter and Cornelius?

Those stories shaped the very life of the early church. We wouldn't be stretching it at all to say that the church, as we know it, wouldn't exist without those stories. And wedged in there between these epic accounts is the little story of the healing of Aeneas, just before our text, and the little story of the raising of Dorcas.

Now, I say “little story,” by which I do **not** mean insignificant—although, I fear, as an apparent sapling in the shadow of three such towering Redwoods, Dorcas does receive short shrift. What I mean by “little story” is exactly **that**: it’s little, brief, doesn’t take up much room. Almost an afterthought, really.

But don’t give up on Dorcas too quickly. For one thing, Dorcas is one of only five people named as a disciple in either Luke or Acts.

Know who else gets named as disciples in this two-volume narrative?

James and John in the book of Luke (9:54), Ananias, who helped Paul with his conversion (9:10), and Timothy in the book of Acts (16:1). Pretty stellar company Dorcas finds herself in. She’s—at least according to Luke—no small-timer, no bit part in the story. She’s a **disciple**.

Indeed, Dorcas is the only woman in the whole Christian Scriptures to whom the word “disciple” is directly attached. Very few people get such special treatment in the Bible. So Luke wants us to understand that the church suffered a devastating blow when news came down that Dorcas had died. She’s not just a member of First Christian Joppa’s Tuesday afternoon bridge club. She’s the straw that stirs the drink.

So Luke can name Dorcas in the same breath as Philip and Paul and Peter with a clear conscience. Within her sphere of influence, Dorcas is a heavy hitter, just like those guys.

But her stature within the young Christian community isn’t the primary point Luke seeks to make, although he does want us to know that this new enterprise called “the church” has some rather revolutionary ideas when it comes to women. In a culture in which women were, by and large,

still considered property, the church subtly put forward the subversive notion that women were capable leaders, too.

In other words, from the very beginning, those who follow Jesus are schooled to trust women to make good decisions. That we ought to have confidence in women's abilities to exercise their moral agency over their lives, their vocations, their families, and their own bodies is encoded in the DNA of those who want to live as Jesus lived.

However, Luke's primary point, which he is looking to underline with his narrative mastery, is encapsulated in a single word.

That's it. Luke ties together these narratives with one word. It doesn't jump out, probably because you're reading an English translation. But if you were hearing these stories read to you in the original Greek—and assuming you spoke Greek—you'd hear something quite extraordinary.

Luke ties these stories together with the same word he uses to announce Easter: **resurrection**. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the conversion of Saul, the healing of Aeneas, the raising of Dorcas, and the conversion of Cornelius hinge on normal, everyday resurrections.

And you say, "All right. I can see how you might twist the raising of Dorcas into a resurrection moment—even though I don't see that word in the text—because she is, after all, raised from the dead. But I think you're stretching it on the other stories. I don't see resurrection with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, the conversion of Saul, the healing of Aeneas, or the conversion of Cornelius. You're just making that up."

Nope. It's in the book.

Resurrection.

Where?

Well, let's start with the obvious one ... Dorcas. Luke tells us that Dorcas has gone on to her eternal reward, causing some disciples to approach Peter and tell him of Dorcas's untimely demise. In shades reminiscent of Jesus' raising of Jairus's daughter, Peter arrives on the scene and tells Dorcas to get up. Actually, he uses her Aramaic name, Tabitha, but the gist of it is that he tells her to get up. That, of course, is a normal, everyday resurrection. But the other stories have them, too.

How about Philip back in chapter eight? Luke tells us, "Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch ... " (8:26-27).

Did you hear it? A resurrection moment.

What about Saul's conversion story in chapter nine?

Where's the resurrection in that story?

Actually, there are two. Saul, as you remember, was struck down on the road to Damascus by a bright light and the voice of Jesus. A little wobbly perhaps, but Luke says, "Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing" (9:8). Then, Ananias, one of those select disciples named in Acts, is approached by God in a vision: "Ananias."

"He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.'"

"The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.'" (9:10-11). There it is again.

After Saul becomes Paul in chapter nine, we have this short account of Peter meeting a man named Aeneas, who'd been bedridden for eight years with paralysis. "Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!' And resurrection happens again.

Then, as we've already discussed, Luke tells us about Dorcas. Just after Peter's encounter with Dorcas in Joppa, he had a dream about eating unclean food in chapter ten. The upshot of the dream was that a voice in the dream said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

Luke leaves us with Peter scratching his head: "Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius [a Gentile centurion—who also, ironically, would have been called unclean by Peter] appeared. They were asking for Simon's house ... While Peter was still thinking about the

vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.'" (10:17-20). Resurrection.

What do all these stories have in common?

If the characters in these stories stay where they are, the work God has for them won't be done. If they lie there on the ground, relaxing, struggling, frightened, paralyzed, dead, puzzling, they're not going to accomplish what God wants done.

But they ***don't*** stay on the ground, do they?

What do they do?

They all get up!

Resurrection.

And you say, “Okay. I get it. I see your point a little. But just getting up doesn’t really qualify as resurrection, does it? I mean, come on. Dorcas, I’ll give you. I’ll even bite on Aeneas and Saul. But Philip and Peter just got up. And getting up isn’t resurrection.”

Oh, no? Are you sure?

It’s the same word in Greek. Ανίστημι.

The word we translate, “get up” in English, is the same word we use to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. Literally, Jesus was ***gotten up*** by God on Easter Sunday morning.

Luke artfully conveys that in all these stories—stories central to the spread of the Gospel and the establishment of the church—God is busy accomplishing God’s purposes in

normal, everyday resurrections among ordinary people. God keeps dropping Easter into the unlikeliest of places.

“My father—a farmer’s son—had Hay Fever.” That’s how I began my dad’s eulogy. I wanted, by that, to point out the interesting contradictions in his life.

I **knew** my dad; I grew up in his presence. I thought I had a pretty good handle on who he was—and who, by my estimation, he could never find out how to be. To me, he seemed like an ordinary guy, full of all the usual human frailties we all carry around.

It’s difficult to romanticize those folks closest to you since you know what they look like before they brush their hair or after they bark their shins on the coffee table.

But burying my father was an interesting exercise in seeing his life through other people’s eyes. I had countless folks

make a point of coming to me to say that my dad, an acquisitions editor, was responsible for launching their careers as authors.

That was gratifying to hear, but not entirely unexpected (given the nature of his work). However, **more** people came to me to tell me how he'd helped them find God through his patience and gentleness.

Interestingly enough, my father struck me as neither patient **nor** gentle. Neither of those words would have been ones my siblings or I would ever have used to describe him—but they kept coming up, over and over again in **other** people's descriptions of him ... how my dad helped people find new life or at least the life they were meant to lead—which may amount to the same thing in the end.

I find it fascinating, and not a little bit instructive, to think that God can make something out of us that nobody ever

thought we could be. Knowing ourselves as we do—that God chooses **us** to embody the love and justice envisioned in this new reign is confounding. But if, when God tells us to get up, we get up and go, the story of the gospel is that God can change the world through us.

And that's the thing: The world, as chaotic and torn as it is right now, needs a little resurrection—needs people like you and me to get up and bring new life to folks who feel like everybody else has given up on them.

LGBTQ kids are dying, waiting for someone to care about them.

Traumatized refugees and asylum seekers are languishing in camps, waiting for someone to notice them.

Our Black friends and family are dying in jail, waiting for someone to realize that we seem to live in a system designed not to ***deliver*** but to ***thwart*** justice.

Single parents are trapped in low-paying jobs, waiting for a enough people to stand up with them and say that you can't live on \$7.25 an hour.

Muslims, who live right next to us in fear, are looking to see if people like you and me wrap our arms around them and treat them like neighbors.

Here's the thing: these stories in Acts aren't about Philip or Paul or Peter or Aeneas or Dorcas—stories about a farmer's son with ragweed allergies. These stories are about a God who constantly seeks to raise us up to do the work needed in God's new realm of peace and justice.

The point of these normal, everyday resurrections is that God doesn't need much to work with to bring the good news of the gospel to a dying world: Philip, the eunuch, Saul, Aeneas, Peter, Cornelius, Dorcas, my father, you and me.

Indeed, Luke says that if God is determined to oversee a resurrection moment with you, not even death can keep you from getting up.

-Amen.