***GET UP AND MAKE YOUR BED!***

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Texts: Acts 9:32-43 and Psalm 146:5-10

The story is told of a young man who was having trouble getting out of bed one Sunday morning. Repeatedly his mother tried to rouse him, without success. Exasperated, she fumed, “*Enough is enough. Get up!*” In hopes of finding a little more peace, the young man called out from beneath his pillow, “*Give me three good reasons.*” “*Well, first*,” replied his mother, “*it is Sunday morning and that is a day to get up and worship the Lord. Second, you are forty years old. And third, you’re the minister of the church!*”

It is sometimes hard to get out of bed on Sunday mornings – or on a cool rainy morning or on the morning after a hard day or hard night, or on the morning after the prom. But it is even harder to get out of bed if you are paralyzed, and it is harder yet if you are dead. This is not a new revelation. Yet you may think from these accounts of healings by Peter in Lydda and Joppa that it is not such a hard thing to do – to get out of bed when no one expects you to – even if you’re dead. Not only Peter, but also Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus raised the dead. Standing only three weeks distant from our Easter celebration, you may think that rising from the dead is a frequent occurrence in Scripture and a little disconnected from our world today. But the same rules applied to their world as to ours – you didn’t stand on dead legs and you didn’t rise from your bed if you were dead. So, when the paralyzed Aeneas got up and made his bed and when the deceased Tabitha arose from death’s sleep, something truly extraordinary happened, something miraculous, something that inspired faith in those who were there.

In her book *The Living*, Annie Dillard tells a tale of families trying to survive in the wilds of late 19th century Washington State. Death was very much a part of life there, yet the heartache for those who lost loved ones was all too familiar. In describing the death of Ada Fishburn, an older woman who had lived with her son Clare and his wife June, Dillard writes:

*Clare knew [June] would find Ada’s cot gone from the parlor, and the floor swept smooth where she had lain. June and Clare were surprised that expecting Ada’s death, and planning for it and around it, was no proof against either its grief or its shock. Clare had observed that when someone died, the whole world hushed the matter up. The living swarmed over the gap and closed it; the hole in the mud swelled shut. His mother, however, had left a hole, a space in the air like a space at the table, into which bits of living thoughts flowed and were annihilated.*[[1]](#endnote-1)

I wonder if such a hole existed for those who gathered around Tabitha in that upper room in Joppa. Here was a woman of great stature, a woman of good works, a charitable woman who had dedicated her life to Christian service – and suddenly she was dead and gone. Her body had been washed and laid out for burial, and mourners gathered round recalling through a veil of tears sweet memories of her acts of kindness. The women who gathered there were widows, those who in first century Joppa were poor and destitute. It was *among* these women that Tabitha served, *for* these women that Tabitha had made clothes; with her death there was a hole in that early Christian community, a hole that would be difficult to fill, a hole in the lives of those who lived and served with her, those who knew her as a faithful *mathetria*, a *disciple* of the Lord.

Jesus’ death had left a gaping hole in the lives of his disciples as well. After the resurrection, the risen Jesus was not with the disciples as he had been before his death; no longer did he walk with them, talk with them, and lead them day to day. In other messianic movements of the day, such holes were often filled by successors. When a messiah figure died, the mantle was passed on to one of the followers who became the new messiah. There must have been those who were tempted to have Peter fill the gap created by Jesus’ death – those who wanted to see in Peter’s teaching, healing, and certainly in this resuscitation of a saint, the hand of a messiah at work. Could not his command to Aeneas to rise and make his bed and his raising of Tabitha lay claim for Peter to be the newly anointed one of God? Yet Peter was clear that the hole created by Jesus’ death had already been filled, not by Peter, but by the risen Lord himself and by the ongoing power of the Spirit. No new messiah was necessary!

When he heals the paralytic Aeneas, Peter doesn’t claim that healing power for himself; he declares: “*Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed!*” When he raises Tabitha from her death bed, Peter doesn’t do so by his own power, but only after prayer, so that her resuscitation led many to believe, not in Peter, but in the Lord. Let there be no doubt, says Peter and all those followers of the risen Christ, it is Jesus who heals, Jesus who saves, and it is the risen Jesus who continues to heal, to save, to bring good news, to offer hope to the world, and to work in our midst through the power of the Spirit. The cross and empty tomb did not leave the Christian faith empty. There is no hole that needs filled, no need for a new messiah, for the one true messiah has risen from the dead and continues to work in our midst in powerful, spirit-filled ways.

It is that Christ and that Spirit who fill the holes in our lives, however those holes may have formed –

when a spouse or child or parent or good friend dies,

when you doubt yourself and your ability to do what you do,

when cancer punches a hole in your health,

when you are struggling to find that purpose for which you were created,

when you start a new job and find holes of inadequacy,

when you move to a new place and confront the gaps created by friends

now far away,

when the world is at war or is falling apart all around you,

– then the Spirit of Christ offers to fill the void and to fill you,

to reassure you that you are not alone,

that you can make it,

that God is with you,

that you can do more than you thought you could do.

It is the Spirit who inspires not only life, but also living. It is the Spirit who says, *through God all things are possible*. It is the Spirit who says, *nothing can separate you from the love of God*. It is the Spirit who makes getting out of bed, even on the hardest of days, not only a possibility, but a joy, for each new day is a gift from God.

Some years ago Dick Beard shared a quote from Admiral William McRaven in a devotional for a Session meeting; it is a quote that was printed in the bulletin for Dick’s memorial service last year. It reads in part:

*Nothing can replace the strength and comfort of one’s faith, but sometimes the simple act of making your bed can give you the lift you need to start your day and provide you the satisfaction to end it right. If you want to change your life and maybe the world – start off by making your bed!*

Making your bed is not a great act of faith or an alternative to faith, but it might be a simple act that helps you start on a faithful path. It is what Jesus commanded Aeneas to do after his healing: *Get up and make your bed!* It is not enough to just get up; there is more to be done, work to be done at home and in the world, work that begins with getting up and making our beds and getting on to the challenges of the day, for in taking that first step we may find it easier then to take the next step and the next and the next throughout the day.

Someone once shared with me a credo by an unknown author that seems to capture something of that “rise and shine” spirit. It reads:

*This is the beginning of a new day.*

*God has given me this day to use as I will;*

*I can waste it or use it for good.*

*What I do today is very important*

*Because I am exchanging a day of my life for it.*

*When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever,*

*Leaving something in its place I have traded for it.*

*I want it to be Gain, not loss…*

*Good, not evil…*

*Success, not failure…*

*In order that I shall not forget the price I paid for it.*

With a day of your life, you pay for whatever it is you do that day; and Christ made that possible for you by paying for your life – for you – with his life itself. Each day is an important day, a day with unlimited possibilities. Enjoy it. Make the most of it. For in the power of the Spirit – power that could give a fresh start to a paralyzed man in Lydda and a dead saint in Joppa, power in the risen Christ – you can make this day extraordinary. You may not heal a paralyzed person or raise the dead, but you can do great things, faithful things. Or rather, God can do great and faithful things through you.

Now I don’t know if you made your bed this morning or not, and I am not coming to your house to check, but tomorrow morning as you get your day started, you might try getting up and making your bed, and as you do, think of Aeneas and Tabitha and those words Dick Beard quoted as encouragement to persevere faithfully through whatever challenges you are facing, to be the instrument through which God is at work throughout the day. For that, my friends, is worth getting out of bed for – this day and all days. Amen

1. Annie Dillard, *The Living*, p.341 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)