



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“Sometimes It Takes So Little”

Acts 9:36-43
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This morning I want to share with you two stories that have something in common. The first one is told by a writer named Kent Nerburn, who many years ago drove a cab. He gets a call to pick someone up in the middle of the night. He remembers it this way.

I was responding to a call from a small brick fourplex in a quiet part of town. I assumed I was being sent to pick up some partiers...or someone going off to an early shift at some factory...

When I arrived at the address, the building was dark except for a single light in a ground-floor window... I walked to the door and knocked.

“Just a minute,” answered a frail and elderly voice...After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman somewhere in her 80s stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like you might see in a costume shop or a Goodwill store or in a 1940’s movie. By her side was a small nylon suitcase...

“Would you carry my bag out to the car?” she said. “I’d like a few moments alone. Then, if you could come back and help me? I’m not very strong.”

Nerburn continues.

I took the suitcase to the cab, then returned to assist the woman. She took my arm, and we walked slowly toward the curb. She kept thanking me for my kindness...

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, “Could you drive through downtown?”

“It’s not the shortest way,” I answered.

“Oh, I don’t mind,” she said. “I’m in no hurry. I’m on my way to a hospice.”

I will return to the story a little later in the sermon. The other story I want to focus on is the one you heard a few minutes ago from the Book of Acts. It centers on a woman named Dorcas who cares for a group of widows in a place called Joppa. She provides clothing and food and support for the widows. In the first century, widows, women without men, are on the bottom rung of society. They have no one to represent them or protect them. Dorcas’ work among them is a humble ministry to a small group of poor and vulnerable women.

Then Dorcas dies. Peter is sent for. It is a poignant scene, as the widows greet Peter and then show him the clothes that Dorcas has made for them: these tangible signs of the new life given to them by their friend. I’m betting that with each piece of clothing comes a story. They tell Peter about the time she drops off several bags of groceries, the time she watches the kids so that one of them can make it to a job interview, the time she

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arrives on their doorstep with a home cooked meal. Sometimes it takes so little to make a difference in someone's life.

Maybe that's why Dorcas is given the name of disciple. She merits the only use of the feminine form of the Greek word for "disciple" in the entire New Testament.

No surprise, Dorcas' death is devastating for this small community. So, when Peter arrives, the widows aren't interested in having a theological discussion about life after death. They want to know how they are going to survive.¹

How do any of us survive the death of the important people in our lives? Each widow has already lost a spouse. Now they are facing the death of their protectorate and friend.

I've been thinking about all of those families in Sri Lanka, burying their loved ones. How are they going to survive such a loss? What can any of us do to help someone who is experiencing a similar loss? What would Dorcas do?

We can give them something to eat. That's always a good thing. Those who are the friends, the relatives, the neighbors – they have the primary job in all of this – to literally feed the grieving – to bring them casseroles and trays of cold cuts and baked goods. Such food won't heal them. It won't take away the pain. But food cooked in love is always a good thing.

Sometimes it takes so little to make a difference in someone's life.

Back to Kent Nerburn, the cab driver, and his elderly passenger. Here is how he tells the rest of the story, what happens after he learns that he is driving her to a hospice facility.

I looked in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were glistening. "I don't have any family left," she continued. "The doctor says I should go [to hospice]. He says I don't have very long."

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. "What route would you like me to go?" I asked.

For the next two hours we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they had first been married. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she would have me slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me... Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. Without waiting for me, they opened the door and began assisting the woman...

I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase up to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked, reaching into her purse.

¹ William Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, p. 85.

“Nothing,” I said.

“You have to make a living,” she answered.

“There are other passengers,” I responded.

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held on to me tightly. “You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,” she said. “Thank you.”

Sometimes it takes so little to make a difference in a person’s life. Sometimes it takes so little to transform the world. Just about every day brings an opportunity to do a small, tangible thing that make this world a more grace-filled place. We can spend more time with our own family. We can listen to a friend. We can offer to pray for a co-worker. We can give money to a cause that creates a more whole and just world. Maybe there is a widow or two who could use – if not clothes – friendship, a phone call, a ride to church.

Sometimes it takes so little to make a difference in someone’s life. Sometimes it takes so little to transform the world. This is how Kent Nerburn reflects back on that nighttime cab ride:

We are so conditioned to think that our lives revolve around great moments. But great moments often catch us unawares. When that woman hugged me and said that I had brought her a moment of joy, it was possible to believe that I had been placed on earth for the sole purpose of providing her with that last ride.

I do not think that I have ever done anything in my life that was any more important.²

A sweater. A cup of water. A listening ear. It takes so little to change someone’s life. It takes so little to participate in resurrection. When we do small tangible things, new life – resurrected life – enters into the world in real and concrete ways.

This second Sunday in the season of Easter, we are reminded that there is nothing abstract about resurrection. You can wear it. You can eat it. You can drink it. You can share it with others. Like the cab driver does that night. Like Dorcas does. This one who is given the title of disciple, she reshapes the world one widow at a time. The work she does is subversive and powerful. In a society in which women control so little, she defines a ministry of empowering women even more vulnerable than herself. All in the name of the crucified and risen one.

Of course, Luke calls her a disciple...

May the same be said of us. May the same be said of us.

² <https://kentnerburn.com/the-cab-ride-ill-never-forget/>