

Clint Eastwood portrayed a grumpy old Catholic man and Korean War vet in a movie called "Gran Torino." His wife had died and the children were dreading the fact that they would have to deal with him. They didn't really like him at all, but they did like some of his stuff. While his granddaughter was in the garage, she asked him if she could have his Gran Torino when he died. Not too long after that his son called to ask if he had connections to season tickets to watch the Lions. Every time they asked him for anything he just scowled at them or hung up the phone. It seemed that they only were nice with him half the time because they wanted something out of him.

Some people are like that, and so are their family members. It's sad to see. The family comes together at a funeral to shed a few crocodile tears, then quickly roll up their sleeves; hire the lawyers; and start fighting over who gets what. They reveal that they love the stuff that belonged to their parent or grandparent more than they love them; and they end up bitter enemies because of how the estate is divided. Greed is an awful thing. What about you, when your time ends on this earth? Will You Be Truly Missed When You're Gone?

With Tabitha you see no family inheritance wars. No mention is made of a husband, children or grandchildren to fight over her stuff. She may have been a widow. She didn't have a Gran Donkey or a Gran Horse. They didn't have to fight over her stuff when she died because she gave much of it away to the poor and the widows when she was living. She provided the poor with clothing - something we take for granted because we have so much of it. They didn't have rescue shelters and government programs to take care of them and give them money. Tabitha felt for them and did something for them. She used her hands and her time and her money to purchase cloth and make the clothing they needed. She was still very active until she became sick and weak and then died. She was a genuinely loving person, and the widows and the poor would miss HER for all she did for them while she was alive.

Think about how Tabitha was mourned. Do you ever wonder if people will mourn your death? (King Herod knew people would rejoice at his death, so he ordered the death of some prominent Jews on the day of his death to ensure that people would cry on the day of his death. Thankfully the order wasn't carried out.) I remember thinking about that in high school more often. It seemed like nobody cared - everyone was caught up in their own little world and their own little groups. I was a town student at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, a Lutheran Boarding High School. The dorm kids hung tight. I felt alone. The girls weren't interested in me. I was the class clown. I had a big nose. But I knew my mom loved me. Pepe Charles, my French poodle loved me. That meant a lot to me. Someone loved me. Someone would miss me if I was gone.

You might think, "Would anyone really miss me if I were gone?" You think about your usefulness. You think that if you can't do what you used to do, then you aren't worth much. You think about your children or your grandchildren; Maybe you have made a mess of your life and wasted talents you could have used for others. Maybe your life has been all about you and you haven't earned anyone's love or compassion. Maybe people would be glad you were gone.

No matter who you are or where you are, don't forget what God says. Don't forget why we come here. God has made you worth the world to Him, because through the death of Jesus He has given you much greater clothing than Tabitha. He has given you a robe of righteousness in the perfect life that Jesus lived. He has clothed you in garments of salvation; bathed you in

the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and made you to be His beautiful bride. He says that all of your ugliness has been covered. He looks at you as His holy and righteous children; His dearest friend. He knows when your death will be and how it will be. Your life is precious to Him. He died to pay for your sins and give you life. He loves you more than your mom. He loves you as your Savior and your God and your Father. When you die, it is because He has chosen to take you home to where you belong when you belong there. He has made you the richest person on earth.

I had a hard time seeing this when I was younger in the faith. I knew I was baptized, but I didn't cherish it. I knew God loved me, but it didn't mean as much to me as the acceptance of my classmates. I didn't cherish the love of the most important Person; my Beloved Groom Jesus Christ who knows me by name and knows me inside and out. It was very depressing at times because I wasn't resting in the love of God in Christ.

Tabitha didn't live like that. Even though she too was probably a widow and didn't have any immediate family or children mentioned, she lived in the love that Jesus had for her. She had great compassion for the other widows and the needy. Since she didn't have children of her own she in a sense adopted the poor and needy and clothed as many as she could. As a natural result she was missed and mourned.

What is perhaps startling about Tabitha's service is how, in the world's eyes, it didn't amount to much. She sewed clothes, not eradicate world hunger or discover a cure for cancer. In the same way, Brothers and Sisters, you don't have to do something that's worthy of winning a Nobel Prize for God to take note of what you have done. What are your gifts and talents? Sewing? Encouraging? Cooking? Organizing? Leadership? Fixing things? Whatever they are use those gifts and talents to serve others. When this service is done to God's glory and not to win praise for ourselves God considers what we have done to be pleasing to him.

But wasn't it easier for Tabitha to serve others than it is for us? I mean look at how appreciative the people were of her efforts. "I'd serve more too if people were appreciative of my efforts." Ever entertain that sinful thought? Ever pull back from helping others because you never get a word of thanks from them? But don't thoughts like that show that the reason we were serving in the first place was to get thanks instead of to give thanks? What was it Jesus said in our Gospel lesson? "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Because we are loved by Jesus. Because he saved us from our sins. Because he provides for our daily needs. Because he has won heaven for us. That's why we serve others. Sure, it's great when people recognize our acts of service but that's not our goal. In fact Jesus tells us to do our acts of service "in secret." Jesus said: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven

Tabitha knew that her purpose in life was to serve others. She did that faithfully and humbly but that didn't spare her from sickness and death. That fact highlights the truth that no matter how many good things we do it can't make up for our sins. Tabitha herself still had to face the consequence of her sins, whatever they were. Although Tabitha died she didn't remain dead! Through God's power the Apostle Peter brought Tabitha back to life. To be sure it wasn't Tabitha's good works that earned her this blessing. She came back to life because her Lord and Savior Jesus had already defeated death for her, and he's done the same for you. Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all your sins of tainted service have been forgiven – like

receiving a hug from your spouse or parents after you have said something to hurt them. That hug assures you that the relationship has been restored.

But now don't you wonder what Tabitha thought about coming back to life? The world thinks death is terrible but that's not what the Bible teaches. Death brings relief to those who trust in Jesus, as did Tabitha. She was finally at the Lord's side. She was home in heaven where there was no more pain or suffering. No more needle pricks on her fingers. No more mornings where her fingers wouldn't work right because of arthritis. No more frustrations with the clerks at the fabric store getting her orders wrong. What would you think if you finally made it to heaven only to have Jesus ask you to go back to earth and continue to serve him there? Would you feel the same way you would if the office called you back into work after you had just spent a day of wearying travel to get to an all-inclusive resort in ST. Lucia for a two-week vacation? Leave the sun and sand you've been looking forward to for months to go back to work? I don't think so! But go back Tabitha did to serve her Lord by serving others on earth.

Although none of us here (that I know of) has died and come back to life some of you may be wondering why the Lord is still keeping you around down here. The answer is simple really. This is where he wants you to serve him right now. He wants you to love the people he puts in your path everyday. That includes the busy and seemingly uncaring doctors and nurses, your noisy neighbor, and the grumpy cashier. Show them love because God loves you. No you may not be able to do today what you had the energy to do 20 years ago – like cook meals or shovel sidewalks but you can pray for others and encourage them. This is God's will for you.

Of course God didn't bring Tabitha back to life just because he wanted her to sew more clothes. Word spread about Tabitha's resurrection and many were brought to faith as a result. It just demonstrates again how God can and does use everything for the good of his people. Tabitha's friends must have questioned why God took such a caring woman from their midst. God took her because he had bigger things in mind. He wanted to use her resurrection as a way to expose more people to his saving message. That Jesus Christ has power over death. That Jesus is the Savior.

As Jesus was able to raise Tabitha through the voice of Peter, so with His clothing and His voice He will raise you and your loved ones who believe in Christ to eternal life to see Him face to face; and that is a sight none of us will miss in heaven. Although no one now may acknowledge all that you do as a servant, Jesus will. On the Last Day he will say to you: "Well done good and faithful servant. Come and take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." Do you see why we're eager to serve? We're eager to serve because we have a God who has been serving us since the creation of the world by preparing a special place for us in heaven – a place purchased by the blood of God's Son. Keep serving this Lord by serving others right up until the time he calls you home to heaven. Amen.