

Walking in Unity With God

By Linda Rex

May 8, 2022, 3rd Sunday in EASTER—When we had our Community Café ministry running strong, I remember sitting at the table talking with some of our church neighbors. Around us, busily taking care of all of us, were the Martha's of our congregation—those with the gifts of hospitality, service, and helping. How tangible was the expression of the love of God through their hands!

I believe this is the significance of the story in Acts 9:36–43 about the disciple named Tabitha (or Dorcas). Luke tells us that she was “abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.” Apparently, she used to make clothing for people, providing a necessary service for those in her spiritual community. When she passed away, the loss was felt keenly—keenly enough that they call for Peter to immediately come.

Indeed, I think about those who are no longer with us who had this same gift of the Spirit of service and helping. It would be nice if they could have stayed awhile with us so we could continue to enjoy the blessing of their loving care. But this was not God's best for us or them, and they have moved on.

What we can learn from them, though, is that we help to make Christ visible to others when we serve, help and care for others. These tangible expressions of God's love enable people to not just hear about Jesus, but to feel and experience his love in a real way that can be life-changing. These expressions of God's love testify to the truth of the good news of Jesus' finished work. When we live out what we say we believe, then the gospel, or good news, begins to carry some weight. When we don't live out what we believe, we dishonor and grieve the Spirit, and make all that we might say about Jesus appear to be false.

The apostle John told about a time when Jesus was walking in the temple during the Feast of Dedication, what we today call Hanukkah. The Jews there gathered around him, hoping to catch him saying or doing something they could use as an excuse to arrest him. They wanted him to plainly tell them that he was the expected Messiah. But Jesus knew their intentions were not honorable and that they did not have his best interests in mind.

Jesus reminded them that he had already clearly told them the truth about who he was. Then he said to them, “...the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.” Jesus was saying that they should have known who he was by looking at the things he was doing. What he was doing—healing the sick, casting out demons, giving the blind sight and the deaf hearing—was all done in his Father's name by the power of the Holy Spirit. No one else could do these things in the way he was doing them. His actions quite clearly showed who he was—the Son of the Father, the Anointed One.

Question: do our actions quite clearly show who we are—the adopted children of God? How well are we reflecting our Lord Jesus Christ? We may preach the gospel effectively with our words, but how are we doing with our actions?

This question can be quite intimidating for a pastor. I realize that I stand up each week and preach, telling people what I believe God wants us to hear and do. But it never ceases to amaze me how that very thing I preached on or planned to preach on becomes an object lesson for me personally. God doesn't want us to just talk about Jesus and his ways. He wants everyone of us to live and walk at all times “in Christ”—so all of life is swept up into walking in the Spirit in such a way that when others look our way, they tangibly experience God's love—Jesus Christ in us by the Spirit.

Every one of us has opportunities throughout the week to offer help, care, and service to others. When GCI talks about the Love Avenue, this is what is meant. We are each called and gifted by God to love others. God has shed his love abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Participating in the Love Avenue is what we all do, though some of us are more gifted by the Spirit for these specific types of ministries.

And those who are especially gifted in the area of helping, service, and hospitality, I encourage you to be sure to find ways to use your gifts to express God's love. You are a blessing to this world and I am very grateful for each of you—you are the reason that we have truckdrivers, farmers, caregivers, nurses, cooks, and all of those who work in hospitality, medicine, and many other fields where having people who serve others is essential to our well-being. When you are busy and active using your gifts to serve others as to the Lord, not only are people blessed, but you become a vibrant, tangible expression of God's love.

Some of us find serving others in this way to be challenging. For all of us, trusting in the Spirit is essential. The apostle Paul said that if we work, we work as if we are working for the Lord. All of life is lived "in Christ" now. Just as Jesus did what he did in his Father's name, we do what we do now in Jesus' name and for the Father's glory. What Jesus did, he did motivated by God's love, since he was filled with the Spirit. Paul says for us to let the Spirit fill us. And, knowing we are compelled by God's love, we are to love one another—proving we are Christ's disciples.

The reason Jesus did the works he did was that he lived in united with his Father in the Spirit. It is because Jesus and his Father were one in will and action that by the Spirit Jesus expressed love so powerfully and profoundly. The reason we do caring, helping, and serving things is because we are united with Christ by faith, therefore united with the Father in the Spirit. It is our unity with God through Christ in the Spirit that we receive the capacity and desire to love and serve others effectively—and God offers this to everyone. May the Lord fully express through each of us by his Spirit the love and grace of our God.

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us people in our lives who are especially gifted to serve, help and care for others. Thank you for pouring your love into our hearts by your Spirit so each and every one of us can serve, help and care for those you place in our lives. Grant us the grace to love others even as you have loved us, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.

"At that time the Feast of the Dedication [Hanukkah or Festival of Lights] took place at Jerusalem; it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.' " John 10:22–30 NASB