As we continue our look at some of the women of the bible whose stories get overlooked we arrive at a time in history when the church is still mainly from Jews or converts to Judaism. It is after our reading today that Peter takes the message to gentiles, or non-Jewish people.

## Our society teaches us that the more significant we are, the more impact we can have. Is that true? Perhaps in worldly terms there is some truth in it – the talented, well educated, hard working person is likely to succeed and exert influence, but so is the child of the wealthy or famous whose parents know ‘the right people’.

## The reality is that our true significance comes only through the Jesus. Through Jesus Christ, the things that don’t seem to matter at all, in fact, come to matter very much.

In our Scripture this morning we have the story of Tabitha. Tabitha was just an ordinary woman in the city of Joppa, who did ordinary everyday things, for ordinary everyday people. She didn’t preach before thousands. She didn’t stand before governors and kings. She didn’t write a powerful theological set of commentaries or perform astounding feats - she simply served those who were in need. She simply did what needed to be done, in the name Jesus.

Now, for us, Tabitha is one of those people who is almost a footnote in Scripture. She is someone who many of us pass over when we read the Bible. For us, Tabitha, is a minor character in the building of the early church, a person of no real significance. But for God, Tabitha is so significant, that He raises her from the dead.

At this point in the early church, persecution has erupted. Christians have scattered, fleeing the wrath of Saul, who was charged with eliminating the church. Many people have died, martyred for their faith in Jesus, but none of them have been brought back to life, none of them have been resurrected from the dead. Even Stephen, a strong and powerful man of God, who was stoned to death for preaching the Word, even Stephen was not brought back from the dead.

Tabitha is the first person that God raises from the dead after the resurrection of Christ. You see, Tabitha is so significant in the eyes of God, so important to the continuing work of the building of the kingdom of God, that God needs to have this woman brought back. This woman, who others might pass by on the street without a second look is so significant that the building of the early church cannot go on without her. This woman who we pass over as a footnote in the kingdom of God is the one whom God deems the only one among thousands who is significant enough to bring back from the dead. Let us also note that not a single one of the twelve disciples were brought back from the dead – yet Tabitha was.

Significance in the kingdom of God, it turns out, is not defined by accomplishment, nor status, nor ecclesiastical power, popularity, impressive book sales or even massive global impact – Significance in the kingdom of God, it turns out….is defined by the Holy Spirit. Significance in the kingdom of God has nothing to do with our usual understanding of what significance in life is.

We live our lives and in various ways we attempt to become people of significance. We work hard and try to become the best at this or that, or known for this thing or that thing. We believe to be significant we need to conform to our society’s notion of success, or prominence, or even of reputation. Certainly striving to be the best, and striving to accomplish is not a bad thing, in fact as Christians we should strive for excellence in our work – but as Christians we should be very concerned with this question in all of our effort: Am I striving to be a person of significance for my own benefit, or am I striving to be a person of significance for the benefit of Jesus?

Looking at verse 36 in our text we see that Tabitha lived in Joppa. Joppa is on the coast of the Mediterranean sea and now is part of modern day Tel-Aviv in the state of Israel.

The name Tabitha is Aramaic for gazelle, which is a good name. The book of Acts translates her name into the Greek, Dorcus, which also means gazelle. Why would Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, emphasize the name Dorcus? Well, the name Dorcus comes from a root word meaning “to see”. Luke is pointing out to us right up front that Tabitha is a woman who can “see” what the kingdom of God is truly about. She can see what needs to be done and she does it.

Tabitha is noted as a person who is willing to help out those in need. She is a person of faith in action.

She becomes sick and dies and they ready her for burial (verse 37). So they bring her up to the upper room in the house, perhaps those who bring her upstairs are thinking of the prophet Elijah, who, in the book of 1kings 17:19, takes the widow’s son to the upper room where God heals her son. Perhaps they are hoping for the impossible. They place Tabitha upstairs in the upper room and call Peter (verse 38).

What were they expecting? Why are they calling Peter? Up to this point in the history of the church, many had been healed, but no one had been raised from the dead other than Jesus Christ himself. Maybe they are not sure what to expect, but they call Peter anyway. They may even realize that if Jesus was raised from the dead, perhaps others will be raised as well.

Now, usually the upper room of a residence was one of the smaller rooms in the house in this part of the Roman Empire. Yet a number of women have gathered in the room where Tabitha is laid. Mourners who gathered at the bedside of the deceased were usually relatives, here this is not the case. Here, those who gather are the ones whom Tabitha served in her life. Here we see that those who are not related to Tabitha are the first on the scene to show their great sorrow. This shows how loved she was. This also shows what a great impact she had on the community. Those gathered are not those obligated to gather, rather it is those whose lives have been impacted by her love that gather.

This Scripture here is not talking about random acts of kindness, that have become more common; and this Scripture is not about some sort of notion that the good energy that you put out travels from person to person. This is about the person of Jesus Christ transforming, something small that we do, something insignificant that we do - something we may see as a mindless detail, this is about Jesus Christ taking the ordinary things we do and moulding them into something powerful.

Peter arrives and heads up to the upper room. There the women are gathered and they present to Peter what Tabitha had done for them. This is not some sort of a fashion show, in fact these may be the only clothes these women own. They are in effect saying, “I literally had nothing to wear but rags, and this woman before you gave us our dignity back”. Now it appears she did sewing for them, but it is more likely that she did a lot more than just sewing. It appears that she met quite a bit of their needs. And I want us to note that Tabitha didn’t just write a cheque, Tabitha just did what needed to be done. They need food, I’ll find it. They need housing I’ll get it. They need something to wear – I’ll not only get it, I’ll make it.

I want us to also note that here in this passage that this is the only time in the entire New Testament that the feminine form of the word disciple is used and Tabitha is the only woman to be directly identified as a disciple. This in itself indicates that the apparently insignificant ministry of Tabitha made her significant in the eyes of God.

Peter gets down on his knees and prays for Tabitha tells her to get up – and the second resurrection of the early church occurs right in front of their eyes, Jesus was the first to resurrect. Acts 9:42 “*This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*”

But I also want to point out for all of us here that it is not simply that Tabitha did ordinary things for others that makes her life a powerful life – NO, it is that Tabitha did ordinary things for others in the name of Jesus that made her life a powerful life, so powerful that God brought her back from the dead. The insignificant becomes significant through Jesus.

How would you like to be remembered when you die? Do you want to leave a mark in history? I can’t guarantee that, but I can say that it’s not always the loudest or most public life that matters or makes the biggest difference. What matters is faith and obedience to the things of God. Doing what we do for Jesus rather than ourselves is where eternal significance lies.