

**Acts 9:36-42 + Love for Each Other + Series: Jesus Lives! So What?**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 6th Sunday of Easter + 6 May 2018**

**CIR HIRI!**<sup>1</sup>

What is love? How would you describe love? Google “how to describe love” and you’ll get 62,300 results! On those 62,300 pages, you’ll find all kinds of definitions. You’ll find the poetic—**“My love is like a red, red rose.”** You’ll find the musical—**“Love is all you need.”** You’ll find long descriptions and single-word answers. Even little kids chime in. **“Love is when mommy gives daddy the best piece of chicken.”**<sup>2</sup> So many descriptions out there of love or of what we perceive to be love, but a complete definition of love? Good luck!

Then you hear today’s Scripture readings. You hear so much about love and loving each other. You hear Jesus tell his disciples, **“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love,”** and **“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you.”** (John 15:9,12) You hear the Apostle John write to his fellow believers, **“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God...”** (1 John 4:7) You hear those words of Jesus and John and you wonder—how does God define love? What does his love look like?

Now there are sections of Scripture well-known because of what they say about love. Perhaps you think of the words of John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world...”**, or you might think of the famous “love” chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, **“Love is patient. Love is kind...”** Even in our reading from 1 John 4, you hear the well-known words **“God is love,”** but you probably don’t think of our reading from Acts 4. Yet here we see God’s love lead others to love.

Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, his good news began rippling out from the city of Jerusalem. Over time, persecution and opportunities scattered Christians to many other places, and they took along the good news of Jesus. Wherever the gospel went, there little congregations, little groups of believers formed, gathering around the Word, growing in the knowledge and love of Christ. One of those little groups of believers formed in the ancient city of Joppa, a major port on the Mediterranean in northern Israel.

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about that little church in Joppa, but there in that family of believers was a faithful woman named Tabitha. That was her Aramaic name. In Greek, her name was translated Dorcas. Both names indicate grace and beauty, but Luke doesn’t tell us a thing about what she looked like. Instead he speaks of the beautiful love in her soul.

Luke tell us that Tabitha **“was always doing good works and acts of charity.”** Her life was **“full of holy works.”** She devoted her life, using the means that she had, to help people in need, especially those who were widowed. In ancient times, a woman widowed without anyone to support her had little to no opportunity to support herself. Perhaps Tabitha herself was a widow, but in either case, compassionate love for those widows filled her heart. So she invested her time, her money, her abilities, everything she could offer to assist those women in need. Many of them needed clothes. So Tabitha created garments for each widow. Tabitha poured herself into this labor of love, providing for widow after widow, that is, until she got sick.

Luke doesn’t mince words to describe what happened next. **“About that time she became sick and died.”** Tabitha’s death sent a shockwave through the entire family of believers in Joppa. Her life of love had impacted practically every believer there. Everyone had enjoyed some expression of her love. The Lord had given so much to God’s people through Tabitha. What would they do?

Well, the Lord, who controls life and death, had plans they didn’t expect. One of the Lord’s apostles—Peter—was in a nearby town. Perhaps God’s people in Joppa had heard about Peter recently healing a man in that town who had been paralyzed for eight years. So as some believers lovingly prepared Tabitha’s body in an upper room, two men were sent to Peter with a simple, urgent plea, **“Don’t delay in coming with us.”**

Now Peter was a busy man, but as soon as those two believers presented their urgent plea, **“Peter got up and went with them.”** When they arrived in Joppa, Peter found a house full of grief and sadness. Tears streaked cheeks. Chests heaved with sobs. As the two men led Peter up to Tabitha’s body, **“all the widows approached**

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<sup>1</sup> “Christ is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, “Christ is risen!”, they respond loudly and boldly, “He is risen indeed!”

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.justmytype.ca/definition-of-love-as-told-by-children/>

**him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.”** Every one of them was clothed with the gifts of love that Tabitha had created for them.

Peter was deeply moved. These weren't professional mourners hired to grieve as was common among the wealthy back then. These were believers who were mourning the loss of one who had loved them so much. Peter sent everyone out of the room. Then the Lord demonstrated his love. Peter **“knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her stand up.** Then **he called the saints and widows and presented her alive.”** The Lord in his love gave Tabitha back to that beloved family of saints. They would have her love a little while longer. Of course, **“this became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.”**

Throughout this entire account, you see example after example of love. You see the love of Tabitha for all those people in need, especially the widows. You see her love in her works of mercy. You see the love of God's people for one of their own after she died. You see the love of Peter for his brothers and sisters in Christ, people he had never met, as he laid everything aside to help them by raising Tabitha from the dead. You see the love of God's people as they rejoiced by telling others of the great things their God had done. You see so much love in every gesture and decision. You can see what love in action looks like, but do you see the love behind it all?

If you were to ask them, you would find out that such selfless, self-sacrificing love didn't come naturally to any of them, not even Tabitha. It doesn't come naturally to any of us either! If you're not sure about that, then ask yourself—Is your love always holy or is it sin-stained and guilt-corrupted? Is your love always selfless and self-sacrificing or does it typically veer self-centered and self-seeking? Does your love always make you ask, “How can I be a blessing to my spouse, my family, my co-worker, my classmate, my neighbor, my friend?” or do you wonder, “What's in it for me?” Is your love ever selfish, fickle, disobedient, or weak? Is your love ever a love for sin and self, which only leads to eternal separation from the holy love of God in hell?

The truth is, sin has left your love and mine stained and corrupted and self-centered. Your love and mine is the very opposite of the holy love of God, really deserving God's wrath because we're so selfish, so self-centered, so enslaved to self. But then we hear these words from John. **“God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him.”** (1 John 4:9) In spite of you and your selfish love, in spite of me and my self-centered love, God still loves you. God still loves me. God still loves us with a perfect love perfectly loved through Jesus.

You see, Jesus didn't leave heaven kicking and screaming. He willingly obeyed his Father's will. Jesus didn't grumble about having to take on our weak human flesh. He did it willingly. Jesus didn't get a chip on his shoulder over the humbling reality of having to grow up from womb to adulthood like every other human being, yet without sin. He grew up willingly. Jesus didn't fight back when he was betrayed by one of his own, beaten, flogged, and ridiculed, treated with injustice, and finally crucified. He endured all that willingly. Jesus didn't scoff at the ridicule of the crowds, the rejection of his Father, and the punishment of death for sins' guilt he did not deserve. He endured them willingly to the very end. Jesus didn't surrender to death either, but defeated it by rising from the dead...willingly. Why? Why go through all that? **“...So that we might live through him.”**

Jesus knew you couldn't and wouldn't love him or others. He knew you would love yourself and seek your own interests until you found yourself in the eternal death of hell. He knew what punishment you deserved and how high the cost would be to save you...and still he loved you. Jesus is the answer to our question about love. **“Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** (1 John 4:10)

Jesus asks you, “Is your love imperfect and unholy? Then see my holy love for you in my bruised and bleeding body on the cross. Is your love selfish and self-seeking? Then see my selfless love for you when I willingly laid down my life on the cross and took your place in the tomb. Is your love weak and fickle? Then see my faithful love for you as the tomb stands empty on Easter morning. I love you so dearly! You are not my selfish slaves. You are my beloved friends!”

Now Christ's love compels us to love each other. The love of Christ leads to works of love as gifts are used and sacrificed for the sake of others. The love of Christ leads to a sense of urgency to share the love of Christ in word and action. The love of Christ leads to works that lead to words that lead to faith in Christ, and the cycle repeats itself all over again.

The fact is we live in a world that doesn't understand what love as God intended it really is. That's why we need to love one another with the selfless love of Christ. That's why we willingly put the needs of other before our own,

willingly sacrificing for the sake of others, even loving those who seem unlovable. People will know real love as you and I love our fellow sinners with Christlike love, loving people who don't need another excuse to keep sinning, but who need the tough love of a Savior who removes the reason for sin. People will know real love as you love with Christlike love your spouse, your children, your classmates, your co-workers, your neighbors, your friends, and people in need. As you love them like Jesus, you might even get the opportunity to tell them about Jesus, who loves them above all. When we live and love as Jesus' friends, then others will know what love in Christ really is.

My beloved friends, what is love? Look to the cross and see God's love for you in Jesus. Look to the tomb left empty because of God's love for you in Christ. Look to the hands and feet and side of your risen Savior scarred for you. How will anyone know what love is? They will know when we love one another because Christ loved us first, loves us most, and loves us for all eternity. Beloved, let us love each other because **CIR HIRI!** Amen.