

Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Cycle C RCL

Acts 9:36-43

The name Dorcas is well attested as a woman's name in Greek from at least the second century BCE. The word originally meant "roe," but in the eastern Mediterranean world it meant "gazelle." This Aramaic name Tabitha, however, is not well attested until late antiquity. The masculine form of the name, Tabi, however, is attested as the name of several rabbis of the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Dorcas is not a translation of the Aramaic word. The story is of a healing, not a resurrection. In the near east there was the belief that the soul required three days to arrive in the underworld. Dorcas has been without signs of life only for part of a day. The practice of displaying goods sewn by the deceased as a way of mourning is what Rudolf Bultmann called a "novelistic enhancement" to the miracle story. The ancient port city of Joppa is now a southern suburb of Tel Aviv, and Lydda is now called Lod and is the site of Israel's Ben Gurion airport. These landmarks remind us of the way Acts extends the preaching of the apostles gradually into Samaria, Gaza, and now the coastal plain where the majority population was not Jewish. The conversion of the first gentile Cornelius by Peter in Caesarea Maritima follows immediately in the next chapter. Peter and his companions are coming inexorably nearer the pagan city of Caesarea built in 10 BCE by Herod the Great. So gentile was Caesarea and wicked that the rabbis said that it was not part of the land of Israel. Here the Gospel would go to the gentiles

Psalm 23

This beloved psalm, together with Psalms 11, 16, 62, 125, 129, and 131, belongs to a category of psalms known as *psalms of trust*. All but Psalms 125 and 129 are individual statements, and all present the worshiper's confidence in the God of Israel to heal and save. The actual function of psalms of trust in the liturgy of the Temple is unknown, but they may have functioned in a way similar to the *thanksgiving* psalms, *i. e.* to accompany sacrifices of thanksgiving after deliverance from some evil such as illness.

Revelation 7:9-17

Revelation 7 contains two visions (7:1-8 and 7:9-17) between the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17) and the seventh seal (8:1-5). The number of the servants of God, 144,000, is of military significance, a heavenly army made up of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. The second vision has all of the redeemed standing before the divine throne. White was the color of celebration in the Roman world, and apocalyptic visions often portray the residents of the heavenly world as so attired. Some modern scholars have contended that the hymns this company sing before the throne are familiar Christian hymns known to the readers in Asia Minor from their own worship.

John 10:22-30

The Feast of the Dedication (*Hanukkah*) celebrates the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabeus in December of 164. See 1 Maccabees 4:36-59. The Portico of Solomon is a portion of the covered porches Herod's architects designed for the Temple that were to shade the scholars and their students from the sun while discussing matters of the Law. Thus the present setting is an academic setting for this last debate with Jewish authorities in the Gospel.

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