**First Reading Acts 9:36-43**

*Dorcas was a faithful and devoted woman of charity in the community of Joppa. Her kindness and her work with clothing were well-known, especially to the widows in town. When she fell ill and died, Peter raised her back to life through the power of prayer.*

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. 37 At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40  Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

**Psalm 23**

1The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. 2The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. 3You restore my soul, O Lord, and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake. 4Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over. 6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

**Second Reading Revelation 7:9-17**

*Christ is the shepherd who leads his faithful to springs of the water of life. Christ is also the lamb who vanquishes sin and suffering.*

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice,

saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” 13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; 17 for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

**Gospel John 10:22-30**

*Jesus responds to questions about his identity with the remarkable claim that he and the Father are one. Those who understand this are his sheep; they hear his voice, follow, and will never be snatched from his hand.*

22 At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23  and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. 24 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me; 26 but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. 30 The Father and I are one.”

**Sermon**

I’ve recently started listening to a book written by our former governor, John Kasich, called Heaven Help Us: How Faith Communities Inspire Hope, Strengthen Neighborhoods, and Build the Future. In this book, Kasich shares the stories of people who were inspired through

their faith to address certain issues they saw impacting people in their community or in their families. Kasich’s premise is that people of faith and their faith communities play an integral role in tackling the challenges in our society and inspiring hope and perseverance in the most difficult of circumstances.

I’d like to share with you briefly one of the stories I’ve heard so far. The first was the story of a nun named Sister Mary from Philadelphia. Her belief was, “None of us are home until all of us are home,” and her mission was to tackle the issue of homelessness, particularly among women. She wanted them to have a safe haven in which to live, and so she started an organization called Women of Hope. Hers is story of perseverance, of accompanying the women while doing the organizational and red-tape work to be able to be recognized legally and funded. But through her tireless efforts, she started Project HOME, which developed 1,000 units of affordable housing and 144 units of recover-focused housing to serve those recovering from addictions. Here care and attention to this issue for these women probably changed and maybe even saved their lives. Sister Mary’s work is an example of living the risen life.

On this 4th Sunday in the Easter season, we continue to explore what the resurrection means beyond just celebrating it on Easter Sunday. Every weekend throughout the year when we gather for worship, we gather as resurrection people. But what exactly does that mean…for our worship gathering, for our lives, for the world? This 4th Sunday in Easter has also come to be known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Generally, there are a few different references made to shepherds or sheep in the readings assigned for today. Psam 23 is also the psalm assigned for the day. So, you will notice shepherd and sheep references in the songs and prayers as a result.

But today we’re going to explore resurrection life through the story of a not very well-known disciple named Tabatha, who is also known as Dorcas, though we will stick with Tabatha. Her story can be found in the passage from Acts, which was our First Reading. Since you already heard the Acts reading read, then you may be thinking, “yes, her story is a great resurrection story…after all she died and then was raised to life again.” That is true, but Tabatha was living resurrection life way before she died.

Here are a few things we learn about Tabatha. She lived in Joppa, which was northwest of Jerusalem in the region known as Judea along the Mediterranean Sea. This indicates that Jesus’ message was reaching beyond Jerusalem and Galilee, for that matter. It also says here

that Tabitha was a disciple. This is the only substantiative story of a woman disciple and that makes it a significant story. Tabitha, in fact, must have been a significant disciple, someone who mattered to others because when she died, the believers sent 2 men to fetch Peter from nearby Lydda…and Peter went with them!

But what is it about this disciple Tabitha that her community, even some of the men, have come to value her so highly? We heard that, “She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.” This most likely means that she gave to and cared for those in need in her community. And we get a clearer picture of her ministry through the witness of the widows. It is important to remember that widows were a vulnerable group of people at that time. Women who had lost their husbands had also lost their social support and their financial resources. They were often left with nothing. The Jewish Law contained a number of laws pertaining to the care of vulnerable people, such as widows. And Jesus taught the importance of caring for the vulnerable as a witness to the fact that God sees and cares for even and especially the most vulnerable people among us.

These widows tell the story of Tabitha’s resurrection life to Peter. In a society where they were often forgotten, Tabitha had made them all clothing. The widows aren’t just showing off Tabitha’s amazing handiwork…they were people touch by the risen Christ through Tabitha’s handiwork. They are grieving the loss of someone who touched their lives so deeply, someone who cared about them like no one before her. Tabitha saw the widows in her community, and she provided for them. Tabitha’s life was an example of the risen Christ at work through her, seeing a vulnerable population in her community and bringing them into her care by providing for their need.

The risen life, resurrection life connects the lives of Jesus’ followers with the assurance of new life for us and for others. Our hearts and our lives are renewed by Christ’s resurrection to participate in the work of creating new life for others, particularly the most vulnerable and forgotten among us. In this way, resurrection life is a way of life that enables us to see people who are on the outside, those who are struggling in life, many of whom society would rather pass by and not notice. As resurrection people, Christ calls us to be about the business of creating a welcome to all those who normally feel on the outside.

The practice of welcome begins within these walls, at Christ’s communion meal, but it extends into our everyday lives in the way we treat people, in the way we interact with our world. Christ welcomes all people to his table and this weekend we will celebrate the First Communion of 4 of our young people. But as we watch everyone approach the table to receive the bread and wine, we realize that Christ welcomes all…from all backgrounds, regardless of our sins, no matter what we are wearing, in all our differences, the one thing we all have in common is that the risen Christ welcomes us to his table to his meal. And when we leave, the risen Christ calls us to live the risen life of seeing those left out, caring for those who are forgotten. Amen.