**PETER, AENEAS AND DORCAS *MM online***

**On Tuesday evenings at our Bible study, we’ve been thinking about Peter. In today’s story, Peter met two people in succession who needed help. Both were in bed. One couldn’t get up and the other would never get up again because she was dead! I hope you see some relevance with current circumstances.**

**Ac. 9:32-43**

**Lydda was about thirty miles north-west of Jerusalem and there Peter visited this man called Aeneas, who, as we’ve already said, was in bed when he arrived. And that wasn’t surprising because he spent all day every day in bed. Aeneas was paralysed and had lain in bed for eight years.**

**Peter couldn’t help, he wasn’t a doctor! If Aeneas wanted *fish*, Peter was your man – he was an experienced fisherman. But it wasn’t *fish* that Aeneas needed. But even if Dr. Luke, who wrote this story down, had been there, it would have made no difference, would it? Because what can any doctor do for a man who’s been paralysed for eight years? There might be ointments to sooth his bedsores or potions to ease his mind, but no medicine could *heal* him.**

**No, Peter couldn’t help – but he knew a Man who could! Peter could remember when *Jesus* had healed a paralysed man. Now, what was it He’d said? When Peter remembered, he said to Aeneas, *Aeneas….Jesus Christ is healing you. Get up and tidy up your mat,* or, *Pick up your mat and walk (Jn. 5:8)* as Jesus had said*.* Peter used the present tense, *Jesus Christ is healing you –* he believed that Jesus was indeed healing him even as he spoke. And Aeneas got up for the first time in eight years and, presumably, made himself useful by making his own bed. And that’s the trouble with being healed, straight away you become responsible for yourself. That’s why Jesus sometimes asked sick people, *What do you want me to do for you (Mk. 10:51)?* - ie, “Are you *sure*?” Aeneas *was* sure, because he got out and about again and, when people saw him, they put their faith in – not Peter, but *Jesus.***

**About ten miles away, up the coast, is the town of Joppa. Today it’s called *Jaffa,* where the oranges come from. When the Christians in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men hurrying to get him. When he arrived, they took him to a house and straight upstairs to someone’s bedroom.**

**It was bedlam in there! The place was full of old ladies weeping and crying and holding up clothes – underwear and outerwear and all sorts – it was like a jumble sale gone wrong! And in the middle of all this confusion was a bed and on the bed lay a woman – dead. Her name was Tabitha in Hebrew or Dorcas in Greek. It didn’t matter which you used because they both meant the same thing – *gazelle.* What a lovely name! A gazelle is a graceful and most beautiful animal. Now I don’t know whether Dorcas was beautiful – we’re not told; but I do know that her *deeds* were – that’s why everyone was so upset. *She was always doing good and helping the poor (v. 36).* The women were poor widows and the clothes they were displaying were the ones that Dorcas had made them. She had loved these women and so they were holding up the clothes in her memory.**

**And now she was dead. But what could Peter do? Even if he’d been the greatest doctor in the world, he couldn’t help a dead woman! It would have taken the best part of a day for the messengers to reach him and the same for him to get to Joppa. She was well dead – a couple of days dead. She didn’t need a doctor or even a fisherman – she needed an undertaker (and fast!). Peter was helpless. I expect he started to compose the funeral service in his mind: *Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to consign the soul of our dear sister Tabitha to God….***

**But even as he stood there his thoughts went back to that time when he, James and John had gone with Jesus into Jairus’s house (Mk. 5:35ff). They’d stood beside another bed on which lay a dead woman, or, at least a dead *young* woman, twelve years old. She was Jairus’s daughter. No, *Peter* couldn’t help, but he knew a Man who could….**

**What was it that Jesus had done? He’d sent all the mourners out of the room….so Peter sent all of the mourners out of the room. Now he was alone with the body. He got down on his knees and prayed – HARD! He needed Jesus’s help. What had Jesus done next? He’d said to the girl in Aramaic, *Talitha, cumi (which means, Little girl….get up!) (Mk. 5:42).* *Talitha….*Peter changed one consonant and said, *Tabitha, cumi*! Yes, Peter spoke to a dead woman and Jesus brought her back to life. She opened her eyes and jumped up – well, so would you, there was strange man in her room! Jesus had taken the girl by the hand, so Peter helped Dorcas up and called everyone back in. News soon spread and people put their faith in – not Peter, but Jesus!**

**Dr. Peter had found a miracle cure, but it didn’t make him proud. To avoid a fuss, he went to stay with Simon. Simon was a tanner and tanning required copious amounts of urine. It was like living in a toilet – no-one would follow him there – or so he thought (10:17-18)!**

**So, what do we learn? Remember, the Book of Acts is *de*scriptive, not *pre*scriptive. We are to imitate Jesus but we aren’t to go around commanding the paralysed and the dead to get up. That would be a cruel mockery. But we are to *pray* for the sick as long as we recognise that God’s healing takes many forms. After all, many of the procedures we take for granted today would seem miraculous to Dr. Luke!**

**What about Dorcas? Well, first of all, learn from her life. She couldn’t preach like Peter as far as we know, but she was a whizz with a needle! So what did she do? Did she cry out to God for a greater gift and resolve to do nothing while she waited? Or did she whip that needle out and use it to good purpose? Don’t worry about what you *can’t* do – God expects you to get on with what you *can.***

**And that includes what we can all do – *pray.* God hears every prayer uttered in Jesus’ name and He answers them (Jn. 15:16). Peter was a man of prayer and both Aeneas and Dorcas got up. Does He always say “Yes”? No, not everyone is healed and He doesn’t usually send people back from the dead. But actually, even His “No” is really a “Yes” because, if He hadn’t given Dorcas back, she would still have got up – it’s just the she’d have “got up” in Paradise (Lk. 23:43), which is far better! So, when you don’t know what to do, pray! And when you *do* know what to do, pray first – and see what God can do.**

**And when your time comes, I do hope people will talk about your deeds and how you helped them, because that’s the best memorial. It’s much better than a statue which, as we’ve seen recently, can easily be toppled.**

**So, fear not. Peter called her by name, *Tabitha, get up,* and she got up. Jesus said, *a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out (Jn. 5:28-9).* It won’t be *Peter’s* voice we hear, but Jesus’s. And He will command us to rise and, because He rose, we will rise, too.**