

Celebrating Women Who Build Community

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on May 8th, 2022 –Acts :36-43 & John 10:22-30)

Can you imagine life at Dorcas' house? Her kitchen table laden with materials and patterns ready to cut out. Once cut out and ready to be sewn, the table would be spread with bread, cake, biscuits, cups of tea.

Then the stories would start to flow, Dorcas listening all the time. Offering an empathetic ear as she pinned up the hems of trousers and skirts. A house filled with laughter, people welcomed, joys and sorrows shared as clothes were stitched for all shapes and sizes.

A place of industry, where you did something to help – you poured the tea while she mended, you watched and learnt how to sew on that button or darn the hole in the socks. You held the cloth as she cut, you modeled the clothes so she could get the fit just right.

A place where people felt safe, where people felt welcome and at home. A place where you knew you were loved. A place where a child's eyes became wider and wider as they tried on their new dress or jacket and realized it was theirs forever, or at least until they grew out of it and maybe there was a little handmade toy given to them as well. A place where the young widow put on a new dress for the first time in years. A place where an old man exchanged his rags for a new shirt. A place where people were clothed in dignity once more. A place where Dorcas told stories, stories of the God she loved and served, where she served her God in word and deed.

The only place I can think that is like this is Bruna's. Have you been there as she takes you into the garden and picks some fresh vegetables and brings them in to add to the freshly made pasta or soup or focaccia? Then she pours the tea and then she brings out the knitting, the baby bonnets made for premature babies at the Children's hospital or the scarves for the homeless or the rugs for the disabled or elderly. And then she wraps up some food for you to take home and gives you a hat or rug. Serving her God in word and deed.

Dorcas and Bruna both women who know how to build community, mainly just by being themselves.

Today is Mother's Day. Mother's Day first envisioned in America in 1870 in response to the carnage of war. The founder despaired that, young men, went off to war, and were killing each other and in so doing were forgetting all their mothers had taught them – charity, peace and patience. It was observed so as to remind people of the importance of peace and reconciliation. It was never envisaged to be the commercial event that it now has become. In the UK they had a similar day called Mothering Sunday where the readings for the day were usually about Jesus the Good Shepherd and people were given time off to go home to visit their mothers. In the church where I grew up special cake – Simnel Cake – was baked and flower posies made up which after being blessed were given to children to take home for their mothers and to take to the elderly unable to come to church, it was a grand celebration, a celebration to give thanks to all those in our community who 'mothered' us. So, both origins of Mother's Day are also about building community.

We must also recognize that Mother's Day can be a difficult day for some people. For some their mothers are no longer with them, they are estranged or have died. For others they have lost children through estrangement, death, stillbirth, miscarriage. For others they have never had children for a myriad of reasons and feel this deeply. A day like today with all its commercialization is like a slap in the face to these people and we need to remember them today.

We also need to remind ourselves that motherhood is not just biological. Motherhood is essentially about caring and nurturing as both Dorcas and Bruna show us. and any of us can do this, male or female, young or old. This kind of caring builds community. Dorcas' community loved her and were devastated when she died.

We all know women like this, those who build community just by being themselves and today is an opportunity to honour, celebrate and give thanks for their influence on our lives.

Jesus calls us to build community in much the same way. He refers to his own community as his flock, his sheep who know his voice and who cannot be snatched from his loving embrace. A picture of intimate community, where people are known and called by name, where people are safe and protected, where people are cherished.

So how will you follow in the footsteps of Dorcas, Bruna and Jesus? How will we follow in their footsteps? How will we build community here in this place? Who will we share meals with? Whose stories will we listen to? Who will we care for and nurture? Who will we keep safe? Who will we provide material aid for, but more importantly who will we build authentic relationships with?

I invite you to come and share a meal with the folk at Orange Sky on a Monday night. I invite you to make a gift for a child who attends playgroup. I invite you to share morning tea with someone you don't know very well. I invite you take a step into the unknown and thus help build the kingdom of God.

As you go about your day today, give thanks for those around you who have nurtured you in the faith, who have built community, who have shared the love of God in word and deed. Celebrate them and find your own way to emulate them in sharing God's love.

Happy Mother's Day.