

The women who greet Peter today in our story day were probably good friends. Perhaps they were in the same sewing circle or book club. Maybe they gathered for coffee or graduated high school together.

Every single one of them had experienced Tabitha's kindness. She'd watched their kids when they were young or sat with them through a scary doctor's appointment. If there was a family crisis, Tabitha was at the front door with a casserole or pound cake; she showed up once with some extra school supplies for your kids once when your husband wasn't working.

But it was not just her closest friends who experienced Tabitha's kindness. She knitted hundreds of hats and mitts for local school children and those she met at the Salvation Army dinner. Each year you'd find her scooping potatoes at the community Thanksgiving dinner where her pies were legendary.

Now Tabitha had died and their grief was profound. In their lives, whenever darkness fell on them, they could count on Tabitha to be there, to hold a hand or wipe away a tear, to keep vigil with you until together you could find some still water to drink and a safe pasture for rest.

Tabitha waited with you through the dark hours where you wrestled with the reality before you, she waited with you until Easter dawned.

Now, in the face of their grief.... just like each and every one of us.... these women stood in that space between what they saw with their eyes and the promises that had been made.

WE have all known a Tabitha in our lives, **and we have each been a Tabitha at one time.** We have all stood in that space between fear and hope, between Good Friday and Easter morn, between cross and resurrection.

In our gospel story today – which takes place before Jesus is even arrested – the disciples ask of Jesus “Are you really the Messiah? How are we to know for sure?”

Surely we have asked these same questions. Facing grief and loss, we - like the women of Easter morning, wonder. Even on this side of the empty tomb, we reach for reassurance of the power and reality of the resurrection. We too have cried out “Lord I believe, help my unbelief.

Those Easter women arose and carried spices to the tomb where they expected to meet death. We rise each day and our new dawn presents challenges large and small.

Death is driving tanks on Ukraine’s eastern border and children are unloved, hungry and dying. The powerful oppress whomever they can and few things come easy.

We rise each day to make the best of this new day, and we wonder **‘Is our faith no more than a sack of spices meant to cover over the stench of death?** How do the Tabitha’s of our times continue to stand in the darkness with hope? We wonder

**Where is our place in this resurrection story?**

Are we simply biding our time, waiting for our turn in the tomb, trusting that the stone will roll away for us?

Has Jesus already punched our ticket and we have no part in the business of resurrection?

And if that is all true, how do we hold onto this promise, this hope, this impossible tomorrow?

**For we are surely sheep in need of a good shepherd**, one we can trust to protect and provide for us, who strengthens us when fear overwhelms, who walks with us in the dark valleys.

But, how do we hold onto the voice of the shepherd calling us to green pasture when the noise of this world floods our senses and fear steals our breath?

I think the answer lies in communion of saints, saints living and dead, saints near and far, saints like Tabitha, and those whose names you know, saints like you and me... the people of faith who face each day as one more opportunity to live into the hope that was birthed that first Easter morning.

With eyes wide open, they face the reality of each day and carry the Easter story with them. They carry a small piece of resurrection into the places of death in our world and listen for the shepherd's voice – a voice that echoes through the communion of believers and strengthens the trust of us all. **It is in those spaces that we find strength and we bring strength to others.**

These are people of faith who stand at the graveside with the family of the beloved young woman who took her own life... **not because they have answers** but because this is the place where hope is born.

They walk with you on the road to Emmaus when it appears all has been lost. They share a meal with you when you are

hungry. Like Tabitha, they make beautiful cloaks for those who are in need.

It is those moments of sharing, moments when we act as the shepherd would, we seek out the lost, provide and protect others, walk alongside them in the dark valleys to help others find rest and safety...

..... in those moments, the voice of the Good Shepherd comes again: "I am the resurrection and the life. Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden for no one will snatch you out of my hand."

The story of Easter unfolds in the lives of the believers who embody its hope **and live it into reality**.

Few of us believe perfectly, but rather our faith comes in small bits, in acts of hope and kindness and generosity, in a pound cake or a cup of coffee or a word of love.

We need one another, to break bread together, to strengthen one another, and to be the voice of Jesus calling us to trust. We tell the resurrection story with our lives.

It is a story that the world is dying to hear.