

May 12, '19, Anthon UMC, Acts 9:36-43, "He Gave Her His Hand"  
By Pastor Sheryl Ashley

Happy Mothers' Day everyone who was or is blessed with a caring mom, and especially thanks to those of you who wrote something you remember about your mom last Sunday. Sorry the pencils were so rare that day but many of you did manage to scratch out a few good words. Mom's are people who give us a hand up when we are small or when we are large or maybe even give us a hand to the fanny to make us better people. It was Peter who gave Tabitha a healing hand up in our second scripture reading today.

For most of us, our moms gave us her hand in living and learning and growing up into adults. Let me share a few things you all shared about your moms. For instance, several of you mentioned you loved your mom's fried chicken and pies, and the baking made by your mom's hands and how she taught you the same skills; and you wrote about how your moms helped you to be faithful at church and Sunday School and because of her, you came to know God and our church. Some of you credited your mom with being your best friend and helping you to grow into a strong person. Some mentioned how your mom was always there to help you and help others... Some moms were remembered for worrying about your well-being and some even remembered a mom's scolding you to be better, and one remembered mom repeating little rhymes like those that will sing in our heads forever, such as the one when she hugged you and sang, "I love you a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck." One mom gave wise advice like telling you to pause and take time to enjoy your life, children, surroundings and it stuck with you. Other moms taught you the value of hard work and how hard work can give you a long and healthy life. Some moms taught their

children how to be positive and the value of giving smiles and love...one told how your mom living through hardships made her a strong role model. Someone simply wrote, "Too many wonderful things to mention." And I wrote that I'll never forget at 17 telling my mom that Brian Ashley asked me to marry him and my mom said, "You are too young to get married...but since it's Brian Ashley..... I always knew she liked him better than me.

One last memory and I asked permission to talk about here, was what Deanna Adler wrote about her mom, Buelah. Many will remember Buelah as our Anthon Postmaster for many years. I know I remember her smiling face there, and most of us remember her work in this church for many years. Deanna wrote of her mom, "My mother Beulah Sand was a very good cook. Being known for caramel cinnamon rolls. She enjoyed collecting cookbooks and I collect them also. Mom loves seeing her family and seeing her grandchildren. She is still with us today but in her "own" world. Love you Mom."

It happened that I visited Buelah early this week in the Holstein Good Samaritan Home. She is in the Alzheimers unit. Buelah talks but is unable to express herself in a meaningful way and I wondered how best to communicate with her. The thought came to me of singing to her. I sang a couple of verses of "Amazing Grace" and Buelah got quiet and her frown turned into a small smile on her lips, and she nodded her head slightly to the rhythm of the old familiar song. I read her the scripture of the day from the Upper Room which was I Cor 12:14. "The body is not made up of one part but of many." I pointed to my calling card in her hand with our church picture on it, stretched out my arms and said, "You and I and all the people of that church are one in Jesus Christ." Then I said the Lord's Prayer for her. I almost thought she might say it with me, and I

think somewhere deep in her soul she was. I sang, "On Eagles Wings" to her and she still smiled. I held her hand and prayed for her and gave her a hug. Then I told her I would see her the next time around. I was so thankful that in this mother's life God is still very much present and keeping her company when we might think she feels alone and unable to interact with others. God has a hold of her hand and he's going with her all the way. We can have confidence so it is with all who God has safely in His hands.

In reading about God's presence in this mother and thinking of all the mother-figures in our lives, I think of Tabitha of our scripture today. It never tells us that Tabitha was a birth mother, but like many among us she mothered those about her, especially those who were in need. Tabitha or Dorcus as she was called in Greek (both names meaning gazelle) Tabitha was a fast moving God-serving machine when it came to caring for others; doing good deeds and acts of charity especially for the widows who needed her care the most. This Tabitha was a legend in her own time. She lifted the lives and hearts of so many that there was a crowd of people in her room and standing outside her door weeping loudly and holding in their hands the items she had made for them. From the reaction of the people you'd have thought Tabitha was the whole church...that the whole church had died. Makes me wonder if she did most of the work, like sometimes a few people in every church do the great share of the work. Who could ever fill Tabitha's place in their church and in their community?

If we can be saved by good works, then Tabitha went to God in a flash of light. However, this way of thought was not what inspired Tabitha. There's a reason Tabitha is mentioned as a disciple in the New Testament. If you are truly a disciple you are serving God, not for popularity, not for fame, not for compliments, not to pave your way

to heaven with good deeds. If you are truly a disciple your hands are an extension of God's hands. You are the first one to go to a needy person's house with a casserole in those hands, the first one to offer clothing and shelter to those without...the first one to fold your hands in prayer for those hurting or offer a word of comfort in those in sorrow.

And so with this great loss, there they were, her children of the heart so to speak, both old and young, weeping as if their own mother had died. It was they whom she had washed and fed and sewn for who came and tended her, now washing her in her illness and in her death, holding in their hands before Peter the clothing she had sewn for them. Peter put them all outside the room as their grief was enough to drown anyone's faith that a miracle could happen. Tabitha was dead and it was the end of their world. Those women had a lot of reasons to cry at Tabitha's demise. They had been deserted and cut off from the help they had come to depend upon. Why is it that such good people die out of time and place? We might expect the elderly to die, and that is hard enough, but for those who are so needed here, to unexpectedly die, why oh Lord, why? We have no answers as God's timing is not the same as ours. Bad things happen to good people and a bad thing had happened to Tabitha. ...But once in a while a miracle comes to rescue us from death...like the times you hear that a specialist who happens to be in hospital when a specific case comes in and is able to save the person no one else could have. Or the recovery of that 5 year old thrown down 3 flights over a mall railing and people prayed and in spite of all odds against him, he is expected to recover fully. Or the movie based on a true story that is playing in theaters now. It is called "Breakthrough" and is about a teenager who falls through the ice and is under for 15 minutes and is without a pulse for 27 minutes. He is declared dead and his mother

comes into the hospital room and starts praying. Suddenly, miraculously the boys vital signs start again. Sometimes there is a miracle that defies the laws of nature, from illness, accident, and death, for whatever purposes God has for this rescue to happen. But we are people of logic and when we go through a death, especially one that happens out of normal time and place and there is no miracle on this earth, we remember that Jesus defeated death, and that the person we love lives on. We remember Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me even though they die, yet shall they live and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die." And we can know that one day, not so long in God's timing, we will see our loved one again.

But try telling that to these weeping widows who just lost the best mother figure, provider, comforter they ever had. So Peter, mighty with Godly power is called in. The pressure is on. Jesus had raised people from the dead, could Peter raise Tabitha?

So, Peter cleared the room of the tearful and with the faith that God hears our prayers, knelt down and prayed. Now Peter on his own is no healer. Peter knows if there is any healer in the room, it is Jesus Christ. So, in that power, Peter, like Jesus with Lazarus in the tomb, called her by name, ordering her dead body, "Tabitha get up!"

Wonder of wonders, the woman opens her eyes. Where had she been and what had she seen? Oh, how I wish the word had gone on in further detail, but faith would be too easy then. It wouldn't be needed if everyone kept getting awakened from physical death, like it was a dream. We could go on living the miseries of this life over and over again forever. The promise is that the day when death is no more, is coming, but most of us have to get to the next realm to experience it. And in the meantime, the strong

ones among us are to stretch out our hands to help the others, like a mother does for her children.

However this story has a different ending from the norm, for the now living Tabitha sat up and Peter gave her his hand. My guess is that she had to get right back to work leading and caring, baking and sewing for those needy widows, like a mother hen gathering her lost chicks under her protection. This was a miracle and many believed because of it.

Now maybe we can't raise the dead, or maybe we can, but certainly your prayers and your presence can accompany the dying all the way to their eternal home. Some of you, short on help, worked yesterday providing a meal for a grieving family. Many people, Hard work. Some of you give of your finances to help others in need through the church missions or just private gifts of giving. Some of you say prayers for others going through difficult times. Some of you quietly do deeds of goodness no one ever knows you did except that person and God.

When you die what will people say about you? Will there be weeping as they remember the kindness of your hands? Will anyone remember this Anthon UMC for the kindnesses given by us as one body of Christ? Will they remember we gave them a hand and helped them to their feet to get them going in the path God has called them to go? In our first reading from John, Jesus said, that no one will snatch his sheep out of his hand for the Father and he are one. The Father and he and he and you and I are one, just as Buelah glimpsed that truth for that moment in time.

In our second reading today it was Peter who gave Tabitha his hand, in the healing name of Jesus.

On this Mothers Day, be aware of who needs you to offer them the kindness of a mother, a father, a brother or a sister, a family who is there to let them know that God's hands may be seen in yours.

I want to leave you with a story of a little 6 year old boy separated from his mother in a supermarket. He began to call frantically for "Martha! Martha! Martha!" That was his mother's name and she came running to him quickly. "But Honey," she admonished, "You shouldn't call me "Martha", I'm "Mother" to you." "Yes, I know," he answered, "but the store is full of Mothers!"

Yes, thank God the world IS full of Mothers, and most of them would have been willing to help put this little boy back into the hands of his one and only true mother. We all can be the Mother-figures in this world, helping to rescue the lost and giving them our hand to bring them safely home to their one and only "Mothering God."