

## Musings ~ 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2017

work to do. Tabitha's story is placed in Scripture to serve as a transition in the fulfilment of Jesus' command to the disciples to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Tabitha is seen as symbolic of Jesus living on in His followers. At her death, like Christ, she was laid in an upper chamber ~ a place reserved for special events. Peter had a difficult 12 mile walk from Lydda to Joppa to reach Tabitha so she would have been dead for several days before Peter raised her and gave her back to her community ~ that must have seemed meaningful to the believer's of Christ's resurrection!

An finally **Mary the mother of Christ.** Mary means variously ~wished for child, rebelliousness, sea of bitterness and beloved! In the predominantly male genealogy presented before the account of Joseph accepting that his virgin bride-to-be is with child we are told that he is descendant of Rahab. There is the connection to redemption weaving its way into the New Testament! Mary, we know said "yes" to God ~ it put her in a place of disrepute in her small minded community who would have been perplexed when Joseph stood by her! As Mary supports and follows her child she is a disciple ~ an apprentice to her son's new thinking and teaching of the God of her faith ~ she promotes Jesus' ministry, carries the hurts that come in being a mother of a child who grows to be despised and shows great courage in allowing her faith to grow ~ she journeys with the other disciples and is central to the women who minister to Jesus and the men. She does not run away but stands at the foot of the cross.

Life is not easy for a disciple, whether we face opposition or prejudice or whether we are affirmed and supported. But discipleship, with all its challenges is an exciting journey of discovery ~ discovering God's love for us and in turn being able to share that love with others in whatever way God asks of us.

Each of us here this morning is considering the invitation to begin the journey or has been somewhere on the path for some time. This morning we recognise Ludo's starting the journey and recommit to our own journey. I pray we will responsibly help him to learn and grow in the faith. Amen

Have you ever really stopped to think about the women of Scripture? There are the obvious ones in the New Testament ~ Mary the Mother of Jesus, Elizabeth, her cousin, Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary sisters of Lazerus, the woman at the well, and you will remember others. In the Old Testament you may think of Hannah, or Ruth or Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, but what was her mother called? She was called Jochebed and was a daughter of Levi and the wife of Amram. This year the Trinity Gospel readings concentrate on Matthew and this morning I want you to think how Matthew uses the women of the faith in his writing.

The opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew trace the ancestry of Jesus back to the patriarch Abraham. Not surprisingly, Jesus' genealogy is an illustrious one, including Jacob, Judah, David, Solomon and Hezekiah. Somewhat unusually, however, the list includes four women from the Hebrew Bible. In Matthew's Jewish world, genealogies typically mentioned only men. Surprisingly, the four women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and "the wife of Uriah" (that is, Bathsheba)—have somewhat questionable reputations. What prompted Matthew to include a prostitute (Rahab), a woman who pretended to be a prostitute (Tamar), a sexually forward widow (Ruth), and a woman taken in adultery (Bathsheba) in his "account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham"? Matthew's choices show that God's love can be shown through whoever He decides to use! After all, the accounts of Mary the Mother of Jesus are not spared from the taint of unseemly behaviour for a female! Can't you just hear the tittle-tattle ~ "how did she get pregnant then ~ whose child is it? And so on. We believe that Jesus is incarnate but the people and prejudice of the day would have thought Mary bad news! Mary was a very brave young lady as were the four women in the genealogy! What was it made these women brave, able to follow their beliefs and to stand up for them? Think about the women you encounter today ~ do they show the same faith and trust? Whether you are female or not do you?

There is a handout naming prominent women of Scripture do use it as you continue to ~ Know Jesus and make Him known.

Joshua 2: 1-22

OT page 200

Acts 9: 32 - 43

NT page 124

Matthew 1:18 - 25

NT page 1

This morning we are delighted to welcome Ludovico for his Baptism. We are Baptising him in the confidence not only that God receives him at the start of his faith journey but that with mum and dad and little sister Sophia, and as a member of our church congregation, he will be brought up learning about the Lord that loves him and how to live day by day as a disciple.

During Trinity we have been looking more closely at discipleship ~ who becomes a disciple and what that means in reality.

Disciple simply means "a follower or pupil of a teacher, leader or philosopher. A disciple is effectively an apprentice. You and I sign up to an apprenticeship as Christians ~ so being a disciple in Christian terms means that we chose to personally follow Jesus as our teacher and leader to enable us to learn of the outrageous and unconditional Love of God the Father.

This morning I invite you to consider the female disciples in Scripture. We have to remember that in the times our Scriptures were written, women were considered as possessions and rarely given recognition as individuals. As in all societies there were exceptions but they were not considered worth written recognition by the males recording history and if they were included then over the centuries the translators of our Bibles have often recorded the names in a masculine tense ~ so it is easy to miss just how many women are included in God's Word !

The insert you have in Open Door lists for you the names of the women entered in our Scripture ~ it may surprise you just how many there are! Frustratingly they are often mentioned by name but there is nothing else said about them ~ so we are left wondering why the writer included them. We can assume that their inclusion was not just random but had an importance which is sadly long lost to us.

This morning I have selected three of the women who's stories we do know something of ~ Rahab, Tabitha (or Dorcas) and Mary the Mother of Christ.

**Rahab** ~ Who's name means proud and quarrelsome ~ was the harlot of Jericho! ~ Disreputable, despised and dishonoured BUT God chose to work through her ~ God gave her discernment and an understanding of His purpose and she had learnt what she could about Him ~ she had become a disciple of a God that was not hers. She was fearful of the power of this God but recognised His love and protection of His people. When Rahab encounters, hides and enables the escape of Joshua's spies she shows great courage in her hospitality, mercy, faith, patience and repentance ~ becoming a paragon of virtue! *(Rahab is also the name given to a Jewish mythological and evil sea monster! Showing the cultural attitude for the female!)*

Rahab's repentance leads to the promised redemption of her and her family. The spies give her a red cord to tie to her window and all the family that shelter in her house when Jericho is sieged will be spared when all around them perish. This is the first account of God's preparation to enable redemption for all through the one named by the prophets as Messiah ~ Jesus Christ our Lord. The red of the cord is no accident ~ it symbolically threads its way through the Old and New Testaments ~ the blood on the doors of God's children sparing them from plague, Moses turning the river to blood and back, the sacrifice of the lamb at Passover, Jesus' new teaching of being the Lamb of God and His blood then shed for us in crucifixion.

*(Every Church Army Commissioned Officer is given a cross on red cord as a reminder of their Calling to be an Evangelist ~ making God's redemption known and accessible to all)*

**Tabitha ~ or Dorcas** ~ her name means Gazelle and indicates a woman of energy, grace, beauty and quick movements ~ Tabitha was a core member of the believing community in Joppa ~ she ministers and shares faith with Jew and Gentile alike. Joppa was a port city near the heart of modern Tel Aviv ~ a place of trade and communication. ~ Tabitha's ministry was vital in spreading the Gospel ~ but it makes her disreputable in the eyes of the Jewish authorities. Tabitha is possibly the first female missionary. Because of her discipleship she is well known to Peter This is the lady who falls ill and dies ~ but in God's plan she still has