



**ST NINIAN'S UNITING CHURCH**  
**WEDNESDAY WORDS**  
**7 May 2025**  
**Scripture Psalm 23 and**  
**Acts 9:36-43**



**Prayer**

Lord, you are my shepherd, and because of you I lack nothing.  
Bring me to green pastures and to still waters,  
refresh my soul this day, as I stop to spend time with you.  
Guide me along the right paths, I pray.  
Even when I walk through the darkest valley,  
I know you are with me and I fear no evil;  
May I dwell in the house of the Lord forever.  
Amen

*(A paraphrase of Psalm 23)*

**Thanks & praise prayer points**

- That you are my shepherd and are always with me.
- That in difficult times, you are with me and care for me.
- For giving me confidence to act in your name, and do what seems impossible.
- For the beauty of the autumn leaves and autumn colours we see around Canberra.
- For family, friends and neighbours.
- For your death upon the cross for us, saving us from our sins.

**Forgiveness prayer points**

- For not trusting you when you take me on new paths, trusting that through you the unexpected can occur.
- For not following your guidance, nor trusting that you will be with me in the darkness.
- For doubting your resurrection and promise to bring a new Kingdom.
- For not loving our neighbour as ourselves.
- For not speaking up for social justice and seeking to change the injustices of our world.

### **Words of Grace**

God has promised to prepare a table for you, and to anoint your head with oil.

God has promised that goodness and love will follow you all the days of your life.

Be assured, your sins are forgiven by God, and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen

### **Reading: Acts 9:36-43**

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. <sup>37</sup> About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. <sup>38</sup> Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

<sup>39</sup> Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

<sup>40</sup> Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup> Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

### **Reflection**

In this reading Peter is called to step out in faith in unexpected ways, trusting in the Lord God. It is a story of having faith and going into the unknown, with amazing results. It is also a story of two outsiders (Dorcas and Simon the Tanner), who hold important roles in the church.

Tabitha, a disciple in Joppa, has died. So well regarded was Tabitha that, on her death, the disciples (leaders) in Joppa sent two men to Peter asking him to come. It is not clear what the disciples hoped Peter would do when he arrived. Was it to bring comfort, support and leadership to the community during a time of distress. Or did they hope for a miracle?

What must have Peter felt when the two men arrived, asked him to come to Joppa. What role did he feel he could play? Did he come to Joppa confident that God would empower him to raise the dead Tabitha? Even coming to Joppa required a commitment of faith.

Once Peter arrives in Joppa, Peter's response to the grief of the community is emphatic. He sends them from the room, and he kneels and prays. Peter steps out in faith. He seems to accept that, while he has never been asked to pray for someone who has died to be restored to life before, he should do so now.

How do you pray for something which seems so unlikely or difficult or overwhelmingly hard?

But Peter kneels and prays. In kneeling he is being humble. There is a sense Peter knows he simply needs to look to and trust in God. And after he has prayed, Peter looks at the body of Tabitha and says 'Tabitha, get up'.

There is a clear link between this story and the narrative of Jesus raising the little girl (Mark 5) and raising Lazarus (John 11). There is a sense that the power of Jesus Christ has been passed onto the disciple Peter – and by extension the wider Church - to act in Jesus' name and bring healing. Peter's power is not a magical power, but a function of his close relationship with Jesus Christ, sustained by prayer.

This reading reminds us to look to and trust in God always. While things may appear impossible, in God nothing is impossible. Our prayers are important, indeed vital. And God responds with the unexpected!

In the words of the 23 Psalm, 'though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me'.

Now remember how the scriptures refer to Tabitha. Tabitha, was not just a highly respected member of her community, but she was a 'disciple'. Hearing the scripture today, it can be easy to miss the extraordinary nature of what was being shared in the reading; a woman, indeed a widow, was described as a 'disciple'. The word disciple carries a great deal of meaning for us and is usually reserved for one of the first followers of Christ, or in the very early church an important leader.

In the culture of the period, women were usually second-class citizens with limited rights. And widows could often fall to the lower rungs of society if they lacked anyone to look after or protect them. We don't know Tabitha's actual situation, but there is no mention of family in this narrative. Rather, it is the church community which surrounds and supports Tabitha.

Regardless, Tabitha is a 'disciple'. She was an important and valued leader in her community, well known for her works of charity. Someone unexpected was so important her community grieved her death, and sent two other leaders to Peter to seek support and help.

The reading from Acts ends with an unexpected verse, which seems to hang as an incidental detail: 'Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon'. But it is an important verse, showing again how the message of Jesus upends the usual norms.

A tanner would be an outcast, working with animal carcasses and blood, all ritually unclean. And smelly. For Peter to stay 'for some time' shows how much Peter had stepped away from the old practices and beliefs he had held. He was showing that a new way of living, which involved changing the old norms, had come into being through Jesus Christ.

For Peter to spend so much time with Simon the Tanner suggests that either Simon was an important leader in the church, or Peter saw in Simon great potential to be a leader. And as such, Peter stayed to mentor and teach Simon.

Through Tabitha and Simon, God was showing that his message can be shared by (and indeed led by) the outsider, the unexpected, even the outcast. The capacity to do God's work is not predicated on the world's view of who is important or capable. Rather, God looks inside of us and identifies what we can do and empowers us to act in God's name. We need to trust in God, that God will provide.

Jesus wants us to practice such radical discipleship, changing the world through our actions and prayers. God calls for us to have humility, faith and conviction. If we do so, we can transform the world.

Amen

### **Intercessory Prayers**

Lord God, we pray for your creation this world. Help us to care for and treasure your creation.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of our country, and leaders of all countries of the world. May they rule with humility, justice and wisdom, for the benefit of all.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of the Uniting Church, the President of the Uniting Church Rev Charissa Suli's, Moderator of our Synod rev Faaimata Havea Hiliau, and Chairpersons of the Canberra and Region Presbytery, Rev Paul Chalson and Janet Kay.

Be with the conclave of cardinals meeting this week to elect a new Pope, and with the nominating committee for the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Guide their deliberations through your Holy Spirit.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders of our local church community at St Ninians and give thanks to all who contribute to the life and witness of our congregation. We pray for the plans for the new outreach activities through The Meeting Place, and that this may come to fruition.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for those known to us who are sick, in distress or lost a loved one. Be with them, comfort them, and show them your love.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who work for social justice in the world, and especially the work of Uniting Care, and other Uniting Church agencies.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

**Song:** The Lords my Sheperd (Stuart Townend)



The Lord's my Shepherd I'll not want  
He makes me lie in pastures green  
He leads me by the still still waters  
His goodness restores my soul

And I will trust in You alone  
And I will trust in You alone  
For Your endless mercy follows me  
Your goodness will lead me home

He guides my ways in righteousness  
And He anoints my head with oil  
And my cup it overflows with joy  
I feast on His pure delights

And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
For Your endless mercy follows me  
Your goodness will lead me home

And though I walk the darkest path  
I will not fear the evil one  
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know

And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
For Your endless mercy follows me  
Your goodness will lead me home

And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
And I will trust in You alone (I will trust, I will trust in you)  
For Your endless mercy follows me  
Your goodness will lead me home

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