

## **Sermon: “Known by the Voice of Love”**

**Texts: Acts 9:36–43; Psalm 23; John 10:22–30**

**Occasion: Mother’s Day**

There is a moment that almost every parent remembers. Long before a child can speak, long before a baby knows much at all about the world, there is one unmistakable sign of recognition: a baby knows the sound of their mother’s voice. Even before birth, the voice of a mother echoes in the womb, rising and falling like waves. Scientists have shown that newborns not only recognise their mother’s voice, but they are calmed by it. Drawn to it. Oriented by it. That voice becomes the sound of safety, of comfort, of home.

And so it is with us and God.

In our gospel reading today from John 10, Jesus says: *“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me... No one will snatch them out of my hand.”* The tenderness in that image is unmistakable. It is not only a shepherd’s voice; it is a parent’s voice. It is the voice that calls to us in the darkness and says, “I am here.” The voice that calms our anxious hearts. The voice that says, “You belong.”

Today, on this Mother’s Day, we give thanks for the women in our lives—mothers and grandmothers, aunties and godmothers, teachers and mentors—who have echoed that divine voice. Those who, through their love, have helped us know what it means to be safe, to be seen, to be held. Today we recognise not only the biological bond, but the sacred vocation of mothering that anyone can take up when they choose to nurture life, to offer compassion, to protect and to guide.

And just like the work of mothering, which often goes unseen or unacknowledged, our first reading from Acts 9 gives us a beautiful moment when the hidden labour of women is brought out into the light and honoured.

We meet Tabitha—also known as Dorcas—a disciple of Jesus, living in the port city of Joppa. We are told she “was devoted to good works and acts of charity.” But what exactly did she do? The text tells us that she made clothes. When she died, the widows she had helped gathered around Peter and showed him the tunics and garments she had made with her own hands. These women, often left without family or protection in the ancient world, had found in Tabitha a caregiver, a protector, a mother.

And Peter sees it. He sees the threads of love that she has woven—not just in cloth, but in community. And so he kneels beside her, prays, and with the power of God, he raises her up.

This moment is more than just a miracle of resurrection. It is a moment of recognition. In a world where the work of women, especially caregiving work, is often undervalued or invisible, here the Spirit of God says, “No, this matters. This is holy.”

Tabitha’s work may not have filled scrolls or pulpits. But it filled lives. Her legacy was worn on the backs of widows and stitched into the fabric of her community. And in her, we see the image of God—not only as Father, but as Mother. God who clothes us in compassion. God who hems us in behind and before. God who, like a mother, feeds and shelters and stays close in the dark of night.

Psalm 23, that beloved psalm we've all heard at bedsides and funerals and quiet moments of fear, has the same kind of intimacy. *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... He restores my soul... Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me."*

You are with me.

That is the heart of it, isn't it? The relentless presence of love. The assurance that no matter how far we stray, no matter how dark the path, we are not alone. God walks beside us, tends to us, speaks to us in a voice we recognise deep in our bones.

And this is where the voice of God and the voice of mothering love intertwine. Because the kind of love that Jesus describes—where "no one can snatch them out of my hand"—is not unlike the fierce, tenacious love of a mother. The kind of love that stays up through the night, that gives of itself without asking for praise, that sees the child for who they are and who they might yet become.

For those of us who have had mothers or mother figures who loved us like that, today is a day of gratitude. But we must also speak honestly. For some, Mother's Day brings pain—grief, absence, longing, complicated relationships, or the ache of dreams unfulfilled. And here, too, the voice of God speaks. Here, too, the Good Shepherd draws near. The love of God is not limited by human failings or fragile family trees. The love of God is bigger, stronger, more persistent. A love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

That's what Jesus promises when he says, *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand."* It is the promise of belonging. The promise of a love that does not let go.

So today, let us remember the women like Tabitha, whose faith was practical and whose legacy was stitched in fabric and in hearts. Let us honour the voices that called us by name and believed in us even when we couldn't believe in ourselves. And let us also give thanks for the voice of God—both mother and father—who whispers to us in our joy and our sorrow: "You are mine. I know you. I will never let you go."

And finally, let us listen. Listen for that voice—not always loud, but always near. The voice of the Shepherd. The voice of Love. The voice that, like the voice of a mother, calls to us before we even know how to respond. And may we follow it, with grateful hearts, all the days of our lives.

Amen.