

Thought for the Week from Roots on the Web (could be read as a sermon)

I wonder if you've ever experienced what it feels like to be marginalised for something that is not your fault. To be considered an outsider, underappreciated, not included, all because of your age, the colour of your skin, your gender, where you live, how your brain is wired or the accident that left you paralysed, to name but a few. The women we meet in our passage today knew exactly how that felt. They were widows – they were vulnerable and, without a husband, they had no status or voice in their society. They faced a constant struggle to have enough to eat and drink, clean clothes and a place to live and to make sure they weren't taken advantage of.

But these widows had got lucky. They lived in Joppa, the same town as Dorcas, a woman who put her faith into action and devoted her time to doing good works. Dorcas, a follower of Jesus, used what she had to provide for the widows in need. This wasn't simply giving them the clothes she had finished with, or the loaves of bread she didn't need. She gave her time to come alongside the widows. She spent time sitting with them, making clothing with them, and no doubt sharing her faith and exploring their questions about Jesus. Through her simple actions she gave these widows worth – she was empowering them to help themselves. You could see Dorcas as leading a micro-enterprise for widows from her home.

No wonder then, that the widows were devastated when Dorcas got ill and died. Her life had such an impact on the widows that I suspect they were incredibly fearful of what would happen to them now. Without Dorcas would they again find themselves marginalised by society? Would the worth they had found be gone again? Were any of those stories Dorcas shared about Jesus giving life actually true? Here we have an interesting interplay between human life and eternal life. Dorcas had called the widows to experience human life again through being with them and giving them worth, yet she had also called them to eternal life through introducing them to Jesus.

Who do we know that is in need of help, that is in need of life (human and eternal)? How can we simply be with people as an act of giving life and worth to them? What sort of impact do we want our lives to have on others? Are we guilty of marginalising people, directly or indirectly? This is the start of Christian Aid week, and they are known for their slogan 'we believe in life before death'. Telling people about Jesus and offering eternal life is incredibly important, but so too is enabling people to live a human life of worth. Where is real life yet to be found? How can we play a part in calling people to live?