

MESSAGE - *The First Christians Bring "Change"*

Acts 11:27-30

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Have you ever started a collection of loose change?

Money from the laundry; found in the sofa cushions, left on the dresser; picked up off the street. Those random pennies, nickels and quarters seem to be inconsequential. Especially these days when we might wonder what pennies are really for...

But we know that when collected together they really are not inconsequential. Here's our current jar of loose change....there's probably around \$20. And you can really accomplish something with \$20. You know, like coffee for yourself and a few friends. Okay, so that's a lame example, but the point is that there is power and witness in gathered resources....like we will hear in today's lesson. Let's listen for the Word of God according to

Acts 11:27-30

<sup>27</sup> At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. <sup>29</sup> The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers<sup>[c]</sup> living in Judea; <sup>30</sup> this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

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And so with this moment in church history, something new began to happen: faith community witness and help.

- Oh sure, the Roman government had a system of public benefaction...through taxes no doubt.
- And in the Jewish tradition, individuals gave "alms" – their spare change to those who begged – as part of their individual faith response.

But in this moment in church history – something new and unique took place - a shared collection for others in need as a witness to the faith.

And in short order, this became a part of the mission and ministry of the church.

In Paul's travels, know he took up a couple collections for those in need in Jerusalem:

From the Christians in Antioch....and then in other missionary journeys.....as he traveled to different churches in different areas.

Became such a part of his ministry that to the church in Corinth: Paul suggested that each member set up a "loose change jar" for the Jerusalem collection.

To us this might sound like an ordinary fundraiser; an everyday kind of thing. But the thing is, this is a very unique event that begins to take place and take shape and become a part of the mission and ministry of the church.

And I believe that collection did a couple of different things:

Brought help to those Christians in need in Jerusalem during a famine.

Brought a witness from around that ancient world to the Jerusalem believers that they were not alone....people cared. And also that the faith in Jesus Christ was stretching out into the world.

That collection of offerings not only brought together "change", but it brought about change in the world:

For shared offerings are both practical and spiritual:

1) Practical: can bring change in circumstances on a larger scale

Let me give you an example...UMCOR

2) Spiritual: It redirects the glory of the offering....away from the giver and puts it on Christ.

- Goes from "look at what I have done" to "look at what Christ has done"
- Goes from "look at what I can do" to "we are stronger together"

And this is what our Faith Promise program at First Church is about!

Every year our Outreach Committee identifies several outreach ministries for our church to support and invites us all to pray a prayer:

*Lord, how much would you provide through me that you would not provide to me if I am committed to pass it along through the local church for your mission?*

And so we celebrate what God has done through us to benefit the world around us this last year:

|                       |                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Food Ministries       | over \$9,000 so far this year    |
| Habitat for Humanity  | \$6,000                          |
| Refuge for Women      | \$5,000                          |
| Preschool scholarship | \$3,000                          |
| Bethany Hope Home     | \$10,000                         |
| Summon2Serve          | \$23,000 (Kids Around the World) |
| Appalachia SP         | \$20,000                         |
| Gift of Hope          | \$5,000                          |

Home of the Sparrow        \$2,000  
Total                        \$83,000 – so far this year with more to go forth!

And people's lives that have been changed include:

Those struggling to make ends meet and food on the table  
Women escaping harsh and exploitive realities  
Girls and young women who are housed and educated  
Homes that have been built to lift people out of poverty.

And the amazing this is that this has all been done above and beyond regular church offerings that keep the ministry of the church alive.

So today I invite you to unite your change/your offerings to bring change to a broken and hurting world...all in praise to our Lord.

For He is the One who has brought an eternal change to us!