

Spare change Christians! 1 Corinthians 15.58-16.9

Today's TFTD come from Rod Hill

Although he was the Superintendent minister, Rev. Chitundu didn't preach at our church very often. After all, his patch was about 50 miles long and had lots of churches of which he was the minister, plus he had the main church in the town. So he didn't come to our church very often, but I've never forgotten his sermon on one of his infrequent visits.

Rev. Chitundu was preaching about Christian giving and he said to the congregation, "When it comes to time for the offering I put my hand deep into my cassock pocket", and he did just that, "and I put every single penny that I find into the collection plate."

With that he pulled his clenched hand out of his pocket. "Mind you", he said (with tongue very firmly in cheek) "over breakfast I make sure that my pockets are empty"! and he showed us his empty hand.

In this passage Paul is encouraging the Christians in Corinth not be 'spare change' givers, but to collect up an offering for the Church in Jerusalem as they go along, so that it will be ready when he arrives. Perhaps Paul is implying that the congregation should be giving on a regular basis for the Church in Jerusalem as well as supporting their own congregation.

One of the members of the Anglican/Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership where I was minister in Sheffield was the Diocesan finance officer. Nick was really helpful to us as a church in all sorts of ways, but his

knowledge of the way that Anglican finances work was really helpful in our understanding of what happened to the 'money in the offertory'. He also encouraged us to review our giving on a regular, and at least annual, basis. He explored with us the principle of tithing i.e. giving one tenth of what you earn away. I've always tried to practice that over the years of my adult life and have found it deeply rewarding – even when times were tight (and they really were in the early years as a minister) we still tithed and were never left short of what we needed!

It seems to me that tithing is not just something that individual Christians should think about, so too should churches. I believe that the time to think about giving as a church is when we draw our budget up for the year – to be planning to give away 10% of our income. Most churches that I have worked with in my role as Mission Enabler, have come to the end of the year and then looked at their giving.

Anyway, I digress.

If you read the passages across Paul's letters that concern the collection for the Saints in Jerusalem, it becomes clear that this is about more than just money for people who have become poor. Its also about a mutual responsibility, perhaps even a mutual accountability. Crucial to this is the personal relationship that Paul has with the Church in Jerusalem. Money flowing without a personal link in some way seems very shallow and can easily become patronising – we rich people give to you poor people because we have, and you don't have. Now, I'm not for one moment suggesting that I've come across that attitude in Alderley Edge, I haven't, but it's ever so easy for those of us in the rich world to have that kind of attitude towards people in other parts of the world in an unthinking kind of way – not that we do it intentionally. I know that I've done it myself at

times.

Several of the churches where I have been minister have decided, for the time of my ministry with them, to form a relationship with the community in Zambia where I used to work. Not only did we raise money for the work of the school and health centre there, but several of our members visited to get to know people and some of their folk came to us so that even more of us could get to know each other and understand each other's situation. Since I left local church ministry in Sheffield and came over to this side of the Pennines to work at a district level I have not been able to keep up that link but ...!

I'm sure that none of us are 'spare change' Christians, but it doesn't do any of us any harm to think not only about what we give but about how we give it. Paul reminds us that giving is an action that belongs best within a human relationship. It's something that is planned, rather than haphazard, and it's an integral part of our Christian discipleship.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church once said, 'The last part of a man to be converted is his wallet.'

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