

# Sermon Text for June 23, 2019

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Malachi 3:16-18, Acts 11:27-30

## **“A little known story about community”**

There are many things that make my heart sing about this church. We love to be together. We love to support each other and pray for each other. We love to welcome people and make them feel at home, especially since at one time or another we were strangers in this church and someone, or many people welcomed us. We love being a community, we love being a family, and maybe I'm just projecting the way that I feel, but I hope I can make a generalized statement about all of us.

But there is something unique about this community that I have experienced in other communities, but not to the degree that I have seen it here in this community. When we take up special offerings for disasters, or for blanket Sunday or for One Great Hour of Sharing, when we put our resources together not just for the general budget, but for special emergency circumstances, or to gather funds for special needs, this community responds in a very powerful, noteworthy way. Every year between special offerings, and disaster assistance, besides from the close to \$100,000 that we give every year for mission in our budget, we raise about another \$50,000. I need to tell you, that is extraordinary for a church like this. You are unique, you are exhibiting something that we don't advertise, but it is a little known story, a little known reality about this community. You are not only generous, but you care.

For the past few weeks we have seen a church that is committed to evangelism and went even as far as the ends of the earth to bring people to it. Last week we saw a church that was committed to taking care of its own through Christian education and we marveled at the opportunities that this church provides and were reminded of the responsibilities of everyone here to be involved in Christian Education, to be taught. It is our responsibility to grow spiritually.

There is another, a third and final piece of this complete church depicted in Acts, the church we are striving to be as we make decisions for evangelism, teaching, and the third piece is outreach, reaching out with help to not only our members but also our

community. A healthy church is involved in all three, and today we look at this third leg of the stool.

### **READ**

We find ourselves today again in Antioch. That fun-loving, pagan, sport-worshipping city that somehow birthed a church which becomes the missionary sending church of the Christian movement. This church gets the attention of Louisville, or rather of Jerusalem, the true mother church, and Barnabas and Paul team up together to help it grow. Today more believers from Jerusalem come to Antioch. It really seems that something special is happening here at this church. Two men come, one of their names is Agabus. He stands up in the middle of the service and says, Pastor Paul, sorry to interrupt, but I have to tell you that in a couple of years there is going to be a famine and we better do something about it.

Scripture calls these 2 men prophets and this would be considered a prophecy. We are not going to address today prophecy and what it is, suffice it to say that if healings occurred back in the early church and we believe that healings can take place now, the same can be said of prophecy.

What we do know is that the early church took it seriously. In fact, historically during the years 46-47 AD there was the great Judean famine during the reign of Claudius as reported by Josephus. It really happened as Agabus predicted. It is a good thing that they took it seriously.

As soon as the disciples in that church heard that there was a need they sprang into action. They deliberated, and they acted. What we find is a community that sees the handwriting on the wall and then acts to meet the needs that may not be currently present, but they know and trust will be coming.

The disciples know that they had to do something, doing nothing was never an option. What to do was decided by the disciples. This term is a very specific one used to describe the leaders of that local church, as opposed to another term we find here, believers which describes the actual members or believers of that community.

Over these past few years Agabus has stood up and spoken a word of prophecy to this church, and we have heard and we have acted. Do you know what Agabus has spoken to this church? I am warning you that this community is going to grow.

Strasburg and Lancaster County is going to grow in leaps and bounds. You had better be ready.

The church heard that voice and took the steps to address the need that was spoken about the future but not seen in the present. People, look around you, that growth is upon us now. A process was set in motion by the disciples of this church or the elders of this church as they foresaw the growth that was coming and now we are beginning to see it happening.

This church is never an entity that can remain static but must be fluid in its programs and in its decisions because God is never still but is always working in ways that surprise and keep us on our toes.

I realize that the Scripture today does not deal with a church that has to make a decision dealing with church growth, there are plenty of those and in every single instance the disciples decide in such a way that opens the door to acceptance even further than it was opened before.

The disciples in this Scripture were faced with a need to take action, for inaction would have a very negative effect, and this is interesting, not necessarily on their church but on people outside of their community.

The church in Judea was one of those well established, well off, influential churches. The church of Antioch was quite the opposite and they could have easily said. That is not our problem, they are not our responsibility. This approach by this Antioch church demanded that they take action to meet a physical need of a sister church. Of all people, these Antioch gentiles respond, each according to what they have.

This Scripture speaks not only to the need for a community to take action when it is faced with a situation that may not be visible except on the horizon, but it also speaks specifically about the need for the church to attend to what it does with its gold.

All through Scripture we find that issues of money are issues that pop up more than any other. Just think of the NT: Judas betrays Jesus for money, Ananias and Sapphira don't give and they die, Simon tries to buy the power of God, Paul and Silas are jailed because they disrupt business activities and the beat goes on.

But here, money is not a problem, in fact it is one of many resources that this community has and uses to address the immediate issue that arises. In Acts Luke always

has conversion matched with charity. We find genuine repentance is matched with how our approach to finances have equally changed.

Christians more than any other religious group of people when a need arises act, especially in giving. This was true from the very beginning, in the early church Emperor Julian once stated: It is disgraceful when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Christians support not only their own people, but ours as well, all men see that our people, the Romans, lack aid from us.”

Like the earliest church, 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian has always rallied when the need arises. We have, as this Scripture states, as each one was able raised money and sent it on to Louisville, or Mennonite Disaster Assistance and so on.

As a church we have never hesitated to step up to the plate and give to our community, to our church. Brothers and sisters this little known community describes pretty well our church as well. They trusted in their community, in their leadership, in their God and it led to a growing, teaching, and reaching church. May we continue do the same. Amen.