

**In what ways might the community life  
described in Acts be relevant to the church  
today?**

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## 1 Introduction

Acts describes the genesis of the Christian Church from the ascension of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem at Pentecost, to the arrival of Paul in Rome. In the earliest chapters, Luke uses summaries (Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-35) as the first years of the church are narrated in a few chapters. These summaries and the surrounding stories paint a picture of community life where the followers of Jesus share all they have; worshipping, learning and eating together.

Many interpretations have been drawn from these verses. Some see hints of the utopian ideals of the Greeks, others fulfilment of passages in the Torah. Some see communism millennia before Marx, or a failed project that leaves the Jerusalem church needing handouts from churches planted by Paul.

As we examine the text and some of the many theories that have spring up from it, we must ask ourselves what it might mean for our contemporary context. We will think about how the author might have intended it to be read and what kind of response would be appropriate in the contexts we know best.

## 2 Common Life in the Jerusalem Church

Acts begins with the few frightened followers of Jesus watching him ascend into heaven. On the day of Pentecost, around 120 of them are praying together when the Holy Spirit comes. Luke records that 3000 believed after Peter's sermon, that they were baptised and 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.'<sup>1</sup> (Acts 2:42.) The word *κοινωνία* (fellowship) quickly acquired a technical meaning to the followers of Jesus<sup>2</sup> – it was an essential part of what it meant to be one of the brothers – part of the family.

'Pesch has suggested ... that in fact only two things are really mentioned here, teaching and *κοινωνία*, with the latter further defined as involving the breaking of bread and prayer.'<sup>3</sup> Both praying and eating are important to Luke as a story teller, especially bread and the blessing said over it.<sup>4</sup> We see this throughout the gospel but especially in Luke 24. The two disciples meet Jesus and talk with him on the road but do not recognise him until he breaks bread in their home. It is unsurprising that eating would be important to the followers of Jesus after his ascension.

There is some dispute on whether 'breaking of bread' is sacramental, whether it means the same as the Eucharist or Lord's supper.<sup>5</sup> It could be that by linking breaking of bread and prayer, Luke is highlighting the ritual or worshipping dimension of both. However, it could be that Luke is rather showing that the spiritual act of prayer is intimately linked to the practical act of a shared meal.<sup>6</sup> In this case, *κοινωνία* means more than the two things mentioned, as verses 45-46 expand. This does not preclude the idea that

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1 Scripture quotations from the English Standard Version.

2 Manzanera in Finger, *Widows*, 53.

3 Pesch, *Die Apsotelgeschichte (1-12)*, 130 cited by Witherington, *Acts*, 160.

4 Moxnes, 'Context', 383.

5 Finger, *Widows*, 49.

6 Finger, *Widows*, 59.

the meals include remembrance of Jesus, but points to the close association between fellowship, sharing material goods, food and worship.

Eating meals was a highly ritualised affair in both the Graeco-Roman and Jewish worlds. For the Romans it was closely linked to religious observation, with prayers and libations to the gods built in.<sup>7</sup>

[For Jews] table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in the meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread.<sup>8</sup>

So whether their breaking bread can be equated with the Eucharist or not, it seems certain that meals were symbolic and religious in their practice.

As Luke summarises the period immediately after Pentecost, he says that ‘religious awe’<sup>9</sup> came upon everyone and that the apostles were doing signs and wonders. ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common.’ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ (together) may be a hint at a formal community<sup>10</sup> or it may simply be saying that the believers in Jesus were a single and recognisable group, distinguished by the actions of the following verses. The repetition of ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ in verse 47 emphasises that they were saved into the community – being saved and joining the followers of Jesus was both simultaneous and synonymous.

We hear echoes of the ancient Greek proverb ‘friends have all things in common’ in the words ἅπαντα κοινά (all things in common). Aristotle and the many others who used it<sup>11</sup> referred to an idealised utopian view of Greek history where everything was shared and no one fought or claimed ownership over property.<sup>12</sup> A saying this common would automatically come to mind to anyone familiar with Greek culture, just as saying ‘a stitch in time’ will conjure up ‘saves nine’ in the minds of English speakers.

It has been suggested that by using this kind of utopian saying, Luke is simply writing another mythological origin story that cannot be taken as historical.<sup>13</sup> However, the realistic writing style of Luke suggests that he does intend to refer to actual events.<sup>14</sup> Although his summaries do not name individuals, they connect episodes where familiar characters are developed and take part in the progression of the story. Personalities like Barnabas are introduced in the context of the common life (Acts 4:36) and go on to play a bigger part in the unfolding narrative of the gospel’s spread (Acts 9:27, 11-15). Luke is saying that the dream of the Greeks has come to reality in Jesus and the community of faith of his followers.<sup>15</sup> It is no

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7 Finger, *Widows*, 172.

8 Jeremias, *Proclamation*, 115.

9 Johnson, *Acts*, 58.

10 Capper, ‘Palestinian’, 336, links this to the *yachad* (‘together’ or ‘community’) of DSS.

11 Plato, *Republic* 449C; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1168B; *Politics* 1263A; Plutarch *The Dialogue on Love* 21; Philo, *On Abraham*, 235 according to Johnson, *Acts*, 59.

12 Johnson, *Acts*, 62.

13 Cf Capper, ‘Palestinian’, 325.

14 Joubert, ‘Jerusalem’, 53.

15 Capper, ‘Palestinian’, 325.

more a utopian myth than the descriptions of the Essene common life in Josephus or Philo that employ the same imagery.<sup>16</sup>

Having 'all things in common' meant that the believers were selling possessions and giving the proceeds to those who needed them. The imperfect tense of the verbs used implies that this was not a one-off sale on joining the community but an ongoing, 'as and when' activity.<sup>17</sup> When a need arose, someone would sell something to make sure the need was covered. This seems to be different to the communal life that the Qumran Essenes practised.

### 3 Continuation of Essene Traditions

While the Essenes are not mentioned by name in the New Testament, evidence abounds that they were present in Palestine at the time of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo and Pliny the Elder describe the common life of the Essenes in similar terms to the description of the primitive church in Acts 2 and 4.<sup>19</sup> The Essenes were distributed in 'every town' of Israel<sup>20</sup> as well as the desert settlement of Qumran. Community meals, prepared and presided over by a priest, consisted of bread and wine, while there were nightly studies and prayer meetings for members to attend.<sup>21</sup> The remarkable similarity between the life described in 1QS and the words of Acts 2 have led some to suggest links between the first followers of Jesus and the practice of community life as the Essenes practised.<sup>22</sup>

The Essenes comprised both communities of 'celibate' men and married couples. Finger suggests that since the Essenes married comparatively late for first-century Jews and did not re-marry, celibacy was not a life-long vocation as it became in the church but rather a description of current marital status. The Community Rule of the Essenes, written before the establishment of the Qumran community, applied to all Essenes, wherever they lived and whatever their marital status.<sup>23</sup>

Essene communities, including Qumran, did not function like modern *Kibbutzim*. There was no 'communalised' production, rather each Essene worked outside the community as a labourer and wages would be collected in daily.<sup>24</sup> The necessities of the community could be purchased from this common purse. The Damascus Document describes a looser community which included women and children, where two days' wages per month would be collected to support widows and orphans.<sup>25</sup> However, Josephus did not see any difference other than marriage between the two types of Essenism,<sup>26</sup> suggesting that there was a variety of practices among the wider Essene sect.

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16 Capper, 'Palestinian', 327.

17 Polhill, *Acts*, 153, see also Witherington, *Acts*, 205.

18 Finger, *Widows*, 168.

19 Finger, *Widows*, 148.

20 Josephus, *War* 2 124 in Vermes, *Essenes*, 39.

21 Vermes, *Essenes*, 8-9.

22 E.g. Capper, 'Palestinian'.

23 Finger, *Widows*, 150.

24 Capper, 'Palestinian', 332.

25 CD XIV.13, cited by Capper, 'Palestinian', 332.

26 Josephus, *War* 2 160 in Vermes, *Essenes*, 46-7.

The Community Rules found at Qumran describe the common life shared by all Essenes. 1QS describes the staged initiation to the Essenian sect. After swearing an oath to observe Torah, the candidate was examined on the teachings of the community, followed by a year of further training. During this year he was not allowed to share the sect's meals ('the purity'). Passing a test at the end of that year allowed him to share the food but not the liquids and he would transfer his property to the sect. It was held in trust, not combined with the rest of the goods of the community until, after a second year of training and another test, the initiate was fully integrated into the community.<sup>27</sup> The requirements for admission to the group were strenuous and detailed, very different from the description in Acts 2. Peter says 'Repent and be baptised' and three thousand are added to the church 'that day'. While both of those actions form part of the Essenian induction, there is no hint in Acts 2 at a long, staged process.

Jesus and his disciples would have been aware of Essene communalism from their travels through the villages of Palestine, and the location of the upper room has been linked with the Essene community in Jerusalem.<sup>28</sup> We can clearly see the influence of some of the Essenian traditions on the early church, but the early church did not simply copy the Essenian way. They certainly did not sell every possession and property that they owned and disburse the money to the poor. It is clear from the text of Acts that they continued to own houses (e.g. Mary, the mother of John Mark in Acts 12:12). Their more important example was that of Jesus in his ministry.

#### **4 Jesus' lifestyle**

In his travelling ministry, Jesus identified himself with the poor (e.g. the homeless in Luke 9:58) but John tells us that what money he and the disciples had was held in a common purse, managed by Judas (John 12:6, 13:29). Luke tells us that wealthy women financially supported him (Luke 8:1-3) and from several gospel accounts we can see that from this money, alms were given to the poor. Capper suggests that Jesus practised a shared life with the twelve that included open meals as well as alms giving and that the earliest church at Jerusalem continued this lifestyle.<sup>29</sup> Although this common lifestyle was not a new idea and Jesus certainly knew of Essenes, the radical inclusivity of Jesus departs from the Community Rules of Qumran.

As we have seen, the Essenes had strict procedures on how a man could be admitted to the sect. Ritual purity and religious knowledge were required and any unclean Essene could not eat the common meal. By comparison, Jesus is distinguished by his meeting with, including, and even eating with all kinds of outsiders: impure, crippled, ostracised and sexually other (e.g. Luke 5:27-31, 7:33-39, 15:2). Jesus says that toll collector, Zacchaeus, seen as a traitor to the nation, is indeed a 'Son of Abraham' – no one is beyond salvation and inclusion at a celebratory meal (Luke 19:1-10).

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<sup>27</sup> Vermes, *Essenes*, 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> Capper, 'Palestinian', 342.

<sup>29</sup> Capper, 'Community', 113-4.

In Luke 14:7-14, Jesus discusses in Hellenistic terms how to behave when invited to a banquet. Speaking to the host, Jesus tells him to invite those who cannot repay the invitation, the very opposite of normal Greek practice.<sup>30</sup> It is blessed to invite the 'poor, maimed, lame and blind' not because of their 'impure' status in Judaism but because they cannot repay. Jesus does not frame this in terms of giving away food or money to the 'other', the less fortunate, but in terms of breaking down social barriers and forming new relationships. Free sharing rather than reciprocity is to be the model.

The primitive church of the early chapters of Acts was made up of all sections of Jerusalemite society<sup>31</sup> - no-one was excluded; it was a microcosm of the city.<sup>32</sup> This sharing between all social and economic groups was remarkable, especially as the followers of Jesus came into increasing contact with the Greek world where "almost all relationships involving property were assumed to operate on the basis of some kind of reciprocity."<sup>33</sup> Alms-giving was a Jewish rather than Greek practice,<sup>34</sup> but the church seems to go further than that. Sharing was based on need, not on ability to return the favour, and it was sharing rather than sporadic charitable donations.

## 5 Common life continues

Some of the themes of Acts 2 are echoed in the next summary at the end of chapter 4. Again, Luke's description of community life is interspersed inseparably with the testimony and action of the apostles in evangelism. The phrase 'there was not a needy person among them' is particularly interesting. It seems to be a reference to Deuteronomy 15:4 - 'there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you...' There is great debate over the extent to which the Torah regulations were ever implemented in the pre-exilic period – this could be seen to be just as much of a utopian ideal of a nation's origin for Israel as the earlier proverb was for Greece. Again, Luke is saying that these ideals have really come to fruition in the community of faith in Jesus.

Not only does this phrase refer to Torah, it can be seen to refer to Luke's gospel. The first act of Jesus' public ministry is to preach a sermon in his home of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30),<sup>35</sup> when he reads from Isaiah 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...' The first act of the church of Jesus (after the Spirit comes on them) is also to preach good news in its home, Jerusalem. As Acts unfolds, each of the promises in Luke 4 find practical fulfilment as the followers of Jesus proclaim the good news.

There has been development in the way the community organises itself with relation to distributing to those in need. Now, those who sell land or possessions put the money 'at the apostles' feet' (4:34). This is a position of submission,<sup>36</sup> not a place to take pride of. Antioch is a pivotal city for Luke, perhaps his

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30 Moxnes, 'Context', 386.

31 Witherington, *Acts*, 210-213.

32 Fiensy, 'Composition', 213.

33 Witherington, *Acts*, 206.

34 Ludemann, *Christianity*, 61.

35 Robinson, *Church*, 74.

36 Johnson, *Possessions*, 201.

hometown,<sup>37</sup> and Barnabas will be very important in building up the Antiochene church and in his missionary travels with Paul (Acts 11:19-25, 13:1-15:39). Luke makes sure we recognise the importance of what happens in Jerusalem as the origin of all that follows as the good news spreads.

Barnabas is described as a Levite from Cyprus. There is a hint again here at a fulfilment of the Torah requirement that Levites should not own land but serve God (Num 18:20-24) – especially with the future that Barnabas holds.<sup>38</sup> More importantly for our understanding of the common life of the church, the implication is that the land belonging to ‘a native of Cyprus’ would not be in Jerusalem and was therefore making no contribution to the community. Selling local land would have reduced the means of the church, but this increased what they could do.

## 6 Breakdown of the System?

After the first few chapters of Acts we find no explicit description of common life in the New Testament writings. While the Pauline churches and others practised shared meals, there seem to have been big problems in their implementation (1 Cor 11). Did Paul and the others who took the gospel out from Jerusalem teach a different way of life for converts to Jesus? Did he (and Luke) see the practice of the very first believers in Jerusalem as mistaken – perhaps even leading to the need for a collection to be taken among the churches of Greece?

As scholars have sought to find a point of breakdown of the common life of Acts 2 and 4, they have pointed to the episodes narrated in Acts 5-6. First, following Barnabas’ lead, Ananias and Sapphira sell land and bring it to the feet of Peter. Their deception of keeping back some of the money is exposed by Peter and they die. Later, a dispute is brought by the Hellenistic Jews that their widows are being overlooked by the Hebraic Jews in ‘the service’. The twelve call together the whole church to appoint seven men to manage the situation more effectively. Are these two events signs that there are problems with the way the common life is working out and that the system is crumbling?

We must assume that Ananias and Sapphira, like Barnabas, had land outside the immediate surroundings of Jerusalem and wanted to appear to contribute to the life of the community. Parallels have been drawn between the narratives of Acts 5, Genesis 3 and Joshua 7. Each detail a new community and their first sin and failing. A husband and wife conspire together to deceive God and profit themselves - ‘here is one of several details in the story suggesting a parallel with the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. The “original sin” of the church is portrayed in terms of the misuse of money and possessions!’<sup>39</sup> The word for ‘kept back’, ἐνοσφίσαστο, is the same one used to describe Achan’s sin in Joshua 7:1 in the Septuagint.<sup>40</sup> Luke, with a skilled writer’s hand, subtly highlights the importance of the story.

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37 Bruce, *Acts*, 8-9.

38 Robinson, *Church*, 74-5.

39 Peterson, *Acts*, 209.

40 Johnson, *Acts*, 88.

Capper suggests that the Essenian model of ‘provisional surrender of property’ explains the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>41</sup> However, as Walton says,<sup>42</sup> this goes beyond the text of Acts. The sin of ‘embezzlement’<sup>43</sup> is not what Peter actually condemns. ‘The great sacrilege that Ananias had committed is expressed strongly in the Greek “you belied/falsified the Holy Spirit” (v. 3). His action was a falsification of what the Spirit was doing and was prompting the community to do and to be.’<sup>44</sup> It is the Spirit that is causing the common life of the church, the breaking down of barriers and the free giving of property and money to extend the work of the community.

One reading of this could be that Luke thinks that an ‘age of innocence’ is over and the church will move into a more pragmatic, less idealistic mode of mission. Another could be that this does not end anything but is a reminder for the church to move forward with humility, recognising that there will be problems from inside the church as well as from outside.

The same can be said for the events of Acts 6. Tensions arise in the church between the Ἑλληνιστῶν and the Ἑβραίους. The difference is in the primary language of the groups - Hellenistics had Greek as their first language and had some origin in the diaspora, while Hebraics spoke Hebrew, or rather Aramaic, as their first language,<sup>45</sup> though many probably had Greek as a second language. The dispute arises over the διακονία, the ‘service’. As the apostles speak to the gathered church, they speak of ‘serving tables’. Though some have tried to connect this with alms-giving and distribution tables, it is much more likely that it refers to food.<sup>46</sup>

Finger turns the common perception of widows being left out of the ‘meals on wheels’ distribution on its head by suggesting that the Hellenistic widows were being left out of the honour of preparing and serving the common meals of the Christians.<sup>47</sup> Rather than marginalising and patronising women, this places them at the very heart of early Christian practice. The purpose of eating together was to ensure that there was nobody left out of the community; if the serving of the meals was highlighting a division, it must be discussed by everyone and the problem solved.

The appointment of the Seven by the Twelve is a critical point in the narrative of Acts. Firstly, it has been often pointed out that the Seven have Greek names. While this does not mean that they were all Hellenistics, it shows a shift from Aramaic-speaking Jews to the outward direction that will characterise the rest of Acts. Secondly, while they were appointed to coordinate ‘the service,’ Luke only describes their acts of evangelism. They were selected not for their cooking skills, but because God was using them, and for Luke, that means evangelism. This demonstrates the importance of the common meal in the sharing of the message of Jesus in Jerusalem.

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41 Capper, ‘Palestinian’, 329.

42 Walton, ‘Communism’, 107.

43 Witherington, *Acts*, 215.

44 Witherington, *Acts*, 217.

45 Witherington, *Acts*, 242.

46 Witherington, *Acts*, 249.

47 Finger, *Widows*, 95-6, 262-3.

As Acts continues, and as we look in the Epistles of Paul, the idea of holding all possessions in common seems to disappear.<sup>48</sup> There is at least one collection to support the Jerusalem church taken (Rom 15:25-27, 1 Cor 16:1-4, 2 Cor 9:1-5; Acts 11:27-30), which has led some to suggest that the Pauline churches needed to ‘bail out’ the Jerusalem church after the failure of ‘holding all things in common’.<sup>49</sup> However, rather than Paul opposing and setting up a different kind of church, these mainly gentile churches outside of Palestine show an evolution in practice but have the same principles at heart.

As we have previously discussed, even giving alms was a big step for Greeks to take, so Paul’s teaching on property is radical. It seems that the collection raised for Jerusalem goes beyond alms, however. Alms are given from a rich benefactor to a poor beggar without changing the status of either.<sup>50</sup> This was sharing of the meagre resources of the poor among themselves.<sup>51</sup> The ‘theonomous’ churches,<sup>52</sup> under God’s rule, share and help the poor of Jerusalem without compulsion except for the Spirit in them, just as they share and help members of their own community freely.

As Paul sets up churches, the common meal continues to be central to the community life and worship. In Corinth, we see that there were problems with its practice, so Paul is quick to correct and explain how it should be done. He emphasises that the meal should not be creating divisions but minimising them (1 Cor 11:21-22). In fact, the radical inclusivity of Jesus finds one of its highest statements in Paul’s writing: ‘Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.’ (Col 3:11). While it seems the churches struggled with it, Paul certainly taught that everyone should be included in the community and its meals, just as they had in Jerusalem.

Paul does not enforce the abolition of differences, what he encourages is brotherly love.<sup>53</sup> Rather than grasping tightly to money and possessions, the early church hold them lightly. They are to be used where they are most needed, not held onto and hoarded. They are to be used as a way of welcoming more people into the community of Jesus-followers and never as a division.

## 7 Holding Lightly Today

So far, we have explored and imagined what the way of life of the first followers of Jesus in Acts might have looked at.

But one must do more than remain in this imaginary world. We must resurface in our own time, bringing with us messages from the first-century church. We will want to examine those messages in the light of our own twentieth century lives - our joys, perplexities, sorrows, challenges, questions, fears, doubts, affirmations, and consternations.<sup>54</sup>

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48 Rowland, *Origins*, 273.

49 Hengel, *Property*, 34.

50 Finger, *Widows*, 139, citing J D Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: Life of a Mediterranean Peasant*, 341.

51 Paul describes the Macedonian church in ‘extreme poverty’, 2 Cor 8:2.

52 Hengel, *Property*, 85.

53 Hengel, *Property*, 39.

54 Walaskay, *Acts*, 21.

Christians have been doing this for as long as they have read the book of Acts – from the Monastics to the Anabaptists and up to the present day.<sup>55</sup> There are no explicit instructions on living a communal life in the New Testament, but the stories we have read are meant to affect us – they ‘speak in the past tense and refer to things that actually happened in the past, but they covertly relate to the future.’<sup>56</sup>

As we try to apply what we have learned so far about the community life of the church in Acts, we must first recognise the huge social and cultural differences between our situations. The world today is a very different place – socially, industrially, politically, morally – and the church is different too.<sup>57</sup> We cannot create ‘an Acts 2 church’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century any more than Paul could or would later in Acts itself. Rather, we must take the priorities and directions of the community and try to apply them in our own context.

The first and most important emphasis we must own is the radical inclusivity of Jesus. As we looked at his eating habits, we saw that no one was excluded, whatever their social position or reasons for exclusion. The early church was made up from every level of Jerusalemite society, but our churches in contemporary Britain are very often segregated by class and race, as are the Christian festivals we attend. The two nineteenth-century focusses of missionaries and pietism have meant that we often exclude the morally other as quickly as the Pharisees and imagine the racially other as someone else’s job.

But Luke and Acts teach us that inclusivity and mission are the same thing and they literally start at home, at the meal table. The issue of the widows serving at tables shows how central the common meals were to the life and witness of the church. We need to explore how eating together can become more of a statement and witness to a new social order being created here and now.

Many have read Acts as suggesting some form of Communism. But both Luke and Paul seem less concerned with political change than the community and congregation sharing life together.<sup>58</sup> The key to sharing is the creating of a new family. In first-century Jerusalem, the family or household was the natural setting for meals to be shared. By opening up this family to everyone, eating together and sharing possessions and money was the most natural thing to do. We need to seek to build these ‘new family’ ties today, too.

As we saw with the Pauline churches, following in the path of the early church does not mean doing everything slavishly the same. The fact that there are different expressions of church community life represented in the New Testament suggests that there is no single way of approaching this.<sup>59</sup> A true community of goods would be very difficult to practice in contemporary consumer Britain, but for that reason it may be all the more important to do. This essay has not explored Jesus’ perceived negative attitude to wealth in Luke, but he described wealth as a problem for the rich (e.g. Luke 8:18-30).

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55 Finger, *Widows*, 12-47.

56 Goldingay, *Models*, 65.

57 Hengel, *Property*, 41.

58 Robinson, *Church*, 83.

59 Fee, *Bible*, 92-93.

Giving alms is not necessarily the solution - a transaction of giving will not change us or those in need indefinitely - the poor remain 'other' to us.<sup>60</sup> Rather, we need to emphasise *sharing* in our churches. One western example of this is the 'White Bucket' programme at Mars Hill Bible Church, Grand Rapids. At the end of a service, buckets were placed at the front of the church and the congregation were encouraged to come up to the buckets. If they could share by putting some money in the bucket, they could, and if they needed to share by taking from the bucket, that was just as appropriate. The white bucket money is not fed into the other ministries of the church but is used to help those in need in the community.<sup>61</sup>

Sharing need not be restricted to church buildings and programmes. Non-profit companies and cooperatives often empower and welcome all kinds of people. The Little Grill in Harrisonburg, Virginia does not take paying customers on Mondays, but shares free meals with anyone who comes. With a tiny budget and the sharing of home-grown produce and leftovers, a wide range of people from those in great need to students, professors and the workers of the cooperative share together.<sup>62</sup>

Luke paints a picture of the early church sharing meals and property in a radical way, including anyone who became a Christian. Our ongoing task is to try to reflect that in our contemporary communities in whatever ways we can.

*Word count: 4906*

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60 Finger, *Widows*, 281.

61 Recorded sermon, 31/05/2009.

62 Finger, *Widows*, 283.

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