important,” says one of the founders of Food Rescue Hero, “but it’s the power of collective action that will drive massive change.”

What’s true today was true in first-century Jerusalem. The book of Acts tells us that “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (4:32). A great team. Tremendous people. Collective action.

“With great power,” says Acts, “the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.…as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need” (vv. 33-35). The result of this collective action was that there “was not a needy person among them” (v. 34). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus rescued these Christians and now they wanted to rescue others. In all that they did, they had one heart and soul and purpose. Crowdsourced Christianity.

If the church can tap into this power then it can more effectively feed the hungry, support those in need, dismantle abusive systems, and give testimony to the resurrection hope we have in Jesus. Collective action that leads to Crowdsourced Christianity is foundational to our faith, and well within our abilities.

“We need Christians focusing on ordinary Christianity,” writes pastor Tony Merida. This means “speaking up for the voiceless, caring for the single mom, restoring the broken, bearing burdens, welcoming the functionally fatherless, and speaking the good news to people on a regular basis in order to change the world.” Ordinary Christians, people like us, need only start with the great commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Reach out to those nearest you, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, visit the prisoner, speak good news to the people around you.

This was the ordinary Christianity practiced by the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, not as isolated heroes but as members of a unified community. They were Crowdsourced Christians who tackled their challenges through collective action, just as we should be doing today. So, how do we do this?

**See a Need.** In his book, The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical, Shane Claiborne highlights how the ordinary Christian can affect radical change. Claiborne tells the story of two college buddies who decided to go into Philadelphia to hang out with their “homeless friends.” Claiborne teamed up with them, and, at first, he was afraid he would be robbed. But in the end, he says, the people in the alleys “stole only my heart.” One day, he heard about a group of 40 homeless families about to be evicted from an abandoned cathedral in North Philadelphia. He joined a group that went to help them, and they became the YACHT Club: “Youth Against Complacency and Homelessness Today.” First, Shane saw a need – shelter for homeless families – then he and others responded through a Crowdsourced Christian effort. Seeing the need is always the first step.

**Meet a Need.** In 1997, Claiborne and a group of friends moved into a small row house in a poor section of Philadelphia. Their vision was to love God, love people, and follow Jesus. They called their little experiment the “Simple Way.” They share food with folks who need it and run a community store out of their house. They reclaim abandoned lots and plant gardens in the concrete jungle. They rehabilitate abandoned houses and make friends with people in prison and on death row. Claiborne and his friends see a vision of another way to live: the Christian way. Theirs is a form of Crowdsourced Christianity, directed toward changing the world for the better.

We do not have to move into the inner-city to meet a need; we just need to take collective action. We can show up as a group and advocate for affordable housing. We can volunteer with others to stock the pantry and pack groceries at the Food Shelf. We can join a group that offers after-school tutoring for students. We can form alliances with our sisters and brothers of color and speak out against unjust systems. We can join a prison ministry and offer Bible studies for inmates. We can pound nails and hang sheetrock to provide safe, affordable housing. The work of rescuing takes many forms, but it is always best done as a group.

**Change the World. Seeing a need and meeting a need is guaranteed to change someone’s world. As** Jesus rescued the Christians of Jerusalem, so they wanted to rescue others. They “gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” and shared their resources with such generosity that there “was not a needy person among them” (vv. 33-34). They became part of a movement called “the Way” (9:2), which took their lives in a new direction. “No wonder the early Christian church was known as the Way,” writes Shane Claiborne. “It was a way of life that stood in glaring contrast to the world. Of course, everyone was forewarned that in this kingdom everything is backward and upside-down — the last are first and the first are last, the poor are blessed and the mighty are cast from their thrones.”

The Christian Way still stands in contrast to the world. Instead of “me first,” it is “us first.” Instead of “hate your enemy,” it is “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:43-44). Instead of “store up treasures on earth,” it is “store up treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-20). In the Crowdsourced Christianity of first-century Jerusalem, Christians worked together to help those in need. Rather than the church being split into factions, “the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). They did not hoard possessions, but instead “everything they owned was held in common” (v. 32). Rather than the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, “there was not a needy person among them,” because they pooled their resources and distributed aid “to each as any had need” (vv. 34-35).

We are still part of this movement called the Way, one that takes our lives in a new direction. Jesus rescued us from sin and offered us new life by his resurrection. He saw our need, met our need, and changed our world. Now it is time for us to see a need, meet a need, and change someone else’s world. Like the Christians of Jerusalem, we do this best when we work together and practice Crowdsourced Christianity.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we praise You! Among all that we have, there are so many hurting and needy people. We lift them up to You and ask that You would bless them, help them, heal them. May Your peace fill their hearts and may joy shine! We ask that You intercede for them, fulfilling their needs according to Your will. We also pray that You would use us to help them in any way we can. Open our eyes and make us aware of the opportunities to bless others in need. Help us to not be selfish, help us to share. All that we have is Yours and we surrender to You. May Your will be done in Jesus’ name AMEN!

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**Crowdsourced Christianity**

Sunday, April 11, 2021 Acts 4:32-35

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

*Crowdsourcing* may be a new term for you; it was for me. Crowdsourcing is a way to obtain volunteers, information, or opinions from a large group of people who submit their data via the Internet, social media, and smartphone apps. Crowdsourcing is also a way to tackle large projects, using multiple participants to achieve a cumulative result.

The toymaker Lego relies on crowdsourcing to fuel creativity, as it develops new play sets for its signature building blocks. The “Lego Ideas” section on the company website invites customers to become “Fan Designers,” submitting their own ideas for new products. Website visitors are invited to vote on their favorite new designs. Ideas which garner over 10,000 positive votes are considered for production. Successful inventors are rewarded with a 1% share of profits from their creations. Kudos to Lego for crowdsourcing!

The “food rescue” movement is an example of crowdsourcing which has a deep impact on communities. Unspoiled food is “rescued” from grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, and hospitals because it cannot be used or sold (i.e., if it nears the “sell by” date). If the food is not rescued, it will be thrown away. With many people facing food insecurity, it only makes sense to rescue good food and get it into the hands and mouths of those who need it.

Prince William Food Rescue in Virginia rescues food and delivers it to churches, community centers, senior centers, mobile home parks, and schools. Volunteers are notified of available food through a mobile app called “Food Rescue Hero,” they pick up the food and deliver it where it is needed. “We have a great team,” says a food rescue leader. “Together we are changing the food insecurity landscape here in the Prince William region.” Prince William Food Rescue is successful in reducing reduced food waste and food insecurity, he says, “because of the tremendous people involved.”

The program is growing because donor locations, rescues, and downloads of the Food Rescue Hero app are increasing weekly. In just six months, the Prince William group delivered more than 200,000 pounds of food, which translates into over 100,000 meals. That is what happens when you mobilize a group of committed volunteers to rescue food. No one person is the hero; the success comes through crowdsourcing. “Technology is