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Baskets of Abundance

What are you hungry for? Listening to the hunger pangs of your heart, what stories are yearning to be told?

I didn't ask our homeowner we served this week but I can imagine what he might say. Dignity, a living wage, community, a home that is safe and dry.

Novelist Barbara Kingsolver says about Appalachia, the region we spent the past five days: "We have been treated like an internal colony of the US. Suffered the exploitation of extracted industries managed by and profited from outside companies who take what they can and leave a mess. Starting with timber all the way to the opioid epidemic. Deliberately perpetrated on us as a vulnerable population."

What do you crave for yourself/the world?

Friday night we sat in a circle at the community center being used as Appalachia Service Project home base. High schoolers, young adult leaders, and folks from three churches including ours reflected on their week in Appalachia. In as many words they shared about gifts they had received along the way. New self confidence, new experiences, relationships formed and strengthened, a new appreciation for the joy of loving and serving neighbors, stories heard and internalized, strangers turned witnesses to God's upside down welcome. You might say— we found bread that satisfies our hunger up in the mountains of coal country- southwestern Virginia. Like baskets of abundance brought to us.

When the disciples notice that the crowds have gotten hungry their instinct is to send them off to find some food for themselves. Jesus rejects this idea wrapped in a kind of "bootstrapping individualism."

How often do we advise the same not only for others but for ourselves? We place burdens squarely on our shoulders and those of our neighbors. The things that will fill us up, we tell ourselves- are either deep within us or within our grasp if we just hustle harder or if they work harder or straighten out their life.

We don't realize that we can never satiate ourselves and no person is immune from systems and structures of sin that place barriers all along life's road on the way to the proverbial grocery

store. There is always a price on bread sold by the world and leftovers are thrown away. It always seems beyond our grasp.

Jesus takes five loaves and two fish and feeds thousands. Women and children too. The miracle is that in the economy of the crucified and risen one there is no more earning or deserving and bootstrapping is finally put out of business. Forgiveness and mercy are multiplied times infinity. Enough to see the ridiculous lavishness with which he bestows forgiveness and unilateral acceptance on sinners. The reckless hospitality he performs. The bread is his own flesh broken for you. The only prerequisite is that we do not pay for it. The only cost is that we die to ourselves, the need to prove ourselves and save ourselves. We have died in those waters of promise and been raised to life again.

From there you have been brought to this table. Here a single piece of bread is multiplied until there is just enough for everyone. Christ is placed in your hands again and again,

At this feast you are forgiven and receive the fullness of Jesus Christ. Around this circle you are beloved. As this bread is shared we become what we eat. You are the body of Christ.

As the body of Christ our craving become transformed when we spend time in this circle of grace. Desires become attuned to the needs of our neighbors. We hunger for what is good for others both individually and communally. Shoulder to shoulder with one another our hunger pangs point to the voices of those we'd rather tune out. As this bread touches our lips in the presence of those in this assembly we cannot help but notice them and live in community with them. Their hunger becomes our own as we find ourselves by losing our lives.

As those who eat the bread of life what one priest calls a living Eucharist. You and me- taken, broken , blessed and given. We become bread for the world. Nourishment.

As this happens in the new economy Christ takes who we are, what we have, and all we have been given, especially our failures, struggles and multiplies them. They become like all the broken pieces that were left over but never wasted in God's economy.

When we are on the receiving end they become like surprising baskets of abundance. Those baskets are filled with just what we need from just what we have.

Who has given you a basket of abundance that filled you up? What was in it?

The Grace crew spent a week hanging soffit and fascia on a house, nailing up flashing, and putting up a gutter.

We were a group of eight with limited experience doing construction work. Yet we each used our gifts and all that we brought with us. Lefties, folks using their height to get stuff done, and so much more. We realized by the end of the week we had all that we needed. We exchanged baskets of abundance. More like tool belts with extra nails.

In Christ this question becomes permission to live our baptisms with eyes and hearts and hands wide open. We find joy in asking ourselves and each other- what are you hungry for and exploring the water washed answers seated at this feast.

Fed-- we feed others.

All we need is here. Sometimes it is a Waffle House along I-65, an adult willing to drive a bus over a thousand miles all together, a pencil, a hammer, or a group of faithful and inspiring teenagers. All bearing baskets of abundance. For me- it was honest and thoughtful conversations about faith initiated by those teenagers around the breakfast table that fed me. For Christ is here and made alive in all of it and us- back from the grave as bread enough for this whole starving world.