

Jesus, let Your voice only be heard, for your sheep know your voice. Amen.

"I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance."

What a statement of purpose. What a promise.

What a reality Jesus invites us to enter and dwell in.

It is hard to live in abundance when things feel stressed and scarce.

I am in a stressful season of my life, as I have brought my mother to live with me. Along with stress comes less opportunity to exercise and more difficulty sticking to a healthful diet. She eats a sandwich, so I eat a sandwich instead of a salad. I'm struggling to keep the carbs at bay.

Yet almost as soon as my mother moved in, something else began to happen: My friend Osmun Kivrak, whom many of us know as a conductor and violist, began to drop off freshly baked loaves of delicious Turkish bread at my house. He and his son have been combining driving lessons with visits to Captain John's, and every few weeks he texts and says he's in the area and dropping off a loaf. I have done nothing to earn this gift besides being a friend, but it comes anyway.

I am unable to resist this bread – I froze some of the first loaf, but the other two I have eaten pretty much by myself in two days. Bread with butter and honey is one of the best things in life. I indulge in it, and then I feel guilty because I'm not sticking to my diet. But then I realized something: That bread is a sacrament. It is a sign of grace and goodness and abundance, and whenever that bread is offered to me I should enjoy it fully, whole-heartedly, joyfully.

I wonder if that's how those early Christians felt as they saw their community coming alive in love. They lived in constant fear of arrest, persecution, martyrdom, and yet in this perhaps slightly idealized picture we get from the Book of Acts, they enjoyed such mutual love and mutual care.

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

There wasn't such a strong sense of yours or mine, as much as "ours."

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple,

they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...

Abundance, even in the midst of tremendous stress.

This portrayal of the first church is a picture of *koinonia*, a word I used recently. *Koinonia* describes a fellowship of mutuality and interdependence.

Mutual sharing and caring is a hallmark of *koinonia*, of Christian community.

It goes with abundance. There are different kinds of abundance –

there is personal abundance, inherited abundance, national abundance...

I live in abundance because I work and earn a good salary; because my family had the means to give me a great education; because the color of my skin and that education gives me access to resources and networks of privilege.

I have an abundance of food, clothing, money, technology, recreation.

But when I first went to seminary, I wasn't so flush, and didn't know how I'd pay for a Yale education. The rector of my church said he'd set up a fund and allow people to make donations through the church, and I sent out a letter.

I expected a few hundred, maybe a thousand... then I passed the first thousand and thought, "How generous." And it kept coming. Then I received \$5,000 from one person, and I thought, "This is crazy." And it kept coming. \$22,000 in all. That's *koinonia* in action – and it flowed from the fellowship we'd shared, much of which I had fostered over 22 years in that church.

Koinonia abundance is shared and sharing. It's not what the church has in the bank; it's what we have to share with each other and with the world.

It can co-exist with hardship. We experience it as we notice where needs are and meet them – *and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

Our Food Pantry and new Community Fridge are markers of our abundance.

Neal Bankenstein got in touch this week about a family at his school that needed help. I asked him to write up the experience:

This past week, a local family fell under harsh conditions due to a loss of utilities and income. This family has been struggling for years with elementary-age children living in substandard conditions without consistent resources. The family reached out to CCPS's Pupil Personnel Workers who were thankful to receive support from the new Community Fridge zero-barrier free food program at Christ Church, La Plata. The family was provided propane (from the Church) and a car full of food (from the Community Fridge & the Food Pantry) to last them through this difficult time. The support and love provided by Christ Church is greatly needed and appreciated to our families in need!"

Of course, the life of abundance isn't only about feeding and giving to the poor.

It's about sharing our deepest gift, inviting people into a living relationship with Jesus in which lives are changed, and they learn to hear the voice of the Shepherd for themselves. We are both sheep and shepherd, under the Good Shepherd. Ultimately, our flocks will thrive as we live into our role as shepherds, finding people in the pasture and helping create feasts. *... day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Safety, sustenance, life all flow from this relationship with the good shepherd, in and out of the fold. In the fold there is rest and security – the sheepfold is where we come together, to connect, recharge, share heartaches and celebrations – but the action is in the pasture, the world. *[They] will come in and go out and find pasture, that's what Jesus said.*

That's the rhythm of our life as followers of Jesus –

He brings us in, and then He leads us out, and after the day – or week – we come back in to be fed and refreshed, and then out we go again.

The food we need is out there. The food is in the green pastures to which God leads us; at the tables he sets for us in the presence of our enemies. That is our calling as sheep of Christ's fold, to make feasts in the pastures, and invite others to join us.

Maybe we're supposed to be baking bread and dropping it off for others – or whatever your version of doing that is.

What Jesus promised us was life, and abundant, overflowing life.

Not abundance of possessions, not abundance of time, not abundance of ease.

Abundance of life. Life is what we're here for, my friends.

Life is what we offer those who are only half-living.

More life, more engagement, more joy, more peace, more love.

More meaning, more purpose to your life.

That's what we offer in the name of Christ.

That is what Christ offers to us: life in abundance.

With butter and honey. *Amen.*

John 10:1-14

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. **The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. **He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. **I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.**”

Acts 2:42-47

Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.