Stuffed with Gratitude
by Matt Laney

All ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. - Matthew 14:20

Have you ever noticed that some of the Bible’s best moments happen around food: manna in the wilderness, Passover, the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Last Supper – also known as the Eucharist? When God shows up, people are fed, walls come down, hearts are opened, grace abounds.

“Eucharist” means “Thanksgiving.” We’ve been taught that the first Thanksgiving was between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag, but it happened long before that in an upper room in Jerusalem, and many times before that, dating all the way back to the first celebration of Passover. Thanksgiving, the Eucharist and Passover share a long, long trajectory of celebrating the abundance of God’s liberating grace.

For my grandparents, every meal was an opportunity for celebrating. They weren’t wealthy people but they liked to eat in style. The table was always set just as you might find in a five star hotel or restaurant. One time, I made the mistake of putting the milk jug directly on the breakfast table and my grandmother scooped it up in no time, poured some milk into a dainty pitcher and banished the offending jug to the refrigerator.

Thanksgiving dinner at their house was all that on steroids. See “Thanksgiving,” pg 8

The Friendship Factor

What is the friendship factor? Studies show that when people were asked why they came to church, a vast majority responded, “I began attending because someone invited me.”

Thanksgiving Sunday, November 23 is “Bring a Friend To Church Day!” We will be sending out an electronic invitation that you can forward, as well as have paper invitations that you can give to your friends, family members, neighbors, and co-workers. It will be a great day to join us in worship at 9:00 or 10:15am and a wonderful way to start the holiday season.

Rev. Matt Laney will be preaching, the all-church choir will lead us in song and praise, and the altar will be decorated with the bounty of the season.

What an incredible opportunity to share the worship experience, inspiration, and community of AHCC! Bring a friend - we’ll save them a seat!

Beautiful Thanksgiving Altar

Sunday, November 23

Thanks to the leadership of Alice & Duane Luster, support of the Worship & Arts Committee, and a gift from David & Alyce Hild, we all get to enjoy a beautiful Thanksgiving altar display. Alice, Duane and their team decorate the communion table, altar space and entrance to the church with food donated by Worship & Arts Committee members.

This seasonal display of abundance not only enhances our worship, but also goes out to serve our community as a gift to Loaves & Fishes Ministries where the fresh fruits and vegetables are used in that week’s meal preparations. Come and worship – and bring a friend!

Let’s Fill the Foodshare Truck

Sunday, November 23, before both worship services

This November, we will continue AHCC’s annual tradition of working to fill the Foodshare truck. Each year, AHCC helps Foodshare provide thousands (yes, thousands!) of our neighbors throughout the Greater Hartford area with a turkey and “fixings” for a warm Thanksgiving meal.

Please honor our tradition of giving freely and plan to bring your FROZEN turkeys, potatoes, canned veggies, stuffing, gravy mix, cranberry sauce, desserts, and any other non-perishables that might complete a Thanksgiving meal to church on November 23! Our Senior High Youth will be more than happy to unload it from your car and place it in the truck. Thank you for your support!
MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

SALT: Serving and Learning Together
Men’s Breakfast: Thankful Men of AHCC
Saturday, November 22, 8:30-10:30am, Youth Lounge

What kind of man does God want me to be and how can I be that man?

All men of the church are invited to be a part of this discussion – bring your questions AND your answers! Sign up at the Member Engagement table or online at ahcc.org.

Service of Healing and Remembrance
Monday, December 1, 7:00pm

Holidays can be so difficult after a loss. If you have had a loss in recent years and would find comfort in a quiet, prayerful service to honor loved ones who have passed on, please come to the Service of Healing and Remembrance. Led by AHCC Caring Ministers and Rev. Donna Manocchio, this service has helped many deal with the difficulties of being without a loved one during the holidays. The candlelight service is held in the intimate setting of the chapel.

In preparation for the service, you are invited to attend the Memorial Ornament decorating session on Sunday, November 23, anytime from 11:30am to 1:30pm. More information on page 9. Attending this session is not required to attend the service.

Poinsettia Deliverers Needed
Sunday, December 7, following the 10:15am service

Would you be able to spend a few moments to brighten the day of an AHCC member? We need deliverers to take the lovely poinsettias to our homebound members and families that have lost loved ones recently. We encourage families with children to help out as our homebound members really love to see children.

To sign up, please complete the form on the Member Engagement table in Drew Hall. Please be sure to include your address on the form to make the assignment process easier. Any questions, contact Joan Hopper at 860.216.9828 or jhopper@ahcc.org. This small task will bring you and the recipient great joy.

Who is My Neighbor?
When we know each other more, we hurt each other less
Sunday, December 7, 1:30pm: Registration; 2:00 – 4:30pm: Program

All are welcome for an afternoon of conversations with people from a variety of faith traditions to deepen interreligious understanding and build connections in the Greater Hartford community. Cosponsored by the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding, Asylum Hill Congregational Church, and Hartford Seminary, several workshops on important and timely topics are offered, including: “Let’s Talk About Prayer,” with Rev. Matt Laney as panelist and Marie Dalton-Meyer as moderator; and “Dealing with Difficult Texts” with Rev. Donna K. Manocchio as a panelist. Pick up a brochure near the Adult Education bulletin board and sign up on the church website. Contact Donna at dmanocchio@ahcc.org or 860.216.9821 for further information.

There’s the Appalachian Trail ... and then there’s the Twichell Trail
Bus Tour, May 4 – 9, 2015

Thousands of hikers have hiked the Appalachian Trail, but you can be among the first to follow the Civil War Trail of AHCC’s first pastor, the Rev. Joseph Twichell.

As part of AHCC’s 150th Anniversary Celebration, Peter Grandy and Steve Courtney will lead a trip following Twichell’s Trail of Civil War service. We’ll begin by working our way up the Virginia Peninsula, then turning north through Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Kettle Run, and ending in Gettysburg. Along the way, we’ll hear excerpts from Twichell’s Civil War letters, called “one of the most vivid of all Civil War eyewitnesses accounts.” Brochures and registration forms are available at the Member Engagement table in Drew Hall or on the church’s website, ahcc.org. Questions? Contact Peter Grandy at 860.233.0255.
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Bryan and Cindi Armstrong live in West Hartford with their two children Kyle and Brooke. Cindi works as a library media specialist at Avon Middle School and enjoys cooking and yoga. Bryan works in the building supply industry as a branch manager and enjoys skiing, scuba diving and flying radio-controlled airplanes.

Kristin Cianflone lives in West Hartford with her husband Jeff and her three children. She loves the outdoors, especially biking and hiking. She is also a music lover.

Nedia Minto lives in East Hartford with her husband Vladimir and her two children Hayden and Julian. She works as an LPN for the VNA. She enjoys reading, baking and playing “Words with Friends.”

Ted and Debbie Mosebach live in East Hartford. Debbie works as a library media specialist at Plainville High School. She enjoys reading, traveling and visiting with her children and grandchildren. Ted is a retired UCC pastor. He likes to grow fruit trees and berries, golf and reading. He also enjoys handyman projects.

David Moses live in New Britain. He is a data analyst for MetLife. In his spare time he loves to read novels, play bridge and golf. He also practices yoga and meditation.

Chris and Shannon Pankratz live in Vernon with their one year old daughter Catherine. Chris is the resident of Masters in Home Care. He enjoys cooking and travel. Shannon is a research scientist with a focus on cancer research and therapies. She enjoys yoga, Zumba and Pilates.

Jennifer and Christian Sager live in Hartford with their 8 month old son Theo. They both work for The Travelers. Christian is a Director of Strategy and Execution and Jennifer works in Communications and PR. Jen enjoys writing, running, and cooking. Christian likes UCONN athletics, traveling and rock and roll.

Trevor Shepard and Shauntice Marshall-Shepard live in Windsor with their two children Aria and Trevor Jr. Trevor works in computer graphics at Windsor Marketing and Shauntice is an integral part of the music ministry here at AHCC.

Erin and Frances Vincent are the parents of newborn daughter Sophia. Frances works in strategy and marketing for Cigna and enjoys sports, traveling and the beach. Erin is a physician’s assistant at St. Francis Hospital. They live in West Hartford.
ADULT EDUCATION

Step Up, Step Out (SUSO)

All are invited to the monthly events which include inspiring guest speakers. Learn more about and get involved in our efforts to reduce violence in our city.

- **Sunday, November 16, following worship**: We will host speakers from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence who will describe the RULER program for schools that helps school leaders, teachers, staff, students and their families to develop their emotional intelligence skills.

- **Thursday, December 11, 6:00 – 7:30pm**: Kingian Non-violence Refresher Classes, conducted by the CT Center for Nonviolence and co-sponsored by SUSO. Refresh your knowledge and find ways to apply Dr. Martin Luther King’s philosophy and methods to your lives and communities. Those who didn’t attend last fall’s training are welcome to attend to learn more about Kingian Nonviolence. Series continues 2nd Thursdays: February 12, March 12, April 9 and May 14 (no class in January).


*Wednesdays, November 19, 10:30am OR 7:00pm*

Christians understand Jesus in a variety of ways, and the sources of those understandings are from a variety of places: the Bible, the Christian tradition, and our own experience. The course, taught by AHCC clergy, explores some essential elements of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection as well as some essential questions about the One we claim to follow. Each session is offered twice – once in the morning and once in the evening. The material covered in this final session stands alone, so participation in the previous two sessions is not a prerequisite.

Grandtimers Goes to Ukraine

*Thursday, November 20, 10:00am*

Our November program is not to be missed, as AHCC member Janet Stulting will talk about what is really going on in Ukraine. Janet spent 2 years there and will offer a firsthand account of what the situation is now and a great deal about the daily lives of the people of Ukraine. As many of you know, Janet is an engaging and articulate presenter who interjects lots of humor to keep you smiling.

WOMEN’S SPIRITUALITY & FELLOWSHIP

The Gifts of Advent: A Short Retreat for Women

*Saturday, December 6, 11:00am – 2:00pm*

_O come, Desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind;_  
_bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;_  
_fill the whole world with heaven’s peace._  
_Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!_

The opening lines of one of the most well-known and beloved of our Advent hymns gives us a glimpse of one of the gifts we anticipate receiving upon Jesus’ birth: the gift of peace.

The season of preparation and expectation known as Advent offers other gifts as well. All women of the church are invited for a short retreat where we will discover what some of those gifts are. We will begin our time together with brunch, continue with fellowship and conversation, meditation and writing, singing Christmas carols and creative expression.

This short retreat is being sponsored and facilitated by the Women’s Spirituality and Fellowship committee. Please sign up for the retreat at the Member Engagement table in Drew Hall so we can plan for brunch, and please let us know if you will need child care. Sign language interpretation is available.

If you have any questions please contact Rev. Erica Thompson at ethompson@ahcc.org or 860.216.9825.

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Sign up for events at the Member Engagement Table unless otherwise specified.
MUSIC AND ARTS

Seventh Annual “Brown Bag-It” Concert to feature
Organ and Chamber Choir
Sunday, November 16, 12:00 noon in the Sanctuary | Free Concert

Since 2008, AHCC organist Dan Campolieta has led an annual lunch-time organ and chamber music recital combining an intimate atmosphere with sublime music and a lecture component. This year’s presentation of the “Brown Bag-It” series will take on a different character from previous years. Featuring the music of Francois Couperin and other liturgical music, this concert will be reconstructing all the music of a Catholic Mass, in the same manner it might have been performed in the late 1600s in Paris.

In addition to transcribing scores from primary sources, Dan spent the summer reading books and scholarly articles about the music, and took organ lessons with early keyboard music expert James David Christie of Boston. A small group of singers from the church choir will join Dan for this concert. It will be an opportunity to experience a rarely heard piece of organ music in its true liturgical context.

“I personally enjoy digging deep and researching the music I play,” said Dan. “My hope with this concert is that by performing the music in a historically accurate manner, it will transport the congregation to a place closer to God, as the music was intended to do centuries ago.”

Snack bags ($3) will be available in Drew Hall before the concert. The concert will start at 12:00 noon with a brief lecture, and will last just over an hour.

All-Church Choir and Orchestra in Worship on Thanksgiving Sunday
November 23, 9:00 and 10:15 a.m. worship

Nearly 100 singers and 40 instrumentalists from the our congregation will be offering up a gift of music on Thanksgiving Sunday. The great song of faith, “Majesty,” has been re-conceived and orchestrated by Dan Campolieta and Steve Mitchell to include a large number of the church’s musicians. The chancel will be overflowing with singers, from children to seniors and instrumentalists from middle schoolers to Hartford Symphony members, from guitars to handbells. Realizing that every time we raise our voices together we give our praise to God, this will be an opportunity for everyone present – that means the congregation as well! – to feel to see and feel the Holy Spirit at work in our beautiful sanctuary. This will be the first time such a large assemblage is gathered, but don’t worry if you aren’t singing or playing this time – there will be more of this to come in future months!

Boar’s Head News

Boar’s Head Festival Video online at ahcc.org

Thanks to the work of church member Kathryn Swanson, there is a wonderful promotional video about our annual Boar’s Head & Yule Log Festival. You may already know Kate from AHCC’s Sanctuary Choir, her direction of the Cherub Choir, or her direction of the Christmas Pageant. We are thankful for all that Kate and her family do within and for the life of our church and express our gratitude for this additional gift of time and talent.

Watch the video at ahcc.org/music-arts/boars-head-and-yule-log-festival, and then share it with your friends and family to spread the word about the festival and purchasing tickets!

Tickets are on sale

Boar’s Head tickets on sale at church following Sunday worship services, weekdays by calling 860.278.0785, or any time by logging on to ahcc.org (on or after November 17). The dates for the 2015 festival are January 9, 10 & 11. Tickets (all reserved seating) are $15 – 22.

Reception Cookies

Ladies and gentlemen – start your ovens! Homemade cookies for the Boar’s Head reception are a treasured tradition that only YOU can preserve. Please make an extra batch (or three!) when you do your holiday baking. Bring your cookies to church and we’ll freeze them.

Gluten Free and Nut Free Options

Because AHCC strives to be inclusive and welcoming to all our members and friends, we are hoping to include both gluten free and nut free options to our reception offerings this year. Last year we offered these options and they were gratefully received by attendees, so we are hoping to expand our offerings this year. If you are able to make any gluten free and/or nut free treats for the Boar’s Head reception, please label them and bring them in. Thank you!
**STEWARDSHIP**

**Letting Go of Fear**

by John Bourdeaux

In stories about giving, I often hear about the end of a process: a name on a wall, a testimony about tithing, or front page stories about big money gifts. I rarely hear the beginning of that journey. Here is mine.

I was not trained to give money in my family. We were sporadic churchgoers, so the offering plate was not a part of my life. While some in my family were quite generous, it was not something we talked about. As I embarked on a career, I found that I loved working in philanthropy and helping others give. But I had a secret – I really didn’t know how to give myself. I didn’t have a plan. And here’s why:

I was scared.

I was afraid that I wouldn’t have enough. I was scared that my gift wouldn’t mean anything. I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to fulfill my commitment.

For a long time, fear kept me from making pledges to church and other organizations I loved. It allowed me to push giving down in my budget, after the rent, food, clothes, utilities, restaurants, toys, vacations ... almost everything.

My attitude about giving changed slowly. I did not have an epiphany. I got started by making a small pledge to my church and my schools. I was able to fulfill it. I didn’t run out of money. I found that my gift was meaningful. I started doing a little bit more.

By the time we joined AHCC, though, I found that I was still holding on to some fear. I felt that I wanted to become a tither, but I was scared – some of those same old fears. It took some education to do it, but it wasn’t more information that I needed – I had to let go of that last vestige of fear. And faith that God would care for me was the only antidote to that fear.

Letting go of these fears around finances and becoming a more generous giver, has taught me how to utilize the power of faith in other parts of my life. A life free of fear because of giving? You better believe it. And I get a “bonus” – knowing that my family’s gifts to the church are doing great work – God’s work – right here, right now.

**Stained Glass Window Restoration Continues**

During the week of November 10, the “Paul” stained glass window was removed from the sanctuary to be repaired by Bovard Studios.

The repair is made possible through a generous donation from Jack and Sali Riege.

“Jack and I were so thrilled when Doug Russell and family restored the “Mary” window,” commented Sali. “Obviously, Bovard Studios has demonstrated their expertise in restoring historic stain glass windows with great skill.”

After seeing the wonderful restoration, the Riege’s began to consider selecting a window to repair the deterioration that has occurred with time. After meeting with Rev. Laney to determine which window might be appropriate to refurbish, it was not difficult for them to select the Paul window. “We have been so impressed with Paul’s life’s work after his conversion. He was a man with a mission which required unlimited energy and determination. We have read about Paul’s journey, how he swept through the Mediterranean spreading the message and reinforcing it with innumerable letters, i.e. Corinthians, Ephesians, etc., serving as Christ’s messenger,” Sali continued.

“We look upon this restoration as a great privilege and we are most grateful that this opportunity has become available to us at this time. We are able to repair the window and also support the Grandy Preservation Fund, which supports a number of vitally needed repairs to our aging sanctuary.”

**Still Counting ... And Counting On You!**

**Every Member Committed (EMC) Campaign**

The pledges are still coming in for AHCC’s six month Every Member Committed campaign – our bridge to support our church from January to June 2015, on our way to a new fiscal year, starting July 1, 2015. As of November 5th, we have received pledges from 472 households totaling $523,443.05. This is 45% of our households and 71% of our financial goal. We have also received commitments of $35,444 to rebuild our reserve fund that was depleted when we replaced our boiler this fall. We are asking for your pledge now (as opposed to a gift later in the plate) so that we may plan a prudent budget.

To all those who have already pledged, our deepest thanks and welcome aboard – we are so grateful you are part of what makes this church the community of faith that supports us all.

If you have not yet made your 6 month pledge, we are still counting – and hope to count you. (Remember, this is called EVERY Member Committed campaign!) You can pick up a pledge card at the church, pledge online at www.ahcc.org, use the QR code below, send an email to dholden@ahcc.org, or mail a hand written note to 814 Asylum Ave, Hartford, CT, 06105, attn: Deb Holden, Program Assistant.

In faith and gratitude,
Your Stewardship Committee
Scott Crespi and Nicole Miller
EMC co-chairs

Use your smart phone to scan this code that takes you right to AHCC’s pledge page
OUTREACH & VOLUNTEERING

Be An Angel This Christmas Season by Giving a Gift to a Child in Need

For many years, members and friends of AHCC become angels during the holiday season by purchasing a gift for children and youth in our community and in the city of Hartford, and you are invited to do so again this year! Beginning on Sunday, November 30, the first Sunday of Advent, the Angel Tree will be up and decorated in Drew Hall. Select one or more ornaments with information about the recipient and their gift wish. Purchase the appropriate gift(s), and place them back under the tree no later than December 14. Please remember to wrap your gift and safely secure the ornament onto the package, so the gift can be matched to the correct recipient. When you become an angel this season, others will truly find joy, hope, and blessings!

The angel tree project is a partnership between the AHCC Outreach Committee and the following organizations. Please contact Donna if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

- **ConnectiKids, Inc.** is an independent, non-profit youth development agency which began in 1978, when volunteers from AHCC and neighborhood corporations came together to provide after school tutoring for students at West Middle School. The mission of ConnectiKids is to connect Hartford children and youth to their potential by building relationships and providing educational opportunities.

- **Asylum Hill Learning Zone/Baby Academy** offers a free ten-week parenting education class for pregnant women and fathers in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. The program is offered twice a year in fall and spring at the church. Topics include child safety, nutrition, health and immunizations, and childbirth education. Breakfast, lunch, and childcare are provided during classes.

- **Asylum Hill Family Center (AHFC)** strives to improve the school readiness and success of Asylum Hill’s young children from birth to eight years old. AHFC believes that 1) parents are a child’s first and most influential nurturer, teacher, and advocate; 2) strong supportive families are the key to healthy and successful young children; and 3) families need access to information and supportive services.

- **Hartford Juvenile Detention Center** provides a continuum of services for children and youth pending court hearings, judicial dispositions of cases, hospitalization, or while awaiting placement with a new family. These children are unable to be home for the holidays. The goal of this program is to make the best of an unfortunate situation by showing love, care, and providing gifts so the kids can enjoy the holidays.

- **Youth Challenge of Connecticut** has been operating as a residential outreach center since 1970, for women and men recovering from drug addiction. The program emphasizes personal and social development in a sharing and caring environment. The healing process begins with a unique combination of acceptance, discipline, and structure. Youth Challenge offers an atmosphere of growth through biblical counseling and work-study.

- **Village for Families & Children/Friends of the Family** is a resource and referral program for pregnant and parenting youth aged 21 and younger. The purpose of the program is to provide helpful and practical assistance to youth who have primary parental responsibility for their children. Friends of the Family staff and volunteers provide access to day care, housing, job placement information and other services.

- **Covenant to Care for Children** is a nonprofit agency with a 25 year history of working with AHCC and other faith communities to meet the needs of abused, neglected and impoverished children and teens in Hartford and surrounding communities. A statewide network of volunteers, donors, and businesses assist to foster nurturing, caring environments, and relationships for children and youth, by providing them with basic material needs and mentoring relationships.

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**Construction Volunteers**

- **Thursday, Friday or Saturday, 54 Huntington Street, Hartford**

All experience levels welcome to work on carpentry, hanging sheetrock, painting, and finish work under the supervision of crew leaders with years of experience. In addition, volunteers will be needed as hosts in the mornings and as cooks to prepare lunches for the construction volunteers.

No prior construction experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn and to have a heart for the city. If you would like to volunteer for construction, hosting, or meal preparation, please contact Rich Grobe at 860.306.5394 or rrgrobe@aol.com.
Coming Soon: Children’s Christmas Store

Sunday, December 7, Twichell Room

For over thirty years, AHCC’s Children’s Christmas Store has given the church’s youngest members a unique opportunity to experience the joys of giving in a non-commercial and God-centered environment. Children and Family Ministries Committee members and volunteers assemble an inventory of modestly priced gifts (ranging from $0.50-$5.00), wrap the gifts, and transform the Twichell Room into a very special, kids only “Christmas Store.” Children will be shopping for their loved ones on Sunday, December 7. Adult volunteers are needed to assist with setting up the store on the morning of Saturday, December 6 and working in the store on Sunday. Please contact Marcie Jackson, mjackson@ahcc.org to volunteer.

Spirit Hill Children’s Collection

In October of last year our children in Spirit Hill began making contributions at Sunday morning worship in an effort to contribute to both AHCC and a charitable organization. For the inaugural year, the Children and Family Ministries Committee (CFMC) chose UNICEF as the charitable beneficiary. We are very proud to announce that our children of Spirit Hill raised over $500.00 in their first year. This will be divided equally between UNICEF and AHCC. For the upcoming year, the Committee has chosen the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center as the beneficiary. We hope that this will be an inspiration for the children to contribute with donations and volunteer activities benefiting both the Connecticut Children’s Medical Center and here at AHCC.

-David Lemkey, CFMC Chair

Important Dates

November 30
Children in worship with their families
No Spirit Hill Classes (Grades K-5)
Advent Wreath Making & Potluck Dinner, 5:00pm

December 7
Spirit Hill Christmas Store

December 14
Annual Christmas Pageant (10:15am)

December 24
Christmas Eve Family Service (4:30pm)

December 28
No Spirit Hill classes

“Thanksgiving,” cont. from pg. 1

I think for my grandparents the formality of meals was not only a reflection of who they were, it was also a statement of protest, an act of resistance, in a world increasingly too busy and distracted to sit down at the table and enjoy a meal. Mealtime was about something more than the consumption of food and elimination of hunger pangs.

Although I didn’t always appreciate all of this bounty and formality at the time, the lavish meals were a gift of love, was provided for me as a gift of grace. More often than not, I didn’t do a darn thing to pitch-in and make it happen.

Something similar is going on with the story of the feeding of the five thousand from one little gift given in faith. People often find this story incredible, not in the sense of amazing, but lacking credibility, difficult to believe. Five loaves, two fish, five thousand people? It just doesn’t add up.

I get it. Part of me prefers to sidestep the mysterious metrics of this story by turning it into a lesson about sharing. Here’s “what really happened” (or so we tell ourselves): When Jesus gave a small bit of food to such a big crowd it triggered a chain reaction of generosity, inspiring everyone to share whatever food they had with them. After all, we know some of those folks were moms. And moms always pack snacks. Case closed.

We like this explanation not only because it is as warm and familiar as a church potluck, but also because we shudder at the idea of receiving such overflowing hospitality with nothing to contribute of our own. We’ve been taught to earn our keep, pay our way, and not show up for a dinner party empty handed.

Sure, great things can happen when we combine, instead of hoard, our resources. But for me, this story is about something else. It’s about a God who gives to us what we cannot give to ourselves or even to one another: unlimited grace.

The power of the story of the Feeding of the Five Thousand isn’t that with God there was just enough food to keep everyone going until they got home. It’s that there was enough for everyone to have a decent meal and still have mounds of food left over! In this season of generosity and stewardship we’re called to remember God’s limitless grace and our generous response of gratitude.

As far as we know, there were no doggie bags. No hoarding the manna from heaven for the next day- they were too stuffed to even think about it. There was just a hoard of changed hearts, overwhelmed with grace, ready to give and serve, as much as they had received, ready to exchange their bib for an apron and keep the feast rolling. That’s why we have a church today.

Now it’s our turn.

If you haven’t yet made your pledge for the first six months of 2015, I urge you to support the church which is supporting you and serving up good news at every opportunity. Your pledge, offered with the faith of that child who offered up his lunch in faith to Jesus, will touch and change thousands of lives.

With gratitude to you and to God,
Matt
Tear Open the Heavens: Advent Devotional 2014
for sale ($5) in the front office November 16 – 30

The Stillspeaking Writers’ Group Advent Devotional is 40 pages of unique devotionals that encourage you to cry out for deliverance and celebrate the answer to that cry. God did tear open the heavens and come down, but not in the way anyone predicted: in vulnerable flesh to love, heal, and suffer with us as one of us. 

*Tear Open the Heavens* begins November 30 and can be used each day of Advent in individual or group settings.

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GOD IS STILL SPEAKING

A Wicked Good Sunday
by AHCC member, Brian Gaidry

*What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* - Micah 6:8

Sunday, November 9 was, as always, an excellent service. But more than that, there was a certain synchronicity to the message — to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God — that continued to speak to me long after the benediction, and I want to share my reflections. Consider it my confirmation class homework, about 30 years overdue.

After church service, my family attended a performance of *Wicked* at the Bushnell, which deals with these exact themes. *Wicked* takes the audience behind the curtain of unquestionable authority (the wizard), beyond society’s simple notions of good and evil (Galinda and Elphaba), to first consider and then DO what is just, which often pits us against that which is considered legal or good by society.

If doing justice is the outer journey of the main character, Elphaba, loving kindness is her inner journey. As the two main characters, who start off as fierce adversaries, become the best of friends discover, even “accidental” acts of kindness can lead us to a fiercely loyal love for one another, as God loves us, and asks us to love one another. And though there is no overt mention of God anywhere in the musical, there is a thread woven through the entire fabric of the musical that asks us to seek and nurture that which is uniquely divine in each of us, not for fame, fortune or power, but so we might give our divine gifts, humbly, as the divine presents/presence of God. Even as Elphaba is scorned by the people of Oz as wicked, she takes it as an opportunity to learn humility, and be satisfied with doing justice and loving kindness, even for a world that cannot see her goodness for their prejudices and fears.

It is a lesson for all of us, brought home in many ways — we only need to be open to hearing it.

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CIRCLES OF CARE

Memorial Ornament Decorating

**Sun, November 23, 11:30am - 1:30pm**

*All materials provided*

All who have lost a loved one and wish to commemorate the loss with a handmade memorial ornament to be placed on AHCC’s Tree of Remembrance are invited to participate.

The holidays can be an especially difficult time to deal with a loss – whether it’s the loss of a family member, a pet, a friend, or an estranged relationship. Creating an ornament can be a therapeutic activity and you will feel blessed by the presence of others creating ornaments as well. Some people choose to bring small pictures to be used as decoration.

This is a very meaningful activity for children as well as adults.

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Time to Order Poinsettias

Believe it or not, the season of Advent is fast approaching, and it’s time to think about the festive poinsettias that grace our sanctuary on the second Sunday of Advent (this year December 7).

Those who wish to donate a poinsettia in honor or memory of a loved one may do so by filling out the form below and sending it to the church along with a check made out to AHCC – Poinsettias for $13.00 per poinsettia. There is also a box on the Member Engagement table where you can deposit your information and check. The deadline for donations is Sunday, November 30.

I/We would like to contribute a poinsettia (please print)

Donor(s)_________________________________________

In honor/memory of ________________________________

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