

Beauty from ashes. I grew up surrounded by ash. Whether it's the mountains of coal-ash piles of Mingo county that once employed 3 generations of my family. Or the ashes of my home, engulfed from opioid-related arson. Or the ashes of my father's church in Wayne county, an attempt by others to cease the serving of the poor.

My family's generational legacy has been written in ash, loss and abject poverty. An Appalachian tale that many others can relate with. I felt powerless. But the more worldly things that I relied on and lost, the more I had nothing else to rely on but God. This was difficult for me to see at the time, but it was a season of liberation through loss. I have never gained more than when I have lost so much.

I find restoration in God when surrounded by dilapidation, I find a home in the Holy Ghost, I find my church in the eyes of those in need of his love in my outreach.

I would not have chosen to give up these barriers between me and God willingly. A land. A home. A church. These things had to be allowed to be removed from me in order for me to be closer to God and his people. In losing land and labor to coal, I have been forced to find new opportunities in solar, reclamation, and sustainability. In losing my home, I have travelled to places that have taught me new innovative ideas and strategies for Appalachia. In losing my church, I have found the walls of my sanctuary now reach into and beyond every holler, hill, and heart in Appalachia. Where this comes alive for me in scripture is Isaiah 61.

61 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to ^{1a}heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;
² To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
³ To ^{1b}console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."

⁴ And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
They shall raise up the former desolations,
And they shall repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations.

Thank YOU, for supporting our work to bring these scriptures to life in the ashes of Appalachia.