

There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish: but what are they among so many?
John 6:9

Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the need of people in our community, across the country, and around the world? Those needs are thrust upon us daily in news bulletins by every media and by our own observation's. If we have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to feel, we must have reached this stage more than once, and sometimes we are overwhelmed.

There are physical needs, medical needs, needs for food, clothing and shelter. In TV ads we see little children, the anguish and tears of their helpless parents, the masses of hopeless refugees and asylum seekers. In spite of all the efforts made by governments, churches, fundraisers and generous entrepreneurs, all past efforts to meet these agonizing needs have not fixed the problems which now seem to be getting worse. We get regular reports of the situation in the inner cities, the remote reservations, refugee camps, fellow human beings living in war torn remains of communities in many places around the world. As you watch the myriads of needy people, especially women and children and think about their plight, our sanity is threatened.

There are spiritual needs, less obvious but startling real. Behind crime, violence, corruption, alcoholism and drugs, there are spiritual needs. Millions have never heard or accepted the Gospel. Many have rejected the Saviour.

We can focus on this right here in our community. However many attend worship services, we know there are several thousands who never do and probably never will, or intentionally do not intend to. There are hundreds if not thousands of people who call themselves Christians but are not practicing their faith. Leisure time has a higher priority for many. Participation in children's planned sports is more important than fulfilling Baptism Vows to nurture children in the faith. We represent a tiny island of faith in a vast sea of unbelief. It is all so overwhelming, so beyond our power to grasp and so paralyzing.

Feeling this way myself, I have been reading and rereading the miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude. All four Gospels record it. It tells about Jesus and His disciples confronted by a mass of human need. Philip like us was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task and gave up. *Two hundred Denarii would not buy enough bread for each of these to get a little.* [A Denarii was a Roman coin of the smallest value, like a penny which was often used to value the measure of a cup of grain or the wages of a lowly workman]. Andrew was more helpful: *There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.* He too was overwhelmed and struck by the sheer absurdity of the suggestion: *But what are they among so many?* What is the use? All our trying will end in futility. *Send them away!* It is easy for us to sympathize with Philip and Andrew as we confront the needs we see and are aware of, in our community, across our country and around the world. Think about this for a moment. What in fact is our response to this overwhelming need?

There are many who ignore this need. There are others who thank God, and involve themselves in these over-whelming needs in costly commitment. They themselves are often over-whelmed, but they refuse to be intimidated and be inactive. They cannot by themselves do everything, but they know they can do something. So, they offer what they have, five barley loaves and two little fish, and give themselves to share the loving concern of Jesus Christ.

I assume that this is where we are in this congregation today. The needs around us are numerous. The mountain seems so steep. The needs seem to pile up, coming one after another and another. There seems to be no end to the people and situations in most unfortunate circumstances. As committed Christians, we will not let what we cannot do interfere with what we can do. We will give what we have and in this spirit, confront the tasks as we are able, as we choose to confront our mission projects.

Hear the words of William Temple: *The need of the world is not too great for our resources if it is the Lord who directs the use of the resources available at our hand.*

We must remember: *He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*

*Thou, O Christ are all I want.
More than all in thee I find.*

The needs if people are over-whelming, but we do not need to be overwhelmed. Given a sense of historical perspective, institutional solidarity, partial responsibility and spiritual power, we can contribute to the working of miracles. John Wesley used to preach: *The best of all is, Christ is with us.*

But He does want those five loaves and two fish – both yours and mine.

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him? Give Him my heart!*

Amen.