

Inspired

John 6: 1–15

by Rev. Joel Sherbino

Leaders' notes: There will be comments and suggestions embedded into the sermon. You will find these in italics.

Good morning! Would it be correct to assume we've all felt overwhelmed? I am sure you have all found yourself in a situation where you initially felt it was just too much. Sometimes the entire world situation feels like too much. *(List some concrete examples of what is happening in the world or in your community)*. I know at times there are situations that seem far beyond my reach. I am left wondering, 'what can I possibly do?' Well, let me give you an example.

(Here is a great place to share your own story. Share a time when you were overwhelmed but because you persevered you saw a difference being made. It would be even better, if you can tie it into a ministry of your church or one supported by the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) or the Atlantic Mission Society (AMS). If you prefer you can share this story from Rebecca Sherbino.)

Rebecca Sherbino has worked with International Ministries for four years in Malawi. She is now the co-founder and co-director of the Raw Soup Social Enterprise. Listen as she tells part of her story.

"I can remember moving back to Canada. At the time we had three young kids and I was a bit at odds of where to invest my time. I wanted to make an impact, and had the time, since I was not in the workforce. I began to look for new ways to get involved in the community and the church.

I had been concerned about a young girl at our church. She had graduated from high school and lived with two parents living on the Ontario Disability Support Program. She seemed to be heading in the same direction as her parents because of some developmental disabilities and a lack of support. I figured I could get involved by helping her find work. For the next year, I drove her twice a week to a job training program and supported her as she tried to gain employment. After a year of hard work and kilometres on my car...no job was found.

Amanda was unable to find work. Because of her developmental disabilities she is unable to work at the speed required for most jobs and struggles with multitasking in a fast-paced environment. This was very frustrating because Amanda really wanted to work and was a loyal and committed person heading quickly in a bad direction.

But what could I do? I had tried and it didn't work out. Then, one night, my friend and I started to talk about this situation and brainstorm ideas for how we could find a viable solution. After many more conversations we had an idea. We approached our congregation at Paris Presbyterian Church to see if they would support a ministry initiative to create employment for people with disabilities. The concept was for people, just like Amanda, who wanted to work but were unable to find a work environment to fit their needs. The vehicle for providing jobs was to employ people to cook gourmet soup that would be sold in the community. “

Fast forward two years later and the Raw Carrot is thriving! With seven part-time employees, their not-for-profit enterprise is making a big difference in the lives of the staff. And if asked, Rebecca would say the trigger point was being overwhelmed. She wondered, “what could I possibly do?” Rebecca then stepped out in faith and tried something.

In the story of the feeding the five thousand we see the makings of one of the great realities of following Jesus. Jesus does not only get our attention in moments when we feel overwhelmed, but He uses that feeling as a catalyst for inspiration.

Let us turn back to the passage that was just read and begin to look for some clues that will show us how we can partner with Jesus to make a difference.

Jesus had been busy healing a variety of people. Now he and his disciples were looking for a little R and R. The crowds, however, had other ideas. They tracked him down. Imagine...thousands of people coming towards you. We often think of this as the feeding of the 5000, but that is not fully correct. Only the men were counted in the 5000—there were women and children present as well (Matthew 14:21). So imagine say 15 to 20 000 people coming toward you!

And what does Jesus do? He turns and says to Philip, “where are we to buy bread for these people to

eat?” Can you imagine if you were Philip? I would be freaking out. I would be thinking, ”Why are you asking me? Go ask Peter. He often has an answer.” In Philip’s response, we see that he felt the situation was beyond him. There was no real tangible solution. Philip is overwhelmed. He doesn’t want to say no, so what does he do? The same thing I often do when I am overwhelmed, he makes excuses.

Do you ever do that? You see a circumstance or a situation and immediately your mind races into how there is no way you could have an impact. This is pretty much what Philip did when he replies to Jesus, “Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” Translation—there is no way, it can’t be done.

But the story doesn’t end there, does it? No, Andrew managed to find a boy with a small lunch. Like an equivalent to a modern day Happy Meal, a fillet-o-fish. He sort of reluctantly gives it to Jesus. And I can understand why. I mean Philip just crunched the numbers. It would take six months of a person’s wages to feed everyone. Think about that for a second. And here is Andrew offering a boys lunch! I wonder if he sort of said this under his breathes, “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. BUT WHAT ARE THEY AMONG SO MANY PEOPLE?” I can’t believe it was offered with much confidence.

I love the honesty of this story. Can’t you see yourself there? At times we act like Philip. We are overwhelmed by the circumstances so instead of doing anything we make excuses. Maybe thinking that Jesus will sort it? Where as other times we may be like Andrew. We have a little to give, but we are not so sure that it will make a difference. The attempt is too small.

Well, Jesus takes the Happy Meal. He blesses it. He gives it out (we all know where this is going). Not only does everyone eat, but there are leftovers!

So where does this leave us. What is our take away? For me, the game changer is in verse 6. John, the one who recorded this miracle, must have had a follow-up conversation with Jesus afterwards. And I am curious as to what would have been said. I wonder if it may have gone like this: ”Jesus, that was incredible. All those people ate, and all you had to start with was a boy’s lunch. Amazing. But Jesus

tell me, seriously, what was up with the conversation with Philip?” And it would have been here that Jesus let him in on a little secret. “John, I already had in mind what I was going to do.”

If you go back and see the details, you begin to realize that Jesus had already tipped his hand when he asked Philip, ‘where are WE to buy bread’. Philip, was not being asked to do this on his own.

When Jesus told John he already had a plan, it was as much for our benefit as it was for John’s. Sometimes we need help to shift our perspective into a different light. When we find ourselves in situations that seem beyond what we can do, we should pause and think about this story. Perhaps Jesus’ request is an invitation for us to join Him. Jesus is leaning in to see if we will join him as he brings about the full transformation.

The way I see it is that when we feel overwhelmed, we can either respond like Philip, with excuses, or like Andrew, and start looking for solutions.

This one miracle is yet another example of how much Jesus values partnership. A truth we see throughout the Bible. Could Jesus have fed these people on his own. Absolutely. But he chooses to seek others to join him. I believe that Jesus asked Philip—not to put him on the spot—but to see if he would join him to make a difference.

And you know what? Jesus has not changed his ways. He desires to work with you and me to bring about change in this world. Will you join with Jesus to make a difference?

What this miracle reminds us of, is how changes often happen in the midst of the challenges. When we begin to see the possibilities in the challenges we face we can become INSPIRED. Let me share a few others examples of inspired work in our church, WMS, AMS and our denomination (*phrase this based on what examples you will share.*).

(Pick two of the following options to illustrate how change can occur in the midst of challenges. To illustrate how change can happen when we may be overwhelmed with a situation, by a task, or uncertainty.)

a) Together We Can! Guatemala project:

We see all the challenges that are faced in the world. The lack of food, clean water and basic medication are only a few obstacles men, women and children face daily. We can throw up our hands and wonder what we could possibly do or we can step in. See the ways that we can make a difference.

In Guatemala, indigenous Maya-Mam people living in the western highlands of the country have a rich culture, yet face discrimination and deep-rooted poverty borne out of decades of civil war. A lack of economic opportunities and environmental concerns such as climate change, encroaching mining operations and deforestation make it difficult for families to break cycles of poverty.

In this area, food insecurity is a daily concern because 95% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day and over 75% of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Fortunately, we have the ability to change the lives of these families. The WMS is encouraging Presbyterians to support PWS&D's food security project in Guatemala through the Society.

This Together We Can! project will enable families in Guatemala to eat more and better food by improving agricultural practices, that will help the soil to produce more abundantly. Growing a variety of crops—including fruits, vegetable and protein-rich beans—and learning how to cook them, will have a healthy nutritional impact on families.

Indigenous women in Guatemala are also learning about land rights, empowerment and cultural identity to provide hope and opportunity for their future.

The WMS, PWS&D and congregations have not made excuses, but have worked to help the Maya-Mam people living in the western highlands of Guatemala.

b) Raw Carrot Soup Enterprise:

Back to Rebecca and the Raw Carrot Soup Enterprise, they are doing great work in helping change people's lives, as their tag line says, 'one bowl of soup at a time.' Did you know that the WMS had a part to play? Very early on, the Raw Carrot reached out for some help and the WMS

graciously made a donation to help them get off the ground and running. So on behalf of the Raw Carrot...Thank you!) *(If your church has video projection capability please show the video of Amanda)* Here is a brief clip of Amanda and the impact the Raw Carrot has had on her. (www.facebook.com/therawcarrot/videos/)

c) Together We Can! ARISE Ministry project:

In Canada, we see many challenges too. Our Aboriginal population is misrepresented in our legal system. Our women are still not proportionally represented in executive positions. We have children that go to school hungry many days a week. Feeling overwhelmed is certainly justified.

In response to an overwhelming need in Toronto for a program that intentionally supports the city's sex workers, ARISE Ministry was created. Women involved in the sex-trade are one of the city's most marginalized and victimized populations.

Talk about overwhelming...listen to some of the statistics. Women and girls together account for 75% of all trafficking victims detected globally according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Plus, according to the UN, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation accounts for 58% of all trafficking cases detected globally. So what about Canada? Studies on human trafficking conclude that the majority of people trafficked within Canada are Aboriginal women and children.

Those involved in the sex-trade, some having been "turned out" into prostitution at 13-years-old or younger, have been devalued through coercion, exploitation, abuse, isolation and prejudice. It is the hope of this program to empower these individuals through relationship and goal setting that they might be able to advocate and reclaim for themselves and their lives.

Through this Together We Can! project and other support, ARISE Ministry provides case management for up to five women per month, provides weekly street outreach, and builds relationships with organizations that serve at-risk children and youth with the hope of preventing involvement in the sex-trade.

Good can come out of challenges if we focus our overwhelming feeling into some type of action.

d) Work of your WMS/AMS or Church locally (here you can highlight work being done by your WMS/AMS or Church)

So what about us? Will we allow Jesus to use our lives as we partner with Him. Consider these next steps.

Step 1. What is personally going on in your life? Are there situations around you that seem to be a bit too much for you to bear? Do you wonder if there is anything you can do? Is God bringing something, or someone, to your attention? Remember Andrew. See what you have. Start there. Starting is way better than making excuses. And never forget, Jesus values partnership ‘and no gift is insignificant when placed in the hands of Jesus.’

Step 2. Look at the church. Sure we see the challenges ahead. We are shrinking in numbers or we are getting older. What about our church? *(Include examples of the challenges your congregation is facing. By making the examples more specific and personal, you will better relate to the congregation.)*
All these obstacles may be true, and if we are real honest, the temptation is to make excuses.

Try taking a different approach and believe that Jesus wants to partner with us. Incredible things happen when we stop making excuses and begin looking for solutions. Remember the Raw Carrot and their goal ‘to change the world, one bowl of soup at a time.’ *(If you are not using the Raw Carrot Soup Enterprise as an example, change the previous sentence to fit.)*

As it has been mentioned to the kids earlier, examining our personal life and our church will require courage. It will mean being stretched. Jesus came into this world, died for our sake and then rose again, not so that we will be comfortable, but so that we will live the abundant life. And for me, that takes courage as we live by faith.

So what can you do? Better yet, what can we do? *(If there is an initiative your congregation has already started, here would be a good place to invite others to join. If there is no new initiative, perhaps considering a time to meet to discuss further what next step your congregation can take. Either way this is where you have a chance to get people to get involved. Don't make it too easy for them to walk away. Lead them to that next step.)*

So that you don't feel left out, no need to worry, you too can have an elastic band. Please take one. It will be a reminder that we want to be stretched by God. Because when we are, it will not only change your life, it will have an impact on others. *(Hand out the elastic bands to the congregation)*

The worship resources for Mission Awareness Sunday have been written by The Rev. Joel Sherbino. Joel started his ministry at Paris Presbyterian Church in June 2006. Before arriving in Paris, Joel along with his family lived in Malawi, Africa, where for three years he served as the Associate Pastor at St. Columba (Church of Central Africa Presbyterian). Joel has recently been appointed as the Malawi Liaison for International Ministries with The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Joel is married to Rebecca Sherbino, Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Raw Soup Social Enterprise. They are the proud parents of Isaac, Masika, and Canaan.