

-I want you to take a moment and think about a time that you might be comfortable in telling someone when a challenge was/is so large or daunting that you became/are overwhelmed. (take a minute to pause and think). I invite you to turn to your neighbor (maybe someone you don't know) and share with each other for a second what you came up with. (take a minute to pause and share)

-Thank you everyone. There is a lot of things in life right now that are overwhelming and scary. Abby and I (as most of you know) are pretty connected with people in Missoula who are working on the problem of Climate Change and care for creation. I don't know if you have heard, but this summer has been one for the books. It's gotten over 70 degrees in parts of the Arctic which is unheard of. Tens of thousands of people have been hospitalized in Japan due to a record triple digit heat wave. Fires are spreading across California and Greece. Even the country of Sweden (not known as a country with wild fires) had to ask for help from Italy (who has more resources for wildfires) to put out multiple blazes raging in populated areas. I have found myself lately getting overwhelmed when thinking: what is this world going to look like when Soren is my age? Maybe your source of anxiety is much more near term: maybe there is real strife right now in your family getting along or your job is getting too much to handle because of budget cuts and responsibilities.

-Whatever it is, being overwhelmed can be a common emotion we have in our daily lives and it can be hard to think we can do anything to address these very real and large problems.

-I bring this up because I recognize the anxiety that is coming out of Philip in our gospel lesson today when he says: "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." Jesus and his disciples have a problem.

-They are teaching and preaching out in the hot countryside of Galilee. Galilee isn't pure sandy desert like, say, the Dead Sea. It's more like the countryside of Italy or Greece (some vegetation and still plenty hot). It's understood that a lot of these people are peasants or common laborers who took the time to go see Jesus. Thus, they aren't fishing or building or cooking or working in the fields and not making any income for the day. This is pretty amazing that they are giving up their income for the day in order to witness Jesus, but it still presents a real challenge. With no food and no income for the day, how are they going to sustain themselves? They are probably a good hour + walk outside of the village, thus even if they did have resources to purchase something it would be a long, long time until eating something.

-Lets also just acknowledge it's not like most of these people are on Weight Watchers. Most, if not all, of this crowd is probably routinely starved on a regular basis for nutrition. All of this leads to sickness, dehydration, weakness, instability, and loss of mobility. Jesus' disciples know they have a problem and it's pretty overwhelming.

-So what is there to do? Well, you could try to leave the crowd and say “you are on your own”, but that always runs the risk of turning the crowd into an angry mob. You could go into the village and try to steal food which of course has it’s issues. You could try to fish the lake a little bit, but that’s going to take a lot of time and effort for likely very little in return (especially to feed five thousand).

-Thus, insert Andrew, Peter’s brother, into the scenario who has another suggestion. Andrew points out this little boy who is willing to share his five loaves and two fish. This action of pointing the boy out, if you think about it, is so ridiculous that it’s almost funny. 5 loaves and two fish.....for five thousand people? That’s what they got. Yet even though it seems like unbelievably inadequate to solve this humongous problem, it’s a start. Sometimes even an inadequate start leads to enough.

-There is an organization based in Minneapolis called College Possible, a non-profit that assists immigrants and low income kids with test scores and studies so that they will succeed and graduate from university. Abby actually served as an Americorps volunteer with this organization right after she graduated from St. Olaf. I remember we heard the executive director speak one time to the philosophy of this organization and it was fascinating to hear. “It’s all about disruption”, I remember him saying. “That’s what we do.” “We look to disrupt the way most of these students think of themselves (‘Oh I could never get a college degree). We look to disrupt the way universities see minority students (THOSE students who need extra help). We look to disrupt family dynamics and systems (by showing a son or daughter who most likely is the first to graduate with a college degree can lift the entire family) Disruption of norms that are stuck in place is what we do.” I feel like Jesus in this story of feeding the five thousand could say almost the exact same thing. Jesus is the disruptor of the norms in place within that culture.

-Bread was used, of course, as a tool by kings to keep power. Keep the people hungry and they won’t have time to think about throwing you out. Jesus disrupts this practice entirely.

-Banquets and meals were usually a way of displaying social status (especially in the ancient near east), the people at the top got to sit closer to food while the people at the bottom had to wait. Jesus disrupts this practice with having “everyone sit together on the grass”.

-Finally, Jesus disrupts the whole idea of something not being enough. This little boy, it turns out, had something that in the end was beyond enough. It’s the impossible being disrupted to become the possible.

-So where does this leave us in our legitimate challenges and being overwhelmed. I don’t think the true answer is to be “Polyanna” as sometimes it’s easy to do: to say “well, God will make it happen in the end.” Because, at least I don’t believe, this is exactly the case. The fact that people on this earth are starving isn’t God’s fault, it’s our fault. We have enough food to feed everyone on this planet many times over yet we

don't have the will to figure out how to distribute that food to everyone who needs to eat. The answer of "well, that's just how a world economy works" is an excuse we like to tell ourselves in order not to be overwhelmed. Perhaps what we need most, then, is the little boy disruption of five loaves and two fish. Perhaps norms that we think are impossible to cross are actually possible with the simplest of ideas.

-There is a beautiful documentary on Fred Rogers of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood that I encourage everyone to go see titled: "Won't you be my Neighbor?" The movie follows the up's and down's of making a tv show for kids as well as Fred's fascination with relating to a child. Even when TV first began, shows for kids were few and far between. What material there was usually became focused in children and products: prepping the future generation for consumption. Fred hated this and decided upon finishing his degree in seminary, told his friends and family that he was interested in doing television (even though he had never been on a TV set before in his life). He went to WQED, the public broadcasting station in Pittsburg and first co-starred in a program called "the children's corner". One of the frustrations of being at a public television station is that money to purchase proper film was scarce, so they had to use donated film that could be dried out and brittle. This film would almost always break apart, sometimes even on live TV. It was common for film to break and the actors having to keep going adlib while the film was being changed. This is where Fred Rogers started to use puppets as "filler" to keep the show going. Turns out, he was rather good at puppets and kids more looked forward to the puppets coming out than the actual show itself. Who knew that getting out a sock puppet for time filler could actually lead to the changing and influencing of lives for millions. Sometimes it's the little boy with five loaves and two fish that can change the world after all.

-May you, even when you are overwhelmed by the challenges that are before you, find the little, crazy ideas that can disrupt and shake us a bit. For there is never anything too great for our God. Amen.