

Count First on Him

*Turning to Philip, He asked, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?"
He was testing Philip for He already knew what He was going to do.*

(John 6: 5-6)

When he became Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford never imagined what he would be counting in 2020. After he was elected, he probably imagined he would spend time each day counting:

- The increase or decrease in the unemployment rate,
- The increase or decrease in the provincial deficit,
- The ways he could reduce costs and create more efficiency in government services,
- Or the ways he could reduce the wait times for surgeries or overcrowding in emergency rooms.

This year, COVID-19 has caused the premier to focus his attention on counting the number of cases each day. He shared at a news conference this week that each morning he spends time counting:

- The new cases by region,
- The number of people in intensive care,
- The number of people needing ventilators,
- The number of deaths,
- And the number of outbreaks in long-term care facilities.

It must be hard some days for the premier to focus his time and energy counting these numbers. Certain days might lead to him feeling overwhelmed. He is not alone in feeling this way. The disciples knew this feeling of being overwhelmed by focusing on the numbers.

Passover was soon approaching and Jesus, along with His disciples and a large crowd of people, were making the journey toward Jerusalem. It was no wonder that the people wanted to journey close to Jesus because it was already well known about the signs and miracles He had performed. At a certain point, Jesus realized the multitude had nothing to eat, so He turned to Philip and asked:

"Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?"

Philip was the most logical person to ask in this situation because he was from Bethsaida which was just 9 miles away. He knew the area and where food could be bought. Philip began to do some counting:

- First, he counted the crowd and recognized that it was somewhere in the number of 15,000 people if you included women and children.
- Then he counted how much bread it would take to feed this large gathering.
- After counting the amount of bread needed, he would have had to calculate that against the cost to buy each loaf.

At the end of all that counting, Philip replied, *“Even if we worked for months, we wouldn’t have enough money to feed them!”*

Philip was overwhelmed by the thoughts of counting how they could feed all these people. Andrew tried a different approach to try to solve the problem. He started counting what food they did have to see if it was enough. It would not have taken Andrew too long to count that they only had 5 loaves and 2 fish. He too was overwhelmed after this count as to how they could feed all these people.

It is a reality that we can become overwhelmed by counting the problems and challenges we face. The disciples experienced this feeling with the challenge of feeding all these people and Premier Ford must feel this way about the daily numbers of COVID-19 cases. Are you feeling overwhelmed at counting all the costs associated with COVID-19?

- Do you feel overwhelmed and anxious as you hear the daily count of new cases?
- Do you feel anxiety going into a grocery store and counting more people in there than you expected?
- Do you feel lonely counting another day that you have been isolated at home?
- Are you overwhelmed counting the amount of deficit and debt our federal and provincial governments are amassing knowing it has to be paid back some time?
- Are you overwhelmed counting the number of ways this pandemic has changed your life?
- Are you overwhelmed as you count there are still a lot of months ahead before a cure or vaccine might be ready?

Counting these factors and others through this pandemic might have you feeling overwhelmed. Our passage shows us that Philip, Andrew and the other disciples failed to count on one thing in their situation – **THEY FORGOT THEY COULD COUNT ON CHRIST TO HELP.**

It is hard to imagine how Philip and Andrew made this mistake considering Jesus was standing right there beside them as they did all this counting. It was equally surprising that they did not respond with more faith considering they were present when Jesus turned the water into wine and healed a lame man. Faith would have encouraged them to say to Jesus, ***“WE CAN’T COME UP WITH ENOUGH BREAD BUT YOU CAN!”*** The idea to trust Jesus and seek His help did not dawn on them because they became so overwhelmed by counting the numbers. Jesus set about to show His disciples the mistake they made by forgetting to count on His help.

He went right to work getting the people seated and then blessing the loaves and fishes and having it distributed to the people. Everyone ate as much as they wanted to the point of being full and afterward there were 12 baskets filled with scraps.

Jesus proved in this situation that we can **“COUNT ON HIM”** no matter how overwhelming a situation may appear to us. COVID-19 has proven to be overwhelming at times whether it be for our leaders, our front-line workers, or for ordinary people like you and I. Part of our feeling of being overwhelmed is failing to count on Christ and what He can do for us. If there are days when you are feeling particularly overwhelmed, stop and ask yourself ***“Have I Counted On Christ To Help Me Today?”*** If your answer is no, include Him in your count. Just like a crowd of 15,000 people and 12 disciples discovered, it is foolish not to **COUNT ON CHRIST** to help.

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean