

The world is too much with us

Numbers, numbers numbers. I wonder if any of you are feeling overwhelmed by numbers and statistics. Every day of we look for the latest Covid numbers in our city, province, country and world so we know what level of anxiety we should or shouldn't feel. However, I was suffering from number fatigue even before the pandemic occurred. Our world and the news media like to document disaster numbers. World War II that was the deadliest military conflict in history. An estimated total of 70–85 million people perished, which was about 3% of the 1940 world population. The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, the deadliest in history, infected an estimated 500 million people worldwide—about one-third of the planet's population and killed 20-50 million. My brain reels trying to process numbers of this magnitude. Even smaller numbers can be emotionally wrenching such as the senseless massacres of 28 people including 20 children at Sandy Hook school in Newton, Connecticut in 2012 or the murder this spring of 23 in Nova Scotia. My ability to absorb and process this degree of misery is quickly overwhelmed after a while the numbers are just numbers and not people. We have all experienced the loss of a loved one. When my father died, I was disappointed and a little angry because the world continued on as if nothing had happened. The impact of losing one person is wrenching so how do we deal with these huge numbers. It is not just the numbers and statistics of human death that plug up my brain but all the other numbers that are a part of our lives in 2020. Social insurance no. passcodes, phone numbers, stats from our daily new about inflation, government debt, unemployment rate, interest rates, food prices, loss of value of your RRSP or RRIF.

What about our personal health- do you fret about numbers such as your blood pressure, your PSA (prostate specific antigen), blood sugar no, A1C. weight? Yes, numbers are important to our health and security but it is a pity we need sooo many. Where did numbers come from? The number system that is prevalent today is known as the Hindu Arabic numerals. The number system notation development is credited to two great mathematicians from ancient India, in the 5th and 6th century BC. . Despite more that 2000 years of number study there are mathematicians today still doing research with numbers.

Human kind for most of our civilized existence has needed to measure things. In the earliest times it might have been how far is it to the river, how much milk should I barter, what is the price of this sack of grain. Most of life today depends to some extent on measurement. The naming of units of measurement was of course one of the first orders of business in early civilization- the cubits of the Babylon were probably the first units of length. The cubit is approximately equal to the length of a forearm. It was typically about 18 inches or 44 cm.

Science depends on numbers to measure things. We use statistics and statisticians to determine the validity of experiments. Statistical analysis will be very important now as scientists use number analysis to prove the efficacy of a vaccine. In the last 250 years our ability to measure things has improved tremendously. For example, when the steam engine was first designed by Watt in 1776 it was cumbersome and inefficient because the way the

machine was fabricated some parts didn't fit together tightly and that allowed steam to leak out. Another inventor Wilkinson used techniques borrowed from casting and boring cannons to improve fitting tolerance to 1/10 of an inch that greatly improved the efficiency of the machine. Today some objects are manufactured with a tolerance of 1/ billionth of an inch. A recent bestselling book entitled *The Perfectionists* by Simon Winchester is a fun read with many great stories about the history of this topic from 1700s to the present. Even time is measured more precisely now. A sundial or hour glass measured time until clocks were invented. Contrast that level of time measurement with a femtosecond laser- that is used in cataract surgery. How short is a femtosecond? - one quadrillionth of a second or one millionth of one billionth of a second—that's about the length of my attention span or my short time memory some days!

A visitor to a natural history museum was standing in front of a skeleton of Tyrannosaurus Rex and asked the docent standing nearby how old this specimen was. The docent said it was 62 million 23 and a half years old. The visitor asked how they could age that dinosaur so precisely age and docent answered I started work here in June 1996 and I was told the specimen was 62 million years old then.

A man was speaking to God and he asked him, "God is it true that to you a thousand years is like a minute?" "That's true," God replied. "And is it true that to you \$1,000,000 is like a penny?" "That's true," God said. "Well, you see I'm a poor man and I was wondering if you could give me a penny," asked the man. "Sure," said God, "in a minute."

Cosmetologists have written that there are more celestial bodies in the universe than there are grains of sand on the earth. I have wondered who could possibly even estimate that number but it is an effective image to allow us to allow us to describe the immensity of the universe.

You may be wondering by now what this topic has to do with our faith our spirituality- -try and stay awake I hope to make this relevant in a moment.

You may recall that certain numbers are frequently used in stories in the Bible. Our ancestors in the Jewish and Christian societies gave numbers meaning- which for the most part those who translated the Bible into Latin, then old English and then modern English simply didn't understand. Here are a few examples. The number One is used prominently throughout the Bible and of course refers to God himself/herself. The first commandment is you shall have no other gods beside me. A sort of sacredness is ascribed to the number seven.

Seven is used in the Bible to indicate perfection or sufficiency Jesus feeds the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish =7. From the scripture reading today Jesus admonishes Peter to forgive 77 times seven Jesus doesn't intend to throw out a math problem here. The answer doesn't matter. What Jesus is saying is that we are to love as He loves and forgives as He forgives. How many times does God forgive our sins? The book Lamentations 3:22–23 tells us God's mercy is new every morning, and His faithfulness never fails, which means He's willing to forgive us every single day. So, ask yourself...how many times has God forgiven you? Probably more than

seventy times seven if you're anything like me. If He has forgiven us that much, then how often should we forgive the people around us who push our buttons, outright offend us, or just plain annoy us? You can do the math if you like, but Jesus' point is to forgive and keep forgiving for as long as it takes.

Forty is used to denote completion or fulfillment-the number is used 146 times throughout both testaments. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, 40 days of rain created the flood of Noah.

In the Old Testament there is a book called Numbers. This is not a mathematical treatise. The book is called Numbers because at the start God ordered a counting of the people (a census) in the twelve tribes of Israel. The book of Numbers was written to demonstrate that God's covenant plan stays on track even when His people don't. The instances of sinful complaining and rebellion, and the resulting judgement are so pronounced and widespread that it seems like they will never make it. Therefore, God punished them by making the Israelites travel forty years before they could settle in Israel, the promised land.

Not only do we measure things in our world – we tend to measure people in a variety of ways. In some athletic competitions we assign a number to performances in certain sports- like diving, figure skating, gymnastics etc. because judges need a means of comparing one to another in selecting the winners. Psychologists for years have measured IQ – intelligence quotient. The Stanford Binet scale or the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children are standardized tests designed to test intelligence. However, these tests differ in how they define intelligence and what they claim to measure. However good those tests are-they can't measure a person's passion, determination or desire to succeed. I am sure you know stories of people with lower IQ or a disability that have accomplished amazing things.

Jesus changed the units of personal measurements- of holiness, of the worth of people. God said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. God does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." Men tend to be measured by their wealth or possessions and women in terms of their looks. Business magazine quote someone's net worth. Does that mean a billionaire is worth more than a struggling homeless person with a toonie in his pocket? The World Business Academy understands that when profit is the only measurement of success in business the result is exploitation of resources. A common misquote from the Bible is that money is the root of all evil the accurate quote is the love of money is the root of all evil.

The average debt for a Canadian is about \$21000. Our Government Debt in Canada was announced recently to be over a trillion dollars So average Canadian is about 47 million times richer than our country.

There is much discussion and angst about systemic racism now. I suspect some people may subconsciously measure a person by their appearance, clothing race, gender or sexual

orientation. Jesus treated lepers, prostitutes, Samaritans, tax collectors with love and acceptance. Compassion -which literally means suffering with -is a state of being that gives people the capacity to respond to anyone in need irrespective of nationality creed, race or color or sexual orientation. Jesus consistently tried to put across this message during his ministry. Beggars, prostitutes Gentiles Samaritans – no one was excluded.

William Wordsworth an English poet 1770 -1850 wrote a poem with a phrase that succinctly describes our world right now He wrote---

The world is too much with us, I love that phrase “the world is too much with us.

The world is too much with us late and soon

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

So if we become bogged down with numbers and the “world is too much with us” here are some suggestions;

In the first place let us remember to be grateful. Recall that when Jesus faced a large hungry crowd and wanted to feed them with 5 loaves and 2 fish the first thing he did was to thank God for what they had. It might be hard to feel grateful when we are forced to isolate and feel anxious about the pandemic but I remind us that we live in one of the best countries and cities in the world. Most of us can find something to be grateful for but it is more difficult when faced with serious or debilitating illness, unemployment or failing relationship. My personal experience is that focusing on gratitude for the blessings ,some of which I may take for granted , helps me with perspective. For example, we live in the best country and city in the world. Let me use an example. A few days ago I spent time on the phone getting technical support for a computer issue. You probably know that these call centres are scattered across the globe. The person I spoke to on Tuesday was in Nicaragua. The call center she worked for was closed re the pandemic and she was working from home. I used the time gaps as we waited for the computers to do their thing to find out about her life. Recently divorced she was trying to work at home with 3 children 10 to 2 years of age. The day she came home from the hospital after she was born, her father was shot and killed at home by the police. Her mother later remarried and her step father abused her and her sister physically and emotionally. Her mother was shot and killed when she was 11. She was a very upbeat person and was not complaining and attributed her ability to survive to her spiritual faith. She kept repeating how fortunate she was to have a job and be alive. Perspective!

If the world is still too much with you I suggest that you can find comfort and inspiration from reviewing the messages of the last month. If you go the St. David's website and click on sermons you can review those messages. On June 28, Rev Peggy McDonagh spoke of the Joy that is Summer, July 6 Rev. Debbie Stockdale spoke on Sharing the load, On July 12, Dr. Michael Trew, Psychiatrist reflection was entitled 3 Blessings of Covid 19, Last week Rev. Stockdale Teach us how to joy.

Finally I remind you of the importance of prayer. Snoopy from Charlie Brown stated it best – When my arms can't reach people who are close to my heart -I always hug them with my prayers.

Amen