"**An Army of Grasshoppers**"
Numbers 13:26-14:9
Series: The Way Home Week 6. Open Your Mind
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The Bridger Wilderness Area is an utterly wild alpine landscape south of Yellowstone in Wyoming. While there are no roads in the park there are 600 miles of hiking trails and much of the terrain is steep. So you can see why the park staff have received some interesting comment cards over the years.

- The places where trails do not exist are not well marked.
- Please avoid building trails that go uphill.
- Escalators would help on steep uphill sections.
- Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests.
- The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals.
- A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed? Please call…
- A MacDonald's would be nice at the trailhead.

In the same way, Moses received loads of comments, complaints and all out criticism when he took Israel on the camping trip we call the Exodus. After camping by Mount Sinai, after the nasty business about the golden calf, God tells Moses to march the people toward the Promised Land. And that's when the real grumbling begins. They whine about traveling in the wilderness. They moan about the manna and meat. It's so tense even Moses' sister Miriam and brother Aaron, start grumbling and complaining.

But the worst whine by far, the straw that breaks the camel's back, comes at the border of the Promised Land. As with any good general, Moses sends twelve scouts to scope out the terrain and bring back intelligence before the invasion. After a forty-day, five-hundred-mile mission, the spies return with glowing reports. "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit" (Numbers 13:27). Two men shoulder a pole holding a gigantic cluster of sweet grapes. The people shout in celebration, 'We are almost home!' But the joy is quickly snuffed out when the scouts add, 'That's not all that's gigantic. There are giants in that land.'

> "But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.
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> We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." Numbers 13:28-29, 31-33

'An army of grasshoppers doesn't stand a chance against a nation of giants. They'll squash us under their boots until all that's left is a green stain.' Now the simmering murmur among the Israelites rises to a full-boil rebellion in a matter of seconds.

> All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." Numbers 14:2-4.

In the face of this all-out revolt, Moses and Aaron can only fall on their faces in prayer.

Suddenly, into the eye of the swirling cauldron, jump two of the scouts to help their leaders. With a booming voice, Caleb quiets the crowd.

> Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Numbers 13:30

Joshua, standing beside him, adds,

> The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey and give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them. Numbers 14:7-9

Brave speeches from brave men. In another age, under different circumstances, with a different army, they may have led the people to a stunning victory. But not this time. The Israelites want the safety of Egypt. Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb are simply the obstacles standing in their way. They begin to reach down for stones to fire at the four when a blinding fire turns the night into day. The Lord has come. All their complaining and whining makes God come down to break it up. Because of their revolt, this whole generation of Israelites get their wish – they will wander in the wilderness for forty years. While their children will take possession of the Promised Land, they will die in the desert because they do not trust God to take them home.

Perhaps we shouldn't be so hard on the Israelites. After all, they are escaped slaves with little training in warfare and scant provisions. The gigantic foes before them can hurl spears and arrows from the safety of their thick-walled fortresses. The enemy has the home field advantage, and they are not about to budge. The Israelites are just being realistic. They do the math and every equation tells them to turn and run.

Maybe you are doing the math right now. At various times, perhaps even now, you are on the border of some overwhelming situations. You have a teacher, a boss, a parent who is making your life miserable. You have a homework assignment, college application, work presentation that feels gigantic. You face a messy divorce, a scary diagnosis, a massive debt, a possible dismissal. And then there are the overpowering giants in our world: the challenges of severe mental illness, the continuing scourge of addiction, the persistence of homelessness, the ever-widening political divide, the pandora's box of AI. These problems are all deeply entrenched like massive walled fortresses filling our land. It makes you feel as tiny as a cricket in Times Square. Your resources, your abilities, your strength seem puny against these towering giants.

And then there is fear. The Israelites fear the unknown that awaits them in the Promised Land. The reality they face is fierce and formidable. It is stiff and stubborn. Let's not undercut the power of the forces which oppose them. Yet Fear makes it worse. Fear magnifies the size of their enemies and minimizes their own abilities. Fear makes them long for the slavery of Egypt over the freedom of their new homeland. Fear causes them to grumble and murmur and attempt to murder God's chosen leader.

Two scouts, however, are not afraid. Why? Caleb and Joshua are no fools. They know the weaknesses and deficits on their side. They can do the math. But they add one factor into the equation the rest forget. "The Lord is with us. He will lead us," says Caleb, "Those Canaanites don't stand a chance." "But we're just an army of grasshoppers compared to them," complain the others. "Yes," says Joshua, "an army of grasshoppers that will swarm all over that land. A plague of locust that will swallow them up." They remember the power of the plague of locust in Egypt. Back then, Moses warned Pharaoh,

> If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians—something neither your parents nor your ancestors have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now. Exodus 10:5-6

How do you slay giants and change things? Learn some lessons from the grasshopper.

Grasshoppers are Small Most mistakenly think they have to be big to make change. The greatest change is often made by a whole lot of little things. Don't believe me? Think about it. Our nation has the power to fight big things like fascism, communism, terrorism. Yet the enemy which closed our schools, businesses, economy, cities, government, infected millions of people and killed hundreds of thousands was the

tiny Covid virus which was too small to see with the naked eye. Technical issues and software upgrade the last few days disconnected our outlook emails and shut down every plane. Grasshoppers are small enough to get in everywhere and make change.

Grasshoppers Swell. Their numbers multiply and increase. The more people brought into the movement, the more it swells in size and the greater the change.

Grasshoppers Swarm. The swelling numbers turn into a swarm which covers the ground and devours the crops. Change occurs when ordinary people work together. When a movement of people focuses its energy, it can create unimaginable change. Grasshoppers can cause great devastation. So can any movement when it is focused on destruction. Yet these three factors - small, swell, swarm - can also bring great good.

What can you do in the face of a gigantic overwhelming challenge?

Confront Reality, Cut Out Fear. The Israelites faced stiff opposition. That was their reality. Fear magnified that reality into gigantic proportions. Fear will weaken your resolve, drain your courage, and undercut your abilities. You are facing some stubborn realities like cancer, job loss, divorce, mental health, mounting debt. Confront these realities but don't let fear make them worse.

Consider the Cost of Going Backwards. The Israelites are always grumbling about going back to the glory days of Egypt. They forget they were slaves in Egypt. Now they say they would rather die in the desert. So God gives them their wish. Fear may convince you that it's better to go backwards. Yet retreat often means defeat. Consider the cost and take a step forward.

Count on God to Be Working. Joshua and Caleb saw the same evidence as the other scouts. They also calculated their army's weaknesses. Yet they added one more factor to their equation: The Lord. Joshua said, "The Lord is with us. Do not be afraid." God told them to go forward and they counted on Him to lead to victory. Attitude makes all the difference. We must replace fear with faith. Remember, faith is not just belief in a set of doctrines. Faith is trust in something or someone. Many trust in their intellect, their strength, the economy, the government or the Almighty dollar. We trust in Almighty God who will never leave us or forsake us. God is always working. Our job is to find out where and join Him.

Collect Helpers and Move Forward. An army of grasshoppers will only prevail if they swarm together. You don't have to face your challenge alone. God is providing an army of believers to swell and swarm with you.

The Church of Jesus Christ did not start as a massive mega church. What started as a tiny gathering of Jewish believers spread to the ends of the Roman Empire. There were great monumental figures like Mary, Peter, Barnabas and Paul. Yet the Church grew exponentially without buildings or pastors, in the face of great persecution because of

countless, nameless people who gathered in tiny house churches, cared for the poor, and shared the Good News with their neighbors who joined them. Small, swell, swarm!

Now you might say the problems of this world are as massive and fearful as a legion of giants. There's nothing we can do about racism, injustice, poverty, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, and unbelief. And you would be right ... if all you are counting on is us. But don't count God out. We may only be an army of grasshoppers, but with God's power, the Church of Jesus Christ can swell and swarm all over this world. Let's start small. Join us as we start **Microchurches**. These tiny groups of 4-6 people can reach neighbors who will not come to a church building. They engage in mission. They make disciples. They multiply. They start small, swell, and swarm.

We may be small. Yet amazing change happens when God is with us. Last weekend you proved it when we celebrated The Church Has Left the Building. Over two hundred Woodside grasshoppers worked at 17 projects

- You wrapped 3,000 utensils for Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.
- Planted 3 trees and 1,200 pachysandra plants to beautify the Garden of Reflection
- Sewed 16 pillowcases for kids with Cancer
- Provided much needed yardwork for a Caregiver
- Made 23 frozen meals and cards for the Deacons to deliver
- Put the finishing touches on a Habitat for Humanity in Levittown.
- Painted walls and the ceiling at A Woman's Place.
- Sorted and organized donations at the United Way Help Center.
- Cleared out a basement, garage, and upstairs room and filled a 30-ton dumpster.
- Assembled 76 feminine hygiene kits for homeless women in NJ.
- Filled 320 Ziplock bags with over 700 cookies for TASK!
- Sorted, moved, and organized donations at Habitat for Humanity ReStore
- Wrote 140 notes to soldier's overseas to be delivered by A Soldier's Hands.
- Winterized the garden beds for Operation Crop.
- Served chili and 100+ lunch bags to 70 homeless guests at Trenton Rescue Mission.
- Next Door Neighbor - 16 people took down a dilapidated fence, removed all the nails and cut up the fence for firewood, removed a fallen tree, dismantled and removed a trampoline, cut down small trees, fixed a lawnmower, mowed the lawn, and weeded everything. Over 20 contractor bags of debris were removed, took 3-4 truckloads of wood, debris and scrap metal away, hauled away 6 metal chairs and the trampoline parts for scrap metal, broke apart concrete with a sledgehammer.

God is calling you to follow Him and move forward. Will you trust God and take a step? Some say trusting God that much takes a leap of faith.
Well, that shouldn't be too hard for a grasshopper.