

**“An Army of Grasshoppers”**  
**Numbers 13:26-14:9**

*Series: Exodus: ReOpening God's Way Week 5. Open Your Mind*

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Has this ever happened to you? The car is loaded up. The kids are strapped in their seats. You jump in the car, pull out of the driveway, and before you get to the end of the block, a voice from the back asks, “Are we there yet?” For the rest of the trip you will hear that question at least a thousand times. In fact, Isaac Newton had a forgotten fourth law of motion. It isn't about inertia, velocity or gravity. It only applies to car trips. His formula states if you take the number of children multiply by the length of the trip and the gallons of soda consumed, divide it by the distance between the kids you'll get the WPM: Whines per mile. “He touched me,” “Get off my side,” “I'm hungry,” “I feel sick,” “Are we there yet?” “I have to use the bathroom.” After a steady stream of complaints, you may shout, “Don't make me come back there.”

Moses heard more complaining than when the Brady Bunch went to the Grand Canyon. This is the fifth week of our series Exodus: ReOpening God's Way. 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. First they whine about traveling in the desert. Then they moan about the manna and the meat. The situation is so tense even Moses' sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, start grumbling and complaining. When Moses brings their complaints to God, the Lord sounds like a frustrated Dad saying, “Don't make me come down there.”

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 spies to scope out the terrain and bring back intelligence before the invasion. After forty days, after a 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” (Exodus 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 spies 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.”

“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.’ A 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 spies 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 better army, they may have led the people to a stunning victory. But not this time. The Israelites want the safety of Egypt and 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, unearthly fire turns the night into day. The Lord has come. All their complaining and whining in the backseat makes God come down there to break it up. Because of their revolt, that whole generation of Israelites is condemned to wander the desert 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 there.

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. We are all on the border of some overwhelming situations. Covid19 is like a gigantic walled fortress blocking your path. Will schools open this fall? How will schools open? Will my business reopen? Will I work from home to the end of the year? For the rest of my career? What about the ones I

know who are sick with Covid, cancer or some other illness? Will I ever be able to be with my family again or how can I get away from my family problems? And then there is the overpowering reality of racism, the challenges of severe mental illness, the continuing scourge of addiction, the persistence of homelessness, the ever-widening political divide. 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. Fear magnifies the size of their enemies and shrinks 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.

Yet two spies are not afraid. Why? Caleb and Joshua are no fools. They know the weaknesses and the 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 make the mistake of thinking you have to be big to make change. The truth is the greatest change is 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 closing our schools, businesses, economy, cities, government, the threat infecting millions of people and killing hundreds of thousands of people is not something gigantic but something too small to see with the naked eye. 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, insignificant 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 can also bring great good.

Imagine if every person in the US did the simple small things we are asked to do: wear masks, wash hands, keep 6 feet apart. We would push back the virus, flatten the curve and literally save lives. Small, swell, swarm!

The Civil Rights Movement had great monumental figures like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Representative John Lewis. Yet it was accomplished by countless nameless people boycotting segregated buses, sitting down at segregated lunch counters, marching to secure the rights promised to them. Small, swell, swarm!

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 Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Yet the Church grew exponentially without buildings or pastors and 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. Here are some things you can do.

- Join us in August for the next sermon series: **The Art of Neighboring**. Jesus says the second greatest commandment is "Love your neighbor as yourself." I know that means love everyone. But what if Jesus meant us to start by loving the people who actually live next door to us. Learn their names, their joys, their challenges. Before you can help your neighbor, before you can share the Good News with your neighbor, you have to know your neighbor. Join us in August. We'll show you how to do it.
- Join us for a discussion of the movie **Just Mercy**. Learn about racism and unjust incarceration, about the systems which keep black people from getting ahead. Imagine if each of us leaned into this issue, listened to the stories of African Americans and learned what we can do. We plan to host groups which will help us **Be the Bridge** over the racial divide.
- Join us as we work to change the way neighbors with **Severe Mental Illness** are treated in our community. We'll provide you with letters you can write to tell our elected officials that these neighbors need compassion and care not incarceration.
- 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. They swell. They swarm.

We may be small. Yet amazing change happens when God is with us. God was with little Ruby Bridges who, at ten minutes to eight, walked with her head up, eyes forward, through a screaming mob with two U.S. marshals ahead of her and two behind

to become the first African-American child to break the color barrier in the New Orleans public school district. She was the only student in that big silent school building. What could she do? She was just a little grasshopper against a giant centuries old system of racism. But she was not alone. Because my God was with her.

Maybe you've heard the story of Woodside member Linda Hayes. She's gone to be with the Lord now. But in 2002 God gave her a vision. At the time there were 10.5 million AIDS orphans in Africa. Five thousand alone are in Siavonga, Zambia. Linda told me the Lord wants us to raise \$30,000 to help build the Namumu Orphanage in that town so children don't have to wander the streets, live in storm sewers or sell themselves just to survive. Now back then we'd never raise more than \$5,000. Back then we thought, "Great idea...but it will never work. We can't give \$30,000. We'll never make a dent in this crisis. We'll never stop the destructive force of AIDS. It is too big a challenge for us. It's a giant size problem and we're just a handful of grasshoppers. It's too big for us.

We didn't raise \$30,000. The people of Woodside gave \$35,000. Nothing is too big for my God.

The only question is: when the time comes, when our God calls us to move forward, are we going to do what's right? Some say trusting God that much takes a leap of faith.

Well, that shouldn't be too hard for a grasshopper.