

“By Comparison, We Feel Like Grasshoppers!”

After a year of camping out
At the foot of Mt Sinai . . .

Mt Sinai being the place Moses received the Stone Tablets
And where they built the portable Tabernacle.

They move on to the Promised Land.

Up to this point, they have been in the wilderness for 1 year.

When they got close to the border of Canaan
Moses selects 12 "scouts" or "spies" –
One from each of the 12 tribes –
To go and check it out.

“See what the land is like
Whether the people are strong or weak, few or many.

“What kind of land is it? Good? Bad?

“What kinds of towns . . . unfortified or fortified?

“What’s the soil like, fertile? Poor?

“Are there trees on it?

“Bring back some of its fruit.”

So the 12 left and after 40 days they returned.

They came back with a flowery report.
The land’s productivity was unbelievable!
Get this . . .

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Numbers 13:23 When they reached the Valley of Eschol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them . . .

It was everything God had promised it would be.

The people’s excitement rises!

Caleb, one of the 12, declares

“It’s ours for the taking . . . what are we waiting for?”

“Wait, wait, wait, slow down,” say the other scouts

“The people there are giants

“Their cities, strongholds!”

“Compared to them we felt like grasshoppers.”

Their faces fall.

“Giant people?

“Large fortified cities?

“Armies of soldiers?”

Their hearts sink

They murmur among themselves.

“This isn’t what we expected.

“We didn’t know there’d be people there . . .

Giants no less!

“Slavery in Egypt? Not so bad!

“Wandering around lost in the wilderness?

A memorable road trip!

“But this . . . uh-uh.”

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And so, after a year of wandering in the wilderness
At the brink of entering the Promised Land

They balk . . .
They hesitate . . .
They refuse to go . . .

And God closes the door of opportunity
Resulting in 39 more years of wandering the wilderness.

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Other preachers call this “grasshopper mentality.”

The idea that God’s call on a person’s life
Or on the life of the church
Is considered more than what can be handled.

That we’re not big enough, strong enough, good enough
To do the work God calls us to do.

With that kind of attitude
The Israelites were defeated
Before they even started.

They embraced the notion the task was too big.

Great ideas have come and gone
Due to people’s low self-expectations.

How can grasshoppers stand up to giants?

And since they thought of themselves as grasshoppers
Others viewed them as such.

Sometimes churches think of themselves as grasshoppers
Particularly smaller churches.

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The work of the church is too overwhelming.

Consequently, we accept a diminished view of ourselves.

Paul wrote Timothy these words: **[But] God did not give us a Spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7 NIV).**

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Followers of Christ face a world with tremendous needs.

God has given the church a giant task . . .

To share the love of Christ in word and deed.

It can be overwhelming to the point of paralysis.

“What can I do?”

“What can we do?”

But Scripture reminds us:

Philippians 4:13 ESV I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

And again:

Romans 8:37 ESV No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

We must never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit!

Today we commission a group

Heading to Lumberton NC

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To begin a week-long disaster ministry.

Lumberton was hit by Hurricane Matthew in 2016
As well as this year’s Hurricane Florence.

The need there is incredible
Such tremendous loss and suffering
Compounded now by Hurricane Michael.

What can one small group from one small congregation
Within one small denomination do
In the face of such tragedy?

They do what Loren Eiseley’s essay “The Star Thrower” does:

“Once upon a time, there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work.

One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up.

As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean.

He came closer still and called out "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

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The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean."

"I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" asked the somewhat startled wise man.

To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die."

Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, "But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!"

At this, the young man bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said,

"It made a difference for that one."

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I want to close with a video clip of a larger video presentation

Of the Church of the Brethren's
Mission and Ministry Annual Board Report.