

SERMON – 08/26/07
DESTINATION: FAITH!
“Canaan – New Vision”

As we begin this third week in our series on DESTINATION: FAITH! I have to ask this question: You remember Moses, don't you?

- He was the guy who, as a baby, was placed in a basket & hidden in the tall grass along the riverbank in Egypt, so he wouldn't be killed like the other Hebrew babies...
- He was the guy that God spoke to out of a burning bush...
 - “Take off your sandals,” said the Lord... “You're standing on Holy ground!”
- Moses was the one God sent to face the ruler of Egypt... PHARAOH... to demand that the Israelites be set free.
 - He was the one who had a walking stick that God turned into a snake...
 - And when Pharaoh refused to release the Hebrews, God sent those 10 plagues... you remember those, right (flies, blood, hail, locusts, darkness, death of the firstborn, etc.)?
- When Pharaoh finally relented, Moses was the one who led the people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea – parted waters and all!
- He was the one who scampered up Mount Sinai and brought back down the Ten Commandments so the people could live in holy community with one another.
- Moses was the one to whom God promised a NEW LAND for the people... a “Promised Land,” if you will...
 - A land “flowing with milk and honey”... a land of abundance!
 - No more desert wandering... finally a place they could call ‘home.’
- THIS was the Moses that we encounter in the start of our scripture reading for today... from Numbers 13...
 - So take out your Bibles with me if you have them... or you can follow along as we project some of the scripture passages on the wall.
 - Numbers 13:1-3... *“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes*

you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’ So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the LORD, all of them leading men among the Israelites.”

- There’s a couple of important things we learn from these opening sentences...
 - First of all, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible calls them “spies”... but actually the word “scouts” is probably more appropriate.
 - Spies seem to indicate there’s something sneaky & secretive going on... but we’ll see that’s not the case here.
 - Instead, the 12 leaders are really scouting out the land... moving about freely & openly... to bring back a report to Moses.
- Second, what land are they going into to scout?
 - Canaan... aka “The Promised Land”...
 - But the crucial phrase in God’s instructions was this: **“the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites...”**
 - God has already PROMISED to give them the land... keep that point in mind, as we go through the rest of this story.

After the 12 men are chosen... one from every tribe of Israel... Moses relays to them their mission... (v.17ff.)

- *“Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, ‘Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land.’ Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.”*
 - Evidently Moses had a few more specifics on his “to do” list for the scouts than God did... isn’t that interesting!?!?
 - They need to check the quality & productivity of the land... the strength of the people... and the security of the towns...

- “Oh yah, and bring us back some snacks, while you’re at it!”
- So all these 12 “young bucks” headed out for a 40-day soiree into the land of Canaan.
 - The children were probably the first to see the scouts return 6-weeks later... because they were carrying a cluster of grapes so big, says the Bible, that it had to be carried on a pole by two men!
 - They also had some pomegranates & figs with them... and undoubtedly everyone gathered around the 12 to hear their report.
 - “What was it like?” the people wanted to know!
 - And thus began their report... (13:27ff.) *“And they told him, ‘We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is the fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.’”*
- There was no discrepancy with this first report... the 12 scouts seem to speak as one. But there are some interesting insights here...
 - They begin by saying that the land is “just as advertised”... it’s a land of abundance (just look at the fruit we brought back!)...
 - The people who live there, however, are strong... and their cities are well protected.
 - Archeological excavation has revealed that even a modest village in the area at that time would have stone walls up to 13 feet thick... and with an estimated height of 46 feet!
 - No, the scouts were not exaggerating.
 - But pay close attention to the people they list here...
 - *“And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live by the sea, and along the Jordan.”*
 - Keep those funky names on hold, as we move through the rest of this story...

- The scouts gave their initial report, just as we heard. But one scout in particular, Caleb, felt the need to add an additional word...
 - (v.30) *“But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ‘Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.’”*
 - Caleb must have sensed that the people were starting to lose confidence & courage at the initial report... so he gives a word of encouragement – “we can do it!”
 - But the battle of fear is just starting to take hold...
 - (v.31ff.) *“Then the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we.’ So they brought to the Israelites an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size. There we saw the Nephilim... and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.’”*
 - Now the report is starting to change, isn’t it?
 - With two of the men still holding a huge cluster of grapes on a pole, they now proceed to tell the people that the land “devours its inhabitants”...
 - Not only that, but EVERYONE they saw was “of great size” (I guess they meant everyone who didn’t get devoured, that is!).
 - It’s interesting to note that the reference to the “Nephalim” comes from Genesis 6... a race of people who supposedly were the offspring of divine beings who fell from the heavens and mated with humans!
 - In other words, now the scouts are saying that not only is everyone huge, but the mythological Nephalim giants also inhabit the land!!!
 - Guess how the people respond now?

I think the whole issue, however, comes down to a matter of TRUST...

- Why was it that the scouts went into Canaan in the first place?

- God instructed Moses to send them into the land that God had already promised to give them!
- GOD HAD ALREADY PROMISED TO GIVE IT TO THEM!!!
- Later on in the story, Joshua & Caleb become the only two of the scouts who believe the people can succeed in the mission God has given them... but everyone else sides with the other 10...
- And fear trumps faith.
- The essence of the issue comes down to the last sentence of the “majority report”...
(v.33) “There we saw the Nephilim... and to ourselves we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”
 - They like tiny grasshoppers... the smallest edible animal in the ancient near east!
 - “We were shrimps compared to them,” we might say today.
 - Those 10 scouts felt belittled – not just in stature, but I dare say emotionally & spiritually as well!
 - They were already defeated.
- What happened next? Well, the people followed the advice of the 10, and started begging Moses to take them back to Egypt...
 - In the end, God decided that none of the current generation (save Joshua & Caleb) would enter the Promised Land...
 - Instead, God would wait for the next generation of Israelites to come forward...
 - And when the older, fearful folk had all died off... then and only then would the rest set foot in Canaan.

But I want to get back to the issue of **grasshoppers and giants**...

- A little over two years ago I had the chance to visit BuPyung Methodist Church in Korea... the home church of Rev. Peter & Judy Lee who came to stay with us for two months this past year...
 - It was an amazing church to visit... from the outside courtyard where they packed in about 2,000 of us to hear an evening concert...
 - To the marble lobby that greets people upon entering...

- We got to see the “chapel” where their youth worship each week...
- Oh yah... and the main sanctuary that sits 3,500!
- It was quite impressive!
- (I won’t even begin to mention the 30 piece orchestra... and the 105-voice strong choir!)
- Want to guess if I felt more like a grasshopper or a giant there?
- Then in March of 2006, I was fortunate enough to travel to Colorado Springs with a small group of pastor-friends of mine... and we stayed at New Life Church.
 - Nestled high up in the mountains, New Life Church was another “spiritual highlight”...
 - They had an amazing World Prayer Center... where not only did their community pray regularly, but they had an internet link that brought in prayer requests from all over the globe!
 - They had dynamic children’s rooms for Sunday School...
 - As well as an amazing separate Youth Center... with Friday night & Sunday morning activities...
 - There was a Young Adult auditorium, where they had a Saturday night coffee house & worship service.
 - Then there was their sanctuary... when you have 11,000 people worship with you each weekend over 3 services, you need a pretty big setting.
 - As you see these photos... how are you feeling? Grasshopper or Giant?
- Then earlier this month... 4 days after I returned from England... I had the privilege of traveling to Kansas City for a Conference
 - We were hosted by Church of the Resurrection, a United Methodist church.
 - This is their “chapel”... and intimate setting that holds 400 people.
 - They also have a dynamic youth center... (where we had a few of our meals)...
 - A colorful & creative Children’s Center for Sunday School...
 - And of course, a sanctuary that can fit the 9,000 people that come to worship over 4 services every weekend.

- Remember, this isn't any "run of the mill" non-denominational mega church... this is a United Methodist church, my friends! This is one of us!!
- Grasshopper or Giant?
- You know, it might have been easy for me to have gone away from this conference feeling, once again, like a grasshopper in my own eyes...
 - But something changed for me at Church of the Resurrection...
 - Many elements that God had been working on suddenly converged in my mind & heart while I was in Kansas City...
 - I started to get a glimpse of a New Vision...
 - I'll go into more details in two weeks, when I share the specifics of our new vision... but let me give you the Cliff's Notes version right now.
 - For the last 3 or so years, God has been nudging my heart... and in turn, I've been working with the Administrative Council... to reevaluate where we are as a church, and where God might be leading us into the future.
 - The leaders of this church have been looking at our mission & purpose... as well as how we, as a church, can be more clear about how to live out our Christian life.
 - One of the offshoots of this process are the new PASSION GROUPS that will be launched in two weeks.
- But what was very clear at Church of the Resurrection was WHY they do what they do...
 - Out in their lobby they have a series of 3 statements on surrounding walls...
 - This first one states their **purpose**: "Building a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians."
 - On the next wall, they state their **journey**: "Knowing, Loving & Serving God."
 - Finally, on the third wall they have their **vision**: "Changing Lives, Transforming the Community and Renewing the Church."
 - Just about everyone who comes to Church of the Resurrection knows why and for what purpose they are there.
- I think God is calling us to be just as focused, my friends!
 - Oh, we may not use the same words & phrases as Church of the Resurrection...

- But I believe with all my heart that we are being called toward something greater than simply maintaining a friendly, self-sustaining, “cocooning” Christian community.
- How might we learn from Numbers 13?
- Will we allow ourselves to be frightened by the majority? Those people and churches who say that the UMC is really a dying denomination?
- That’s it’s only the “New Hopes” and the “Hope Chapels” that are growing & impacting the world for the Kingdom of God...
- I don’t believe that God is calling us to simply make sure we have enough money to pay all the bills & keep our building in good shape.
- I believe God is calling us to something greater! MUCH GREATER!
- *“But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ‘Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.’”*
 - God gives new visions, my friends...
 - Over the next few weeks, let’s be in prayer together as we seek God’s heart & direction for the life of this congregation... and for our own lives, as well!
 - Thanks be to God for the encouragement of Caleb... and the chance to see the “new vision” that Canaan truly holds!
 - AMEN!