

Flying Grasshoppers, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E5090208
Isaiah 40:21-31 and Mark 1:29-39
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 8 February, 2009

I remember a hot sunny day on the corner of Scottsdale Boulevard and Townley Road. I was catching grasshoppers to make a “bug collection” while in sixth grade. I learned how to be quick and cup them in my hand. I felt an accomplishment when I could look at one with its big eyes and strong legs. I didn’t like it when they would “spit tobacco juice” in my hand, but I was always amazed at how they could fly.

If you were to go up on the observation floor of the Sears Tower in Chicago, the Empire State Building in New York City, or even the Wachovia Center in Winston, and look down, people would appear like grasshoppers. The prophet known as “Second Isaiah” (he was responsible for chapters forty to fifty-six of Isaiah) said we humans appear to God like Grasshoppers. Think about it. Where would someone two thousand five hundred years ago get high enough to have people look that small? There was no structure as tall as those buildings. Masada, Herod’s desert fortress? It was built five hundred years later than Second Isaiah. The tallest parapet of the temple in Jerusalem wouldn’t have been high enough to make humans look like grasshoppers. And, by Second Isaiah’s time, it had been destroyed anyway! Perhaps from the top of the cliffs overlooking the Dead Sea, people would look like grasshoppers, but one wouldn’t have seen many people in that desolate wilderness. Yet, the prophet was able to conceive of God’s viewpoint.

The prophet began this portion of scripture, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? [God] sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers.”¹ Isaiah knew the proper relationship between God and humans. He knew that God was creator and that humans were creatures.

How different that is from some of today’s religious movements that proclaim men and women are like gods. They say, “You are so important you are like God.” Great stars of tennis and masters of computer games are called “gods.” That’s scary. That turns reality back into the chaos that was here before God started creating!

When people think they are like god, they begin acting like demagogues – like Adolf Hitler, Robert Mugabe, or Bernie Madoff. For power, they step on the backs of others whom they judge less worthy.

When we fly in an airplane, we are high above the earth, and we have a high commanding view. We feel like God. We can see things from a much better perspective, which is good, but we are not God. We are like grasshoppers. That’s humbling, and that’s the way it should be. Yet, we are important to God.

God cares for us and loves each one of us. God has given us life and named us. God wills that each one of us becomes whole. God grants healing. After Second Isaiah compared us to grasshoppers, he said, “those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”²

¹Isaiah 40:21-22

²Isaiah 40:31

In the proper perspective, in the proper relationship with God, we grasshoppers can fly! The irony is, we are healed *as we heal* others. If God is a giver and lover, and we are created in God's image, then we are givers and lovers also. We are only fulfilling our true nature as God's children when we seek healing for others.

A Chinese legend tells the story of a woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to a holy man and asked for an incantation to bring back her son. The holy man said, "Bring me a mustard seed from a home that has known no sorrow for a year. We'll use it to drive out sorrow from your life." She immediately set out in search of the sorrow-free home.

Soon, the woman came to a mansion. Surely, such a splendid home holds no sorrow, she thought. So, she approached and said, "I am looking for a home where no sorrow has been for a year. Surely, this is such a home."

"You have come to the wrong place," they said, as they described a year of much disappointment and sorrow.

The grieving woman thought, "No one is better equipped to help these poor folks than I, because of the sorrow in my life." So, she stayed for a while and comforted the family. Then, she resumed her search for a home and family with no sorrow.

Wherever she went, the story was the same. Sadness and misfortune had visited every home she found. So, she stayed a while in every home to help them with their sorrow. Soon, she became so involved in helping others that she forgot about looking for the magic mustard seed. She found the comfort she needed in serving the needs of others.³

This is exactly what Jesus did— he served the needs of others. We heard the story of Jesus' healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and how he became tired and went off to be by himself to meditate and pray. But, the disciples and the crowds found him. "Aha! There you are. We've been looking all over for you."

Even in his weariness he responded to the requests of people. He said, "It's time to get up and go minister." As he helped others, he himself became whole.

Paul, after describing all he suffered and endured said, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings."⁴

Each of us is called to ministry. We are not Christians for the purpose of being glorified ourselves, but to glorify God. We glorify God by teaching others about God's love. That is ministry, and we are baptized into ministry, each one of us. We minister to others so that we may share the blessings of the gospel, but we also share *in* its blessings.

Your quest in life is to figure out or "discern" your calling in ministry. How will you teach others and how will you show others about God's love?

³Felix Lorenz, "Happy New You," January 2, 1994

⁴1 Corinthians 9:23