# “Greater Works Than THESE?”

## *John 14:8-12*

Turn with me to our Scripture reading, John 14:8-12.

***Last year I read* A Harmony of the Gospels*, a book that I strongly recommend if you want to see the gospels in a new way. A harmony of the gospels puts the four gospels in chronological order so the story flows through time as it actually happened. It brings out new perspectives and understandings, especially as it relates to* when *events occurred in the life and ministry of Jesus. I have two additional copies in my office if you’d like to borrow one. I think they’re a valuable resource that helps us to envision the gospel accounts so much more clearly.***

***As I was reading through this book, I discovered something I’d never noticed before: in the gospel of John, Jesus spoke a lot about the “work” he was to do. In fact, there are over thirteen specific references to the work of Jesus in John’s gospel.*** He began in John 4:34 saying*…“My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.”* Jesus talked of performing “works” that testified to his power and identity. When the disciples got excited and also wanted to do miracles and wondrous signs, Jesus told them in John 6:29, *“This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.”* And in John 17:4, as he prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, *“I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”*

The Greek word that is used in all these passages is the same, and depending on its context it can mean ‘work’ as in miracles and signs of power, such as we see in John 5:20: “*For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man.”* In other contexts, however, ‘work’ can mean just what we normally think of it meaning: doing a job, performing a task, working for a living.

Now let’s look at our Scripture reading:

*8Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”*

*9Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? 10Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.*

*12“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.”*

Jesus told his disciples “*The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work—*that is, his miraculous signs, his power--*through me. 11Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work*—that is, the miracles--*you have seen me do.* And then Jesus dropped the bombshell: *12“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.”* The followers of Jesus will do the same kind of miracles that Jesus did. In fact, we will show even greater displays of supernatural power!

So how is that possible?

**ASK: What are some of the miracles that Jesus performed?**

[Feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, walking on water, raising the dead, calming the storm, turning water into wine, etc.]

How can we possibly do those kind of things?

Jesus said we can do those things “…*because I am going to be with the Father.”*

In John 16:7, Jesus told his disciples *7But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate*—the Holy Spirit--*won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.”* Jesus knew that his time on this earth was at its end, and he knew he couldn’t just run away from what he was facing. ***Sometimes people will ask, “Why didn’t Jesus just get out of town? Why didn’t he go hide somewhere—like David did when King Saul was after him? If Jesus knew the torture and death that was in store for him, why not do everything possible to avoid it?”***

We know that one reason was because Jesus had to die as the perfect, sinless Lamb in order to take away the sins of the world. But another reason is because if Jesus didn’t go away, the Holy Spirit couldn’t be released the way God desired. In the Old Testament, God’s Spirit was given to a single person for a limited period of time, in order to accomplish a specific task. Once that work was completed, God withdrew his Spirit—not to leave the person lost or alone, because God was still with them—but because the job was finished.

But God’s plan wasn’t just to bless one person here and there with his Spirit, for limited amounts of time, for just one thing. God told the prophet Joel, “*I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. 29In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants—men and women alike”* (Joel 2:28-29).

But God wouldn’t fulfill that prophecy until Jesus had physically left the scene. Once Jesus had returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit was released upon all who claim the name and work of Jesus. That’s what we remember, recognize and celebrate today—on Pentecost: not only the beginnings of the church, but the empowerment of all Christ-followers with the Spirit of God.

Instead of the Spirit being given to one person—Sampson, David, Isaiah, even Jesus—for specific tasks in a specific place and time, following Pentecost the Spirit is now in every person who follows Christ, for every task, in every place and time.

That’s why Jesus could say *12“I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.”* Whereas Jesus could only feed the multitude—five thousand men, plus women and children—at any given point in time, how many hundreds of thousands—indeed, millions—are fed by Christians all over the world in a single day?

Whereas Jesus could only heal those whom he spoke to, saw or touched, how many hundreds or thousands or millions are healed every day through the prayers of the faithful and the work of the Spirit?

Jesus could only speak of the kingdom of God and the forgiveness of sins to one group of people at a time—in one place. How many hundreds or thousands or millions can hear about God’s kingdom and the gospel of Jesus Christ through the words and actions of the church every day around the world?

***Jesus chose to limit himself in human form. No doubt there were days when he probably felt like saying, “Hey, I can only be in one place at a time! Hey, I can only do one thing at a time!”*** And because of those human, earthly, finite boundaries there were only so many people he could see and touch and speak to. But when the Holy Spirit was released on the early church at Pentecost, that was no longer the case. From that time until now, Jesus can be in every place and every time through his servants, the church, and through the Holy Spirit.

You and I are given the exact same Holy Spirit that Peter and Paul had. We are temples of the Holy Spirit in the same way that St. Francis and Joan of Arc were. We are strengthened by the same Spirit who strengthened Martin Luther and John Huss. We are sent out into the world, accompanied by the same Spirit that sent out John Wesley and William Carey and E. Stanley Jones.

We don’t have some cut-rate, lower-shelf version of the Holy Spirit. We don’t have the leftovers of the Spirit. The power that raised Jesus Christ from that tomb dwells in each of us! The fire and wind of Pentecost still exists within each of us!

I wonder what the church would look like—I wonder what *our church* would look like—if we decided that we were going to let that power flow unhindered through us? If we would allow to happen whatever the Spirit desired? If we did not erect barriers or try to confine the Spirit? I daresay we would experience what the early church did in the weeks and months and years following Pentecost. The world might once again say about us, *“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also…,”* as they once did about Paul and Barnabas and Silas.

Even greater works than Jesus did? Sounds suspicious. Sounds impossible. Until we remember that nothing is impossible for God. And if we, his people, surrender ourselves to his Spirit humbly, honestly, willingly, we can do even greater works than those when Christ walked the earth.

This morning we are blessed and privileged to gather at the Lord’s Table as one body in Christ. At this table sins are forgiven, salvation is received, and the Holy Spirit dwells in us afresh. As you come forward, I challenge you to pray one simple prayer: Holy Spirit, use me to accomplish even greater works for the glory of your kingdom.

Please turn to page twelve in your hymnal…