

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: John 14:7-14

Sermon Title: "Greater Works than Jesus" (Easter Sunday)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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A few months ago I was attending a presbytery meeting at the First Church in Atlanta, and they had a guest speaker from California giving the sermon. He is the pastor of a larger Presbyterian Church in one of the large cities in CA (I cannot remember which one), and much of what he does is help people get off drugs and alcohol and afterwards get off the streets and find good jobs

He did not grow up like I did. I had parents who went to church every Sunday, especially on Easter, whereas this pastor had parents who cared little about church. It was a miracle that he was able to hear anything about Jesus Christ, and having faith in Jesus Christ, and living a new life in Jesus Christ. By some great miracle, he did hear and he accepted and he chose to follow God's call to wherever it led him.

He told us at the Presbytery meeting that he was new to reading Scripture. The Bible opened up new doors and new horizons to him. He ate up everything he could read, until he reached this section in John

14. In this chapter we visit with Jesus having the Passover meal with his disciples. This would be their last supper together. Jesus was going to be handed over to the religious leaders later that night, and the next day he would be killed on a cross. He is giving his disciples last-minute marching orders about faith and ministry before he leaves, and then he gets into a discussion with Philip, one of the 12. We wouldn't go into the discussion, but the passage that struck this pastor right between the eyes comes in verse 12. "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these."

These words stopped this pastor in his tracks. He was a new Christian. He knew Jesus to be a big important Person, the greatest Person to ever live, the humblest Person to ever serve." He learned that Jesus is everything, and there is no greater Name on earth or in heaven than his. And now Jesus just said that he could do greater work than Jesus. This pastor said he read and reread verse 12 just to make sure Jesus didn't mess something up. Maybe John got it all wrong; maybe it was supposed to say, "You will do the things I do but, in fact, you cannot do anything greater than me." No, John didn't misquote Jesus. Jesus didn't get his words wrong. He meant what he said: this new Christian who was preaching to us at a

Presbytery meeting, and even we, will not only do the thing Jesus does, but also greater things.

This is one of those passages we might blow past without noticing it. We might have heard what Jesus said before verse 12. Verse 6 is a doggone important passage we might have heard, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me’.” Preachers will definitely preach on that. Verses 14 is also important passage we might have heard, “[Jesus says,] ‘If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it’.” That’ll preach, too. But verse 12 of Chapter 14... we tend to go right past it. Why is this? Is it because we don’t think Jesus is telling the truth? Is it because it sounds too incredible; there is no way we can do greater things than Jesus of all people. If we have faith in Christ, and we believe his words to be true, then he means what he says. We can not only do what Jesus does but greater things on top of them.

That preacher from a few months ago wrestled with those words of Jesus. “Greater works than Jesus.” The first thing that he realized was that people might not believe they can do greater things than Jesus because of their images of Jesus. We have all grown up with pictures of Jesus in Bibles and on grandparents’ walls, and he seems too otherworldly,

too shiny and perfect. No way could we do greater things than the One we picture in our minds.

Here are some of those picture we might have grown up with. {SLIDE, SWITCH WHEN I SAY SO}

Perfect images of Jesus. Could we do any better than those images of Jesus? Now, let's look at this image {SLIDE}

The science is called forensic anthropology.<sup>1</sup> What artists do is construct faces with the historical information they have, including nationality, culture, natural physical features, etc., and they put together images of people as they may have appeared during their historic lifetimes. This picture is not the exact image of Jesus, because nobody possesses Jesus' actual bones. He was resurrected and ascended into heaven in a new bodily form. What this picture is, however, is an estimation of what a normal human being would have looked like during Jesus' time. This image is closer to what Jesus would have looked like than the pictures of white guys that we have created.

{SLIDE}

There is some Biblical evidence we could turn to. Just last week we read Isaiah 53, "[Jesus] had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.popularmechanics.com/science/health/a234/1282186/>.

that we should desire him.”<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2 says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking of the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”<sup>3</sup> Doesn’t this possible image of Jesus fit those Scriptural passages better? Do you think we could do greater things than Jesus, if he looked like this?

So our image of Jesus needs to change: a little less white and shiny and little more practical.

But we still might have a problem with understanding Jesus’ words, “You will do greater works than these.” If it isn’t how we view Jesus, maybe it is how we view his actual works. Is there any possible way to do better than what he did?

Well, when it comes to dying and rising for all humanity and creation, that work fell on Jesus exclusively. That is not our work to do, to die for others as though we can save them from sin. Jesus died once for all, to paraphrase Hebrew 7:27 and Hebrew 9:28. Only through him is there salvation.

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<sup>2</sup> Verse 2.

<sup>3</sup> Verses 5-8.

So, if we understand that his death and resurrection is not anything we should improve upon, what about the things Jesus did on earth? Let us take the miracle of raising a lame man from the ground.

**{SLIDE}** The scene on the screen shows a man who had been lying next to the pool at Bethesda for 38 years. He complains that no one helps him into the pool in order to receive healing. Jesus comes by and says, “Rise up, take your bed, and walk.”<sup>4</sup> Could we do anything like that? That is some kind of miracle that seems beyond our ability. Is this one of those greater works we ought to perform?

Or this one. **{SLIDE}** This painting depicts Jesus calling Lazarus from his grave. He had been dead for four whole days, and yet he obeys Jesus’ powerful voice and breathes again. Could we do anything like that? Is this one of those greater works we ought to perform?

Last one, but not the last of Jesus’ miracles.

**{SLIDE}** Here, Jesus is helping a paralytic. His four friends brought him to the house in which Jesus was staying. They lowered him through the roof, because too many people were inside the house listening to Jesus. Jesus sees their faith and tells the man to get up and walk. Could we do this? Could we do a

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<sup>4</sup> John 5:8.

greater thing than these?

Jesus doesn't say that we are to do *better* works than he. It is *greater* works, more abundant works that we may accomplish. This is how Martin Luther put it, "greater work because the apostles and the Christians had a wider field for their works than [Jesus] did, that they brought more people to Christ than He Himself did during his earthly sojourn. Christ preached and worked miracles only in a small nook, and for just a short time..."<sup>5</sup> It is true that Jesus' time on earth was limited to certain people in certain towns and villages in Judea and Samaria. He couldn't fly on an airplane and cross oceans to do his work. He didn't have a car to travel all night across several states to some town for a revival. That was not his mission. His was to teach so many people about faith in him, and then to die for our sins and rise up for our new life.

The mission of Jesus continues today across oceans and mountains and borders – the mission continues through us. Jesus tells us that we are given the task to do greater things, more abundant things. We have many more people to come in contact with, even the stranger on the side of the road. We have

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 830.

many more things we may do with the resource we personally own and the resources our church provides. We may cross an ocean and visit a different country, like the youth did in Costa Rica a year or so ago; or we may travel a short distance to a place of ministry like the Food Pantry we host every Thursday afternoon.

We might not be able to heal sick people from diseases. We cannot miraculously cure cancer or dementia or high blood pressure. We cannot raise people from the dead like Jesus can. Placing those aside as special miracle of Jesus, we may still do greater works with the knowledge God gives us, the tools God provides for us, and the courage God instills in us. {SLIDE}

For example, I tell you a story about getting my hair cut a month or so ago, not to toot my own horn but to share a possible greater work one could accomplish. I was seated toward the front, and the stylist was doing her thing on my head, and a woman came in the door looking for a cut and color. From my vantage point her hair did need some work. She asked the lady at the counter how much it was, and she was shocked by the price. I thought my hair cut was expensive at nearly \$20, and I only go once every two months. The lady's cut and color would cost about four times that amount.

And then it hit me. I was going to pay for her cut

and color. As the lady mulled over the cost and reluctantly chose to get it, I silently determined that I could help her out. She wanted to feel pretty. I could tell that's what she wanted. Doggone it, I was going to help her.

When I finished, I told my stylist to place her cost on my bill. I told her not to say a word, but to surprise her when she came back to the cashier register. All she could whisper to me was, "God bless you. God bless you." I felt blessed. I wanted the woman to look nice, and use that money for something else. I left for my car, and never knew what became of that lady. I was proud to have done a greater work than Jesus on that day.

**{SLIDE}** I have a challenge for you for this week and the weeks ahead. I would like you to look for opportunities to do greater things. You may not be in a search for them all the time. When I was getting my hair cut, that was only on my mind. The woman appeared, I listened to the small, still voice of Christ in my ear, and I responded. You may not be in a search for them all the time, but when they appear jump on them. Do not hesitate and respond.

And then, write those experiences down, and share them with our office manager Dianne Hooten, so she can place them in the newsletter. That is my

challenge. For when you are able to do greater things than Jesus, I would hope that you would share them with the rest of the church. Write down the experience and give it to Dianne, so we may all read about them.

Do not submit your name – the point of this exercise is not to toot our own horns. It isn't to make others feel as though they are lame for not doing greater things for god's kingdom. The point is to inspire. The point is to encourage all of us to look for the opportunities and jump on them. Please, do not be bashful and do not feel as though you are boasting. Write down your experience. Do not write down your name. Quietly give in to Dianne (she has a mailbox in the office marked HOOTEN).

Let us all share in God's good graces. Let us all take Jesus' words seriously. He says we will do greater works. He expects us to do greater works. Because of the love and thanks we have for our Savior, let us do greater works.

## *The Assurance of Pardon:*

Hear the Good News as it comes from Isaiah, Chapter 1: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool." The Lord invites us into reconciliation with him. The Lord encourages us to receive his forgiveness and his resurrection. Believe this firm message with thankful hearts, that we are forgiven through Jesus Christ, our Lord! Amen.