

Written Copy: John 14:11-14 “What Are Those Greater Works?”

5th Sunday of Easter

Sunday, May 7th, 2023

Text: John 14:11-14

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. ¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

The text’s intent

To assure you that the work Christ did through His death and resurrection has opened the way for you to the eternal dwelling place Jesus put your name on by the gift of faith from the Spirit. This miracle of conversion with its eternal consequences is greater than the temporal miracles that Jesus performed. He calls us as His Church to be the Spirit’s tool to do that work throughout the world and with whomever He puts in our path as a divine appointment. And since this is the will and plan of both Father and Son that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the Way, Truth, and Life, He promises to provide whatever is necessary for us to do this witness through our words and works, in keeping with proclaiming Jesus as God who has come to save, and the promised anointed One who has been given reign and rule now in our hearts, and will reign without opposition in the Father’s eternal dwelling place to come.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is your way to the Father’s eternal dwelling place in the New Heaven and New Earth through faith in His life, death, and resurrection being for you. The Truth is He fulfilled the Father’s plan perfectly so that His death was not defeat but the door to our resurrection to eternal life. Through the miracle of conversion performed by the Spirit through the Gospel Truth He gives to us new life with Him and eternal life to come. As we share our faith through that Gospel Message the Spirit sent from Jesus at the Father’s side is there to work that greatest of miracles-conversion, in all who hear. Because the Father and the Son want all to know they have an eternal dwelling place Jesus promises to provide whatever is needed for us to share this wonderful message through our words and our works.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

How is it that we are supposed to do works greater than what Jesus did? Can we really ask for anything in His name and expect Him to grant it? And what does this have to do with Jesus’ promise of the place He has gone to prepare for us?

What the hearer should do as a result:

As living stones offering spiritual sacrifices to Christ the cornerstone, we are to be built up in the faith, and pray for the means and opportunity to share Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all who believe.

Subject Sentence: Conversion of the hearts of men is the greatest work.

Introduction: Questions About the Gospel Reading

Our Gospel Lesson today should be familiar to many of you, not just because it is the appointed Gospel reading for the 5th Sunday of Easter every three years, but because it is often used as the Gospel Lesson for funeral sermons; at least the first six verses are. I have used it for funerals many times now. Since it is a familiar text, there was a temptation for me to focus on those six verses today. But I don't want to sound like I'm preaching your funeral sermon, at least, God willing, not yet, not for a long time.

Instead, I was drawn to the last three verses; ones that I do not include when preaching a funeral. And perhaps as you listened you found yourself drawn to these as well. **John 14:12-14** ¹² **“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.** What grabbed my attention is what appears on the surface to be a blank check from Jesus. **“Whatever you ask”** He will do. And then I began to wonder how is it that we, sinful broken human beings, can be called on and expected to do not just the works that Jesus did, but even greater ones. And then finally, on top of all that, what does any of this have to do with Jesus' promise in the first part of our lesson that He prepares a place in His Father's house for us? On the surface, those last three verses seem like they belong as a totally different lesson.

In My Father's House Are Many Rooms

Let's begin by looking at Jesus promise in the opening verses about the many rooms. The setting is the Upper Room. Jesus has been preparing them for what is to come: His arrest, His suffering, and His death. He upset them more by telling them one of them will betray Him. They are upset, afraid, and fearful. He tells them to stop being afraid. His going away in death is a good thing, because through it He will prepare for them rooms in His Father's house.

What are these rooms; or as some versions translate it “mansions”? I'll tell you what they are not. They are not the vision our culture often paints of the afterlife: golden cloud buildings where our loved ones, who are pictured as cloud people with white robes and wings and harps, are hanging out, passing the time doing stuff they loved to do when they were alive on earth. You know the picture we love to paint of them sitting around playing cards, bowling, playing golf, jamming to the likes of Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Elvis, Naomi Judd, Olivia Newton John, and Frank Sinatra. First off, our loved ones who died in faith do not have bodies where they are right now. They are souls without a body since their body died and was buried in the ground or cremated. They are souls who are in the presence of Jesus who is ruling over all things. They are at peace and patiently waiting for what is to come.

And what is to come? The eternal dwelling place of the resurrection that Jesus calls the Father's house. Jesus uses the term "house" as symbolic imagery of a reality that we cannot imagine because we have never been there yet. He wants to convey that feeling we have when we have been away on a trip and gladly return home to our comfortable surroundings. Only when we reach our Heavenly Father's house, we will have a far greater happiness and comfort and satisfaction. This will be our permanent and eternal dwelling place where all we could want, or need, will be supplied, and all that troubles us, or hurts us will be gone forever. This means we should see our life here on this earth: our homes, and our prized possessions, as only temporary. We are like exiles in a foreign land waiting to return home. And when Jesus returns on the Last Day all that we treasure now will be burned up and dissolved. All of it will be replaced by the new creation Jesus will bring into being by His word of command: the New Heaven and New Earth. And by that same word of command, He will raise up the decomposed and decaying bodies of your loved ones, as well as yours and mine, making them better than they ever were when we were alive on earth. He will make them perfect. And our lives lived out in the New Heavens and New Earth will be perfect. All that troubles us now and causes anxiety and fear will be gone. Jesus is assuring them, and you, that we have a place in this perfect reality to come.

And how can you be sure? Because it was through His going away, His going to the cross, His suffering and death that He prepared a spot for you. Or better yet, He went to the cross to prepare you to be good enough to have a place in this world of perfection. Because of our brokenness and our sin, we could never be worthy, we could never earn for ourselves a spot in eternal life. But He took all of the sin that makes you unworthy to the cross and removed it forever. With your sin completely atoned for, He declares you worthy of your place in that perfect eternity. And through the gift of the Holy Spirit in your baptism your name is written on the doorpost of your own place, guaranteed by all that Christ has done for you and given to you as promised in the Gospel. His resurrection is your assurance that you too will be raised body and soul to life everlasting.

The Greater Works He Will Equip Us to Do

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This is the Good News. This is wonderful news, the best news anyone could ever hear. It's so good that the Father and the Son want us to share it with those around us. And those around us really need to hear it. The prevailing thought outside of faith in Christ is that "I can be good enough to earn a spot for myself in whatever kind of afterlife there may be." But the only thing they can earn is an eternal dwelling in the everlasting torment called the Eternal Lake of Fire. Jesus wants us to share that same message He shared with His disciples here in our Gospel Lesson. He wants us to explain to them how **Jesus is the Way**: the only way to the Father and His eternal dwelling place. He opens the way through the faith He gives in the Gospel Message. **And that message is the Truth about who God is,**

our Creator who loved each and every person so much that He gave His Only Son over into death for all. He excludes no one. The only reason a person will not make it to the Father's eternal home with us is that they refused to believe the truth of the Gospel.

Jesus, as God the Son, present at Creation, is **the source of life for all**. He blew the breath of life into Adam's nostrils. He is the source of life for all babies that are born. Our sin, which is there from the moment of conception, stains and ruins that perfect gift of life. But Jesus has come to restore it to the perfection of His original creation. Through the work of conversion His Spirit did in your heart and mind at baptism, He has begun the ongoing process of restoring that perfect life in our hearts and minds. And He will complete that work of restoration on the Last Day when He raises your bodies to perfection and joins your perfected sinless soul once again with it. This is the miraculous work He does and is doing through the Gospel Truth as the author of life now and eternal life to come. And He wants those around us to hear about it.

It is this work of conversion, done by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of those who hear the Gospel. This work done in your life and mine is the greatest of all miracles. It supersedes even those miracles Jesus did on earth. The Calming of the Sea, the Feeding of the 5,000, the healing of diseases and sickness, the casting out of demons, and even those He raised from the dead; all these have great benefit while a person is alive on earth. But by themselves they have no benefit once a person dies. None of those things by themselves will give them any help in eternity. But the Spirit working through the Gospel to change hearts and minds, to plant faith, renew faith, and strengthen faith in Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that is the power to give wonderful benefits now, making us beloved children of the Heavenly Father. And it brings the promise to us in our hearts that Jesus has secured a place in the Father's eternal dwelling. We can trust that Jesus has opened the way for us.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light

Jesus calls us to this faith now because He has work for us to do. He calls us to faith and through the gift of His Spirit equips us to serve Him as His royal priesthood: giving sacrifices of prayer and praise to Him in how we worship and how we live our lives. We live not for ourselves but as people of His own possession, living to serve Him. And we serve Him by proclaiming the excellencies of the God who desires that all be saved and find their eternal home with us. We share what Christ has done in our lives; how He called us out of the darkness of our sin and unbelief, how He keeps calling us back to Himself through Word and Sacrament. How His Spirit and the promise of His presence with you now and forever brings that marvelous light of faith to enlighten your heart and mind even when the world is dark around you.

This is not a work you or I could ever do on our own. But through our study of His Word and our participation in Word and Sacrament worship, Jesus works to equip you to be the means by which the Spirit works that miracle of conversion and keeps hearts and minds in faith toward Christ. And the means is our sharing the Gospel message through the works of our hands and our words. He calls us and blesses us to take part in this greatest of work as His chosen race and royal priesthood redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Asking In His Name

I know what you are thinking about now. This is a tall and difficult task. The thought of sharing our faith with others makes most of us uncomfortable, including me. We would rather just sit comfortably here in our pew, than take our faith relationship out on the road and share it with others. We want to see that sharing of faith as the responsibility of Pastors and evangelists; not us.

John 14:13-14 ¹³ **Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.** ¹⁴ **If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it**

Jesus knows how you feel. And that is why He gives us words of great encouragement. He wants us to turn to Him in prayer and ask Him to provide the means, the opportunity, the boldness of faith, and whatever else is needed to share our faith through word and action.

Notice this is not the blank check that some might want to make it out to be. We ask in His name. And what is His name? Jesus-which is the English rendering of the Hebrew name Yeshua (or Joshua), which means Yahweh Saves. We ask Him to provide what we need to proclaim Jesus as the God who came to save us. Certainly, part of His saving action is to provide for our daily needs, so we are fed, rested, and able to be His witnesses. And we can then proclaim Him as the One who provides not only our temporal needs in this world, but also provides the faith that opens the door to the eternal dwellings Jesus died and rose again to stamp our names on. And then there is His title: "Christ". This means "The anointed One" or "The Messiah". This connects Jesus with the promise made to David that one of His descendants would be given an eternal kingdom to rule. And Jesus is that King. He is the loving and most merciful and gracious King that has come to rule our hearts and lives. All that He moves us to do is always for our good now looking forward to eternal life to come.

He works to provide what we need to live and witness to this truth as His children, His royal priesthood, His Holy Nation, the people for His own possession, even when we don't ask for it in prayer. He brings before us divine appointments as we live-out our everyday lives. He places people before us and provides us with an opportunity to share our faith. Maybe it's someone asking for your advice, someone you can pray for and with, someone whom you've gotten to know, and after they have shared with you what is important in their life, you can share the One who is most important in yours; the One who provides for you now as well as that place in eternal life to come. While He provides these opportunities without our asking, He still wants us to ask, so that we can see Him answering us, and thereby be strengthened in our faith concerning all the other things He promises us.

Conclusion

Jesus certainly gives us great and wonderful promises in our Gospel Lesson. They include our life of faith with Him now and eternal life to come. The Gospel Message that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life changes everything for us. We don't need to worry about how many people we witness to in order to earn the Father's favor and earn ourselves a place in eternity. Jesus has already done that. And no one can steal that place from you. Jesus has become for you The Way, The Truth, and The Life. He has done it all for you. And when you fail to do your part in this greater work of sharing the Gospel that He calls you to do, He forgives you. Your place in eternal life still stands. May that ongoing forgiveness, and the knowledge that Jesus has assured you of your eternal dwelling, encourage and strengthen you when He next provides an opportunity to share His name and all the work He has done and continues to do for you. May we have many opportunities to share the glorious truth of that place in the New Heaven and New Earth which He has secured for you and for all who believe. Amen.