

July 4, 2010 – First Baptist Church, Vancouver

Text: John 14:12

Title: “Do Greater Works Than He?”

I invite you to focus with me on one of the most startling promises the Lord Jesus ever made. Listen.

John, chapter 14, verse 12.

“Truly, truly, I say to you ... whoever believes in Me will do the works I do ... and greater works than these shall they do, because I go to the Father.”

He made the promise the night before going to the cross, the night before giving His life for the life of the world. He had gathered his group of disciples together for a meal, for the Jewish Passover Meal ... in an upstairs apartment in the downtown core of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus loves to gather disciples together in the downtown core of cities! It is His way of providing salt and light in the city.

During the meal he does a number of surprising things. He takes a loaf of bread, gives thanks, breaks it, hands it to the disciples, saying, “This is My body, given for you; eat this in remembrance of Me.” He takes cup of wine, gives thanks, hands it to the disciples, saying, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; drink of it all of you in remembrance of Me.” He then tells them what is initially devastating news. He is going away. He is returning to His Father. He had come from the Father ... and was returning to the Father.

And then the startling promise.

“Truly, truly, I say to you...whoever believes in Me will do the works I do... and greater works than these they will do because I go the Father.”

We? We disciples?

We will do the works we see Jesus do in the rest of the Gospel of John?

- Turning water into wine?
- Calling a young boy back from the brink of death?
- Enabling a man paralyzed for 38 years to walk?
- Feeding 5,000 people with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish?
- Walking on water on a storm-tossed sea?
- Giving sight to a man blind from birth?
- Calling Lazarus from the dead?

“The works I do you shall do also.” We?

Even more startling. “And greater works than these shall you do.” Greater than multiplying loaves and fishes? Greater than restoring sight? Greater than raising the dead?! We?

What makes Jesus' promise even more startling is His double "truly, truly" which is too flatly rendered by the NIV as "I tell you the truth." "Truly, truly" is Jesus' signature introduction to His most significant claims. One "truly" would do. But no, He uses two. "Truly, truly." Literally it is "Amen, Amen." "Amen, Amen, I say to you" It is Jesus' way of saying, "This is solid stuff," "this is the really real". We could translate it "rock, rock", or "solid rock, solid rock", or "you can build your life on this, You can build your life on this", or You can bet the whole farm on this, you can bet the whole farm on this."

Jesus just lays it out there ... as a matter of fact. Along with all the other foundational truths he introduces with His double "amen, amen", "truly, truly". "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51). "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again from above you shall not see the Kingdom of God" (3:3). "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live" (5:25). "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin, is a slave of sin" (8:34). "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, they shall never see death" (8:51). "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains all alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:24) All sayings to which we can readily add our "amen". Right? "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am". Amen! Right?

And then in the Upper Room His startling promise "Truly, truly. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I do!! ... and greater works than these shall they do .. because I go to the Father."

What does Jesus mean by "greater works"? Does He mean "more spectacular works"? What can be more spectacular than feeding a huge crowd with a little lunch? What can be more spectacular than giving sight to a person who has never seen before? What can be more spectacular than calling a man out of the grave? Or, "greater" mean "more"? You will do "more works" than He did because there will be more of you doing my works?

What are these "greater works" Jesus promises? Would you turn to the person next to you and share your opinion? What do you think Jesus means by "greater works"? Notice that Jesus' "truly, truly" is grounded in a "because" clause ... "because I go to the Father". It is not just a "when" clause. It is not just "You shall do greater works than these when I go to the Father". Because. "You shall do greater works than these because I go to the Father". The reason we can build our lives on His promise is because He goes to the Father. The reason He says we can do the "greater works" is because He goes to the Father. "Because I go to the Father". What is He getting at? Two great facts of life. A new reality and a new resource.

First, the new reality. Jesus going to the Father brings into being a new reality. Jesus going to the Father alters the structures of reality. Jesus going to the Father changes the way things go together in the universe. What do I mean? Going to the Father involves a sequence of events. Going to the father involves a crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Going to the Father involves dying on a cross, rising from a grave, and being seated on a throne. Crucifixion, resurrection, ascension. All three. Together. In sequence. Jesus goes to the Father by going to the cross, by coming through the grave, and by being seated on the throne.

Now ... what we need to grasp is that this sequence of events alters the structure of reality. This sequence of events alters the way the universe goes together. That is, reality after the sequence of events is different ... radically different ... from reality before the sequence. The way the universe goes together after the events is different ... than the way the universe went together before the events. In what way? I am glad you asked! In the sequence of events, something happens to sin, evil, and death. Jesus does something to sin, to evil, and to death. He does not just do something about sin, evil, and death. In the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, something objective happens to the enemies of life. Through the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, the stronghold of sin is broken, the authority of evil is broken, the grip of death is broken.

At the cross sin is forgiven. All the punishment justly deserved is taken by Jesus Himself on to Himself. Sin no longer owns us! At the cross evil is faced head on. All the powers of darkness are overcome. They have lost their status as lords. At the cross death is dealt a death blow. At the cross ... before the resurrection. Matthew tells us, Chapter 27, verses 50-52 – “And Jesus cried out again in a loud voice and yielded up His Spirit. And behold, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split; and the tombs were opened, and many of the bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised”. Whoa ... wait just a minute. Did you hear what Matthew is announcing? At the moment Jesus dies tombs were opened! Should Matthew not have said that “at the moment Jesus was raised the tombs were opened”? No. Matthew is declaring what C.S. Lewis called “the deeper magic”. When Jesus who is life already handed Himself over to death, death lost its grip. In the moment Jesus died death’s grip was broken ... it could no longer hold the saints in their tombs. The structures of reality were altered. In His death, death was defeated. Not abolished ... not yet. But defeated. Some of you have heard me quote the Welsh preacher Peter Joshua who loved to say: “When death stung Jesus Christ it stung itself to death”. Death no longer holds the place it once did in the way the universe goes together!

In the empty tomb! reality is altered even more! Jesus’ resurrection is not just the return to life of one individual. Jesus’ resurrection is the emergence of a whole new creation: a new Adam, a new human, the Head of a new human race. On Easter morning, the old order of things died ... and a new order of things begins to emerge. In Jesus’ ascension to the throne reality was altered even more! All the power that sought to destroy us and Him before Good Friday and Easter are now placed under His feet. They are not abolished ... not yet. But they are now under His feet. They are now “subservient powers”. They do not like it ... some fight it. But it is the way it is from now on. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”, says Jesus. Do we believe Him?

Because Jesus has gone to the Father, the structures of reality are different from when He was on earth. Really different. That is why Jesus says to John the Baptist, that although there was no one greater than John in the old order, the one who is least in the Kingdom Jesus has inaugurated is greater than John (Luke 7:28). Something has happened in the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that makes for a very real “before” and “after”. It is wholly appropriate that history should be demarcated B.C. and A.D. ... before Christ ... and *anno domini*, the year of our Lord.

Let me suggest two images, two pictures at this point. One is that of scaffolding around a large building. Because Jesus has gone to the Father, the scaffolding of reality is not what it used to be. the scaffolding of reality after is not what it was before. the scaffolding of sin, death, and evil which held us captive before has been re-configured. Yes, pieces of the scaffolding still exist. But they are no longer assembled the way they once were. The other image, or picture, is that of a web, like a giant spider web. The web is made up of all kinds of strands. Big strands include sin, evil, and death. Because Jesus goes to the Father the way sin, evil, and death are woven into the web has changed. Yes they are still around, and still weave their way into the web. And still cause confusion and pain. But they do not have the place in the web of the universe they once had. Do we believe this?

And what does all this have to do with understanding of Jesus' startling promise about doing His works, doing greater works! Well ... Jesus does His works before His victory; we do His works after His victory. Jesus does His works on the way to the battle; we do His works after the battle is won.

Which is to say: every foe we encounter is a defeated foe. Sin is still a strong foe ... but it is a defeated foe. Evil is still a strong foe ... but it is a defeated foe. Death is still a strong foe ... but it is a defeated foe.

“Because I go to the Father.” Because He does the structures of reality are altered. And, therefore, the works Jesus did before are now able to be done in every greater measure. If His works of release and restoration and recreation were done in the old configuration, think of what can happen in the new configuration. Is this making sense?

But there is more. The second great fact of life results from Jesus going to the Father. There are now new resources in the new reality. Because Jesus goes to the Father, He can now send the Holy Spirit. John, chapter 14, verse 16. “I will ask the Father, and He will send you another Paraclete”. That is what Jesus call the Holy Spirit ... Paraclete. “One called in alongside”. Para – alongside. Cletos – called. Paracletos – one called in alongside. Because Jesus goes to the Father ... because He is now on the throne ... He can send His very life to us. And, says Jesus, when the Paraclete comes, Jesus comes. Indeed, says Jesus, when the Paraclete comes, He and His Father come. “we will come ... we will make our home with you.” (14:23) “He will be with you”, Jesus says. In the new reality we have a new Companion, a new Presence to guide and empower.

And, says Jesus, “He will be in you”. That is the great fact to grasp: “In you”. A reality we keep forgetting. We get so overwhelmed by all that is going on in the world, in the city ... and forget the “in you”. The Holy Spirit, the Animating Force, enables Jesus to do what He does... the very life of Jesus ... “in you”. Because He goes to the Father the way the universe goes together has been changed, and a new resource now dwells in you. “Greater is He who is in you, that he who is in the world”, John tells us (1 John 4:4).

Oh Lord ... how can I put it? Because He is in us everything He is, is in us! Because the Holy Spirit is in us everything the Holy Spirit is, is in us. Awesome! He is strength. He is purity. He is wisdom. He is love. He is victory. He is joy. And all His strength and purity and wisdom and love and victory and joy ... are in us ... in you ... in me. We are strong in His strength. We are

pure in His purity. We are wise in His wisdom. We are loving in His love. We are victorious in His victory. We are joyful in His joy. (see E. Stanley Jones) Now can we say “amen” to Jesus’ “Amen, Amen”? “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I do ... and greater works than these will they do because I go to the Father.” His going to the Father alters the structures of reality; every foe we face is a defeated foe. And His going to the Father enables Him to send the Spirit: we face every defeated foe with inexhaustible resources.

What it all means is this: the greater works which we who believe in Him will do ... the greater work ... is announcing and applying the benefits of His greatest work. I worked on that sentence to get it just right ... so let me repeat it. The greater work is announcing and applying the benefits of His greatest work. The greater work is announcing and applying the benefits of His finished work. The greater work is announcing and applying the blessings of His victory.

N.T. scholar George Beasley-Murray puts it this way: The greater works are “... the actualization of the realities to which the works of Jesus point, (namely) the bestowal of the blessings and powers of the Kingdom of God upon men and women which the death and resurrection of Jesus are to let loose in the world”. (*John*, 255) Isn’t that good? Let me read it again.

So ... on the Day of Pentecost, the Day Jesus sent the Spirit ... one man, Simon Peter, a fisherman, stands up and announces the new reality and new resource ... and 3,000 people come to life in Jesus. 3,000 ... in one day! More than all who came to life during the 3-1/2 years of Jesus’ public ministry. Greater works. And a few days later, Peter and John are going to the Temple to pray. A lame man sticks out his hand ... begging for money. Peter says: “Silver and gold I do not have; but what I have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus the Nazarene, walk!” And the man does! What Peter had ... and what you and I have ... is the benefits of the altered structure and new resources. If you have read the rest of the story as we have it in the book of Acts, it was not all roses. As a result of this great work, Peter is thrown in jail! By the religious establishment. “religion” cannot handle the new reality and new resource. No matter. Peter went on declaring the good news.

And, if you have read the rest of the story, you know that persecution soon came upon the whole church. Institutions caught up in the scaffolding, in the web, cannot handle it when they realize the scaffolding, the web, are being dismantled. “Not to worry,” as we say in Canada. The persecution only served to scatter believers beyond Jerusalem. And within months, cities and towns throughout the ancient Near East, were hearing and experiencing the new reality and new resource. The defeated force tried to stamp out the Gospel, only to send sparks of the Gospel far and wide. Letting loose even more of the power and blessing of Jesus’ reign. Greater works.

And so it has been for 2,000 years. Nothing or no-one is able to rebuild the structures of reality dismantled by Jesus in His death, resurrection, and ascension. Sin, evil, and death keep trying ... and keep losing. Like in Latin America today. 3,000 people an hour coming to confess Jesus as Lord. 3,000 an hour! One new Pentecost every hour! 500,000 new believers since last Sunday! William Carey goes to India and the Gospel is let loose. Slowly but surely life changes for thousands of people. People begin to stop the practices of widow burning, leper burning, killing

the sick. The caste system begins to crumble. People are freed from the oppression of re-incarnation and Karma. Greater works.

Yes, sin, evil and death are still at work. But they keep losing. A missionary family goes to Foo-Chaw, China. The father and mother are killed in a riot. Their four children escape .. each in four different directions. They later find each other .. decide to obtain the best educations possible, and return to China and serve those who killed their parents. Greater works. The only daughter of an Australian widow is killed in that same riot. The widow decides: “since I have no other daughters to give to mission work I will go myself”. And she sets up a school for those who killed her daughter. Greater works. German missionaries go to India. Their only daughter contracts leprosy and dies. The parents respond by setting up the finest leprosy home in the world. Greater works.

Many of us lament the current state of our part of the world. Listen to Jesus again. “Because I go to the Father”. Because He does it does not have to be the way it is. The powers of sin, evil, and death do not have the last word. Injustice does not have to rule. Internet pornography does not have to rule. Drug addiction does not have to rule. Violence does not have to rule. Terrorism does not have to rule. They are defeated foes. They cannot finally stand against the invasion of the Gospel. Through the Paraclete Jesus sets the captives free.

So what do we do ... right now ... in this city and in other cities represented here today? Three things. One, we lean into this new reality. We embrace the fact that the structures of reality have been altered. We say with the NT: the stronghold of sin is broken, the authority of evil is broken, the grip of death is broken. Two, we receive the new resource. We receive the Paraclete. We welcome the Holy Spirit to live with us and in us. And three, we throw our weight on Jesus’ startling promise. We bank on His ability to fulfill His startling promises in the city. We say “amen” to His “Amen, Amen”. “Whoever believes in me will do the works I do ... and greater works than these will they do”... because I go to the Father”.