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Title: Greater Works

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Preaching: Senior Minister Randy Spleth

Scripture: [Ephesians 2:4-10](#)

Text: [John 14:1-6a, 12-16](#)

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I should have thought about it what I was doing. I don't normally act so impulsively but I confess today that I caused some road rage this week. It happened on Tuesday as I was running some of the wedding supplies back to the florist. She works out of a barn north of Noblesville. I was still feeling wonderful about our great weekend.

This might have influenced my judgment. As I was heading back, I got stopped at the light at SR37 and SR38. I pulled up behind a car, just one back from the first in line, waiting for the light to turn green. As I came to a stop I noticed a bumper sticker on the car. "Honk, If You Love Jesus." I love Jesus. So, I did what the bumper sticker said to do. I honked, whereupon the guy driving the car in front of me, raised his hands like this and looked in his rear view mirror to see who was honking. I gave him a smile and waved a big thumbs up and then decided, I'd honk again, because, I really love Jesus. That was a mistake. This time he turned around and red in the face, he waved back at me and mouthed some words. I don't think he was saying "I love Jesus too."

I didn't expect to start a road rage incident and clearly he wasn't expecting anybody to honk. But the way I figure it, if you are going to put your faith on display, you should expect to be watched. Expectations are everything when it comes to people perceptions about our lives as Christians.

Today we are going to talk about what Jesus expects from us and in a word, Jesus expects greatness. He expects great things, great work, even greater work than he himself did. He says, "...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works..." (John 14:12) Now there's an expectation for you. You'll do greater work than Jesus.

You may not be familiar with this expectation and there may be a good reason. It comes from a famous chapter in the gospel of John, the 14th chapter, a passage of scripture that is often quoted. It begins, "Do not let

your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3)

Now you recognize that, don't you? You've heard it read at funerals. You've studied it yourself for comfort. Depending on when you started going to funerals or when you first studied this passage, instead of rooms, you might hear it, in that voice in your head, mansions. I don't like mansion much. It sounds too much like a four car garage with marble fixtures and a big home theater in the basement. The New Revised Version says dwelling place which doesn't do much for me either. When I worked with the homeless in LA, we used to talk about their dwelling places under the bridges and at the parks. Mansions or dwelling places sound like the extreme. I grew up with rooms, "in my father's house there are many rooms." A room sounds okay although every time I check into a hotel and they say, "Sir, your room is ready" it worries me.

If you've studied this passage or have been to a funeral lately, you'll remember that this is also the chapter that has that great I AM phrase. Jesus used a lot of I AM phrases to describe himself. Two weeks ago we studied, "I am the Good Shepherd. In this chapter, Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. (John 14: 6a). It's connected with Jesus promise to prepare a place for you, to get your room ready in heaven.

Jesus shares this with the disciples at his Last Supper. I know we are way past holy week but we are doing just what the disciples must have done once Jesus was resurrected and ascended into heaven. We are thinking about his last words. People do that a lot when someone is gone. You tell me these stories about your last conversation with dad or what your wife said before she passed. Last words are important. There are even books about people's last words.

The gospel of John has a big section of Jesus' last words at his Last Supper and the middle of it is this 14th chapter. Jesus tells them that even though he was about to die, that they shouldn't be troubled; he was preparing them a room. He tells them that he and God are one. But he promises that he won't leave them alone. He is going to send the Holy Spirit. That's what this I AM phrase means and it was a jaw dropping moment for the disciples. Jesus fully reveals his identity to them. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (John 14:18, 26)

Heaven and the Trinity, that's what we've got with these last words. It is one of the most important chapters in the scripture. Good stuff but maybe so good that we miss this expectation that Jesus puts on our shoulders. Right there in the middle of heaven and the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, "You'll do even greater works than I did."

That's a pretty big statement, don't you think? Jesus did some impressive things. He went to a wedding and turned water into wine. How can you top that? He fed five thousand people with few loaves and a couple fish. Anybody here that good with food? Jesus gave sight to the blind, healed the lame, raised the dead. If we take Jesus' statement at face value, does that mean we should do these things...or even greater things? If by greater works he means miracles, all of us are in trouble.

When I was growing up in the south, there were all of these miracle workers on local television and in small communities in Oklahoma and Texas. Tulsa and the Dallas-Fort Worth area, my two places of origin, were pretty much the epicenter of these tent revival miracle workers. One of the most famous pitched his tent all over Oklahoma before he build a university north of Tulsa. It was impressive to see what they were doing but as a kid, I was suspicious of miracle workers who were bald. I mean if I had that power to do miracles, the first thing I'd do would be to take care of my own problem! I'm not saying I don't believe in healing. Rather, I've never known of anybody who could match Jesus. I've never known of anybody who measures up to the works of the Lord, let along do greater things. But this seems to be Jesus' expectation. You will do greater works.

I remember hearing a sermon about this when I was a kid. Our family talked about it in the car on the way home from church. You see, I know about talking about the preacher on the way home from church. We did it too. A preacher named Sloan Gentry, the very preacher who baptized me, preached on miracles. "Why can't we do miracles," I asked. My dad said that Dr. Gentry was saying that we don't have enough faith do the things that Jesus did. I thought about that a long time, that if I had enough faith, I could walk on water. But you know, every time I was at the swimming pool, I sunk like a log. Eventually, his explanation didn't make sense to me. Jesus doesn't say, "if you've got enough faith you can do greater works than me." He says, "You will do greater works."

I think the problem is this. We are so blown away by the power of Jesus that we forgot that His miracles aren't about power but about love. God didn't send Jesus to show us His power. God sent Jesus to show us His love. How many times does Jesus perform a miracle and then say, "Don't tell

anybody, keep it quiet. I don't want people to get the wrong idea." Jesus wasn't about power; he was about love.

That's what the Good News of Jesus is. It's about God's love. We can't duplicate the power of Jesus. I can't walk on water. You can't raise people from the dead. But we can express the love of Jesus. When it comes down to it, Jesus was more committed to expressing His love than showing off his power. Expressing love was the work of Jesus and that's what he means when he says, "You'll do greater works."¹

So, we can't take five loaves of bread and a couple of fish and feed five thousand people. But we can bring canned goods to the food pantry and express the love of the Bread of Life.

We can't cast out the demons of a demoniac but we compassionately care for the troubled and lost, offering the love of the Good Shepherd.

We can't give sight to the blind but we can open the eyes of others to the love of Light of the World.

We can't bring back to life someone who has died but we can introduce someone to the Resurrection and the Life and assure them that Jesus has gone to prepare a room for them.

These are the greater works that Jesus expects us to do. He didn't say, "You'll do greater miracles," he said "greater works" because his work was showing God's love. That is his expectation of us. We can't replicate the powerful acts of God in Jesus Christ, but every time we perform an act of love in his name, we imitate Jesus and I think he looks at us and says, "That's what I mean. Well done, faithful servant."

Just so you don't fall prey to the competitive, 'bigger is better' kind of thinking that is so American, Jesus isn't suggesting that you personally will be the greater. Rather, the "you" is an inclusive pronoun. Jesus is calling us to be instruments of His love to people who need to experience God's love.

It's a matter of scale. When Jesus was here in the flesh He was only able to look into the eyes of one person at a time. He expressed His love individually. But when Jesus ascends to heaven, He doesn't leave us orphaned. He sends his Spirit to abide in us, to live in us, to fill us with His love so we can do His work. Now millions of people go out each morning and if each of them performs one act of love in His name, then that's "greater work" because millions are expressing Christ love.

That's what Jesus expects from us. It is perfectly clear. "I tell you the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works..." (John 14:12)

When we mentor a troubled teenager, we're doing greater works.
When take a stand against discrimination, we're doing greater works.
When we befriend a lonely coworker, we're doing greater works.
When we work the homeless shelter, we're doing greater works.
When we visit the imprisoned, we're doing greater works.

Jesus expects us to do this because this is "His way, His truth, His life." Oh you thought that was about your room in heaven, your mansion, your dwelling place you're going to get. Accepting Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord is not just so that you've got your spot lined up eternally. It's not a real estate deal. Jesus saves you from sin and at the same time, Jesus fills you with His Spirit so that through you, His love might be expressed to all of those people that you meet day in and day out. That's His expectation. Or as Paul puts it, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." (Ephesians 2:10a)

So how are you doing with this expectation? Take an inventory. How'd you do yesterday? What's your plan for tomorrow? Will the love of Jesus be seen in you? What work are you doing that shows that love? That's the challenge, the expectation. It's not just about what you get; it's about what you give, about the work you do.

Let's read it one more time. "...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works..." (John 14:12) Do you believe in him? Is he for you, "the way, the truth and the life?" Then own it, claim it, live it. Express God's love. Find a way, each day, every day, to do, in the name of Jesus, greater work. It's not honking your horn. It is walking your talk and it says, even more loudly, "I love Jesus."

¹ Tony Campolo, "'Doing Greater Things, October 6, 1996 as aired on 30 Good Minutes.