

Good morning everyone, at this time I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to John 14:11-14.

Over the last two weeks we have been looking at the first 11 verses of John 14. When Jesus announced that He would be leaving, His disciples were concerned, understandably. They didn't know where He was going or why He was leaving. His leaving had everything to do with securing a future for them and for all of us. "*I am going,*" Jesus said, "*to prepare a place for you.*" It is through His death, resurrection, and ascension that Jesus has secured our future

But of course the disciples didn't understand this at the time, and so, Thomas asked for clarification: "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*" Jesus responded, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

Jesus said, "*I am the way.*" The way to where? He is the way to God, the way to eternal life, but He's also the way—the example—to follow in the here and now. Jesus said, "*I am the way,*" and this metaphor is married to the invitation He extends to all people: "*Follow Me.*" Jesus invites us to go where He is going, to live as He lives.

To this point in John 14, Jesus has been comforting His disciples in light of His leaving but now the conversation shifts from comfort to preparation. Yes, He was leaving, but the work He had begun—establishing God's kingdom—would continue through His disciples. Here, in vs. 12-14, He begins to tell them how.

*"11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*

When a Founder or a long-time CEO announces they are leaving, it sends shockwaves through the company; transition always produces uncertainty. The first questions people ask are often "*who*" and "*what*". **Who will take over?** Someone from the inside or from the outside? And, **what's going to happen?** Will the new leader remain true to the company's vision? Will the company continue to grow, or will it stall?

The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus—their families, their hometowns, their careers. His leaving signalled the end of what they had been doing, or at least, they thought it did. But Jesus informs them that His work will continue, in fact, He will continue His work—through them.

I've attempted to summarize Jesus' teaching in vs. 12-14 by way of three words. These three words form the outline for my sermon; they are—*Faith, Fruitfulness, and Prayer*.

**1. Faith:** Let's begin by looking at the word "*faith*". This word can be used in a general sense to convey the doctrines of a particular religion; we might speak of the Jewish, Muslim, or Christian *faith*.

But we use this word in other ways. You might say to your friend, “*I have faith in you.*” What we are saying is, “*I am confident that you can do this,*” or more simply, “*I trust you*”.

Vs. 12, “[Trust Me when I say], *whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing*”. It’s important to pause and consider the magnitude of these words, and perhaps it’s helpful to catalogue what it was that Jesus had been doing.

Jesus had been praying, loving, and serving. He had been teaching, leading, and mentoring. But of course, He had been doing other things as well, things that we might place in the category of the miraculous. He had been turning water into wine, walking on water, and delivering people from evil spirits. At times, in His conversations with strangers, He *knew* what people were thinking and feeling without them saying a word. Jesus had also been healing the sick, and on two occasions, He raised the dead to life. “*Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing*”.

I have noticed a pattern in much of the contemporary, western, readings of the Bible; they are often dismissive, or at the very least, reductionistic—vs. 12 is a good example. “*I know that Jesus said that we would do what He had been doing but He couldn’t possibly have meant for the miraculous to continue through us.*” And so we say, “*yes*” to things like praying, loving, and teaching, but “*no*” to deliverance, healing, and words of knowledge.

Our entire faith is dependant upon the supernatural—God becoming human, the Cross addressing the sin of the world, resurrection from the dead, etc. When did we conclude that the miraculous is no longer possible?

We commit a grave error when we reduce Jesus’ words to fit our own experience. The plain reading of vs. 12 suggests that *anyone*—and perhaps *everyone*—who trusts in Jesus can participate in the kind of work He has been doing. I’ll say more about the miraculous when I speak about **Fruitfulness**; for now, let me share an illustration.

**illus:** As some of you know, in the past few years I have been dabbling in woodturning, making furniture, and the like; it’s something that I enjoy immensely. When my supply of wood begins to dwindle, I often look on Craigslist or Facebook Market Place for people advertising free wood—trees that have fallen down that owners want removed.

Earlier this week, a post from a Vancouver owner caught my eye; a large Black Walnut log needed to be removed. I made contact, packed up my gear and went over to take a look but my heart sank when I saw the log. It was massive, easily 500-600 pounds, and it was half buried on its side. The owner was hopeful that I would take it away but it was too big and heavy to manage. I was ready to drive away when I saw a 4x4 wooden post lying on the ground and a few large rocks nearby—then I had an idea.

I grabbed the post and the rocks, constructed a makeshift lever, jamming the post under the log. With the help of the owner, I was able to lift one side, wedge a large rock underneath, allowing me to put my chainsaw to work. Little by little, I began to cut slabs. Part way through I turned off the saw to refill the gas and the oil, and the owner turned to me and asked: *are you a professional logger?*

I laughed out loud and told him that I was a pastor at a local church, and then he laughed out loud, but in that moment I thought of my

Dad. My Dad has the ability to build almost anything and to fix almost anything. If there is something mechanical or construction related that needs to be figured out, my Dad is the man for the job; I've always admired that about him and wished I could do what he does. And it struck me that in that moment, I was doing exactly what he would have done; I'm more like my Dad than I realize.

Jesus is saying something that is both similar and different. Vs. 12 captures what is similar: "*As you put your faith in Me, you will do what I have been doing.*" Vs. 13 and 14 captures what is different: "*I will do whatever you ask in my name... You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*"

I'll say more about this when I speak about **Prayer** but for now I want to simply highlight the relationship between Jesus' work and our work. He hasn't left us to continue His work in our own way, by our own strength. Note what He says, we will do what He has been doing, and yet somehow—as we prayerfully trust Him—it will still be Him doing the work.

Let's move on to talk about **Fruitfulness**.

**2. Fruitfulness:** Let's take another look at vs. 12: "*whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*"

Did you catch that? They (which includes us) will do even **greater** things. Greater than healing the blind, lame, and paralyzed? Greater than walking on water and raising the dead? What did Jesus mean by "greater"?

I want to leave this question for a moment in order to focus on the final clause of vs. 12. These "greater things" are tied to Jesus' departure: "*they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*" In light of the verses that follow in John 14, it's clear that Jesus is referring to His ascension and to the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The work that Jesus invites us into—to do what He has been doing—is impossible apart from the power of God. I can't heal, save, or transform anyone—only God can do this kind of work.

As I said before, we are invited to join in Jesus' work, and through the Holy Spirit's presence and power, Jesus will be working through us to do what only He can do. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He spoke a word of promise to His disciples; in Acts 1:8 we read, "*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

The kind of fruitfulness Jesus promised can only be accomplished by Him, at work in us, through the Holy Spirit. When He spoke about "greater things," Jesus wasn't promising greater miracles—it's pretty hard to top raising someone from the dead. Gary Burge writes, "What is 'greater' is that these works will be done by regular people

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. John 14:16-18; 16:7.

in whom the power of Christ has taken up residence [by the Holy Spirit]”.<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle Paul makes the same point in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*” And again in Ephesians 2:10, “*For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

Apart from a brief time in His childhood, as a refugee, Jesus never left the borders of Israel—His ministry was regional and His followers were few. The disciples did carry on the work of Jesus and in one sense the “greater things” that Jesus promised can be seen in the fruitfulness that accompanied their work.

At the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those first disciples, and Peter’s first sermon resulted in the conversion of 3000 people. Acts 3 and 5 contain accounts of many, many, different miraculous healings and everywhere the disciples went, the message of Jesus spread.

In Acts 8, one of the disciples—Philip—brought the message of Jesus to a particular city in Samaria. Reading now from vs. 6-8, “*When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.*” Philip’s preaching was accompanied with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, which

resulted in the entire city experiencing great joy. Is this not, in part, the “**greater things**” Jesus promised?

Later in the same chapter, Philip met an Ethiopian official and he took the opportunity to speak with him about Christ. The man confessed faith in Jesus and was baptized, and no doubt, brought this faith back with him to his country; Ethiopia remains a Christian country today.

We know from history that the message of Jesus was preached to poor and marginalized; it was also preached to those with power—to Kings and Emperors. What began with Jesus, and a handful of disciples multiplied exponentially; today, 1/3 of the world’s population identifies as Christian. Jesus promised “greater things” and it has surely come to pass.

The plain reading of our text is that *anyone*—and perhaps *everyone*—who trusts in Jesus can participate in the kind of work He has been doing. He is still willing, the question is, are we willing to step out in faith?

**3. Prayer:** In the time remaining I want to address the third word that is central in Jesus’ teaching, namely **Prayer**. Vs. 13 and 14 says, “*I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*”

Generally speaking, the ascension of Jesus points to the consummation of His earthly ministry; with His death and

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<sup>2</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 394.

resurrection, Jesus had accomplished what the Father gave Him to do. But that doesn't mean there's no longer anything for Him to do. As vs. 13 and 14 make plain, Jesus is now at work in response to prayers that are prayed "*in His name*".

**illus:** Years ago, I took a class with Eugene Peterson that was entitled *Jesus and Prayer*. He made the point that since Jesus was fully God, every time someone asked Him a question, or made a request, they were praying even though they didn't know it. When this particular idea first struck Peterson, he decided to do an audit of the Gospels; the goal of the audit was to determine how often Jesus answered the question He was asked, or gave the person what they asked for. After completing the audit, Peterson concluded it was about 10% of the time.

It's a shockingly low percentage, but as you know, interpreting the numbers is every bit as important as gathering them. Based on this 10% number, we might conclude that Jesus doesn't care very much about our needs and concerns. Or we might conclude that He is extremely busy, and so, His attention is elsewhere 90% of the time. But I'd like to offer an alternative interpretation, one that aligns with what Jesus says in our text today.

*"I will do whatever you ask **in my name**... You may ask me for anything **in my name**, and I will do it."*<sup>3</sup> Simply adding, "in Jesus' name" to the end of every prayer doesn't force God to give us what we want. To pray "in Jesus' name" is to pray for things that are in alignment with His character, purposes, and activity.

If you study the Gospels as Peterson did, you will notice that Jesus didn't ignore the people who asked questions; He always engaged them. But He didn't always answer the question they asked, instead, He often answered the question beneath the question, addressing the agenda or issue that was under the surface.

The same can be said of the requests people brought to Jesus. When we ask for the wrong thing, is Jesus obliged to give it? Jesus isn't a vending machine, giving us what we ask, when we ask it. Jesus is a doctor of the soul; He sees and knows what's gone wrong and what we need. At times, because of His wisdom and mercy, He doesn't give us what we ask for, He gives us what will align us to God's plan and purpose.

Just as Jesus brought glory and honour to his Father through His work, we now bring glory and honour to the Father by living, working, and praying in Jesus' name. Our work is meant to be a continuation of His work, our praying is meant to be in alignment with His purposes.

When we put our trust in Jesus, and align ourselves with Jesus—in our working and our praying—we experience the fruitfulness, the "*greater things*," Jesus promised. May Jesus Himself, grant us the grace to trust Him more, to depend on the Spirit's power, and to align with the Father's purposes.

**Prayer**  
**Worship**  
**Benediction**

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<sup>3</sup> Clearly the Apostle John internalized these words because we see a version of them in a letter he wrote later in his life; cf. 1 John 5:14.