

07 May 2023, The 5th Sunday of Easter: John 14:1-14

Jesus says: *the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.*

In John's Gospel Jesus says this after washing the Disciples' feet, a slave's task. Their reaction is confusion and shock, especially since he tells them they should do the same to one another. Then he says they will not just continue his work—a great teacher's followers were expected to carry on—but that they would do greater works than he!

It is right for us to be equally perplexed and astounded. Greater works than Jesus?! Does Jesus mean the Church's mission would become worldwide? Is it about numbers, millions more than the small band 2000 years ago? Perhaps our American pre-occupation with quantity and ostentatious quality is not helpful. The 'greater works' of Jesus' followers are living God's love, mercy, and healing wherever, with whomever we find ourselves, especially where there is evil, want, need, necessity, violence, destruction, and death. Our mission is not so much about words and actions of newsworthy attention but works of simple kindness and goodness which give people life and lead them to trust God and God's presence in them.

Every Sunday we gather to be renewed, reinvigorated, restored to do the greater works of Jesus' mission. We celebrate through Word and Sacrament the abiding, gentle, healing Presence. We are fed through the Scriptures, our common life, and through Jesus' Body and Blood for mission.

Remember: bigger and grander does not necessarily mean better. The side of the boat to which everyone is rushing is rarely the safest. The more flamboyant, attention grabbing, and flashy, perhaps the less the message is about the message and the more it is about those blaring it. We are to follow our Lord's teaching and example in what we share and how we share it, how we live in him and for him in the world. Jesus gives us both the content of the Gospel and the strategies for sharing the Gospel.

Can you imagine a 21st Century marketing expert magically transported back to 1st Century Galilee. The marketer's advice is easily imagined: "Dude! Lose the sandals and homemade tunic! Dump the weird misfits hanging around—they reek of fish! We'll get you a cool, hip entourage. Drop the 'repent for the kingdom of God is at hand' stuff—our research confirms nobody wants it. Don't make the authorities angry, we need photo ops with them. Stop talking about how blessed the poor are, how suffering is to be endured with God's help, and all that nonsense about generosity, forgiveness, and tolerance. We need billboards and social media. And if you say one more time that it's easier to get a Ferrari through a keyhole than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God—you're toast. This ministry needs cash from the rich and hip! Get with it, Jesus, or you'll be just another 'might-have-been!'"

Read the Gospels: Jesus is disarmingly modest. He demands people not talk about his miracles. While he does speak to crowds—once over 5000—more frequently he interacts with smaller groups and individuals, sometimes secretly. He regularly escapes, for prayer and solitude. Even with the big crowds usually his attention is on, his interaction is with individuals, intimately.

We best share God's love one-on-one, in the context of relationship. A phrase I heard years ago reveals the way: Make a friend, be a friend, bring your friend to Christ. It is the most effective, surest, Christ-ordained way of performing the 'greater works' of Jesus. With all but his enemies he neither accuses nor browbeats. Jesus shares God's love gently, personally, invitingly.

He says "ask" in His Name. Ask for what you need to minister for Him. Ask that you be part of the fulfillment of God's mission. Ask for the discernment, strength, and opportunities to be Christ for others. Ask to see Him and love Him in others' lives. Always ask to be a minister of God's loving-kindness, to spouse, family, friends, and strangers. Practice Christian virtue with all, especially with the unloved and unlovable. Be humble, be teachable; yearn to grow in love. Do not worry. Do not wonder if you are worthy or effective. Christ makes you worthy; leave all results to God's wisdom, timetable, and power. Simply, humbly share God's love with everyone and anyone with kind, encouraging words; helpful, healing actions, grace-filled thoughts. Practice mercy, patience, moderation. Be lenient, restrained, forgiving. Be quick to love, make haste to be kind. Do Christ's 'greater works' and your heart will fill with faith and your life with joy.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.