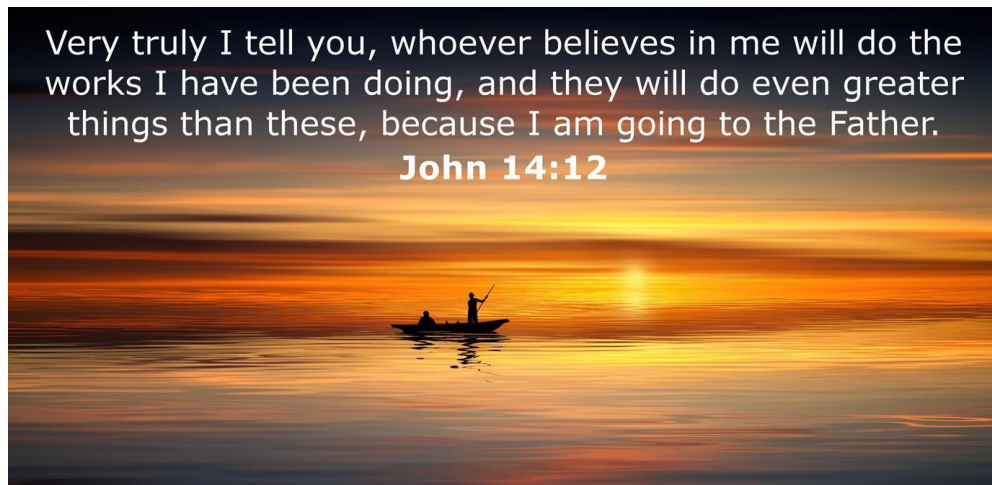


Sermon – May 7, 2023  
“Greater works than these”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: John 14:1-14

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit come, and visit, filling open hearts and anointing the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that continues our transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! We continue in the season of Eastertide, the season between Easter and Pentecost. I would like to thank Brant for filling in last week so that Kay and I could have time to go and be with our grandchildren. As has been shared on Saturday, the Called Annual Conference of Virginia, with 90% of those voting in the affirmative, ratified the votes of the 64 churches and they are considered to be released from the UMC. Be in prayer for the leadership of the UMC and for the leadership of churches and for those many congregations that are discovering through the discernment process that they are not of one mind on the authority of God's Word. Pray all will continue to walk with each other while extending mercy and grace as they seek God's will for the next steps in the places and among the people who gather for worship.

We can have an interesting discussion about the ways the dwelling places in Jesus' Father's house have been translated and interpreted over the centuries. Let me share this morning that however we understand the dwelling places Jesus speaks to in our scripture, those dwelling

places are in heaven; they are in the Father's house. Jesus does not tell us that there *will be* many dwelling places in his Father's house after he goes to prepare them. No, Jesus tells his disciples that there *are* many dwelling places. They are ready. Jesus will go and prepare a place for us. And we will know the place Jesus is going.

When Thomas asks Jesus how we are to know the way, Jesus replies that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. Jesus does not go away to create dwelling places; he goes to make a way to the Father's house where there are many dwelling places. Jesus will leave from this discussion with his disciples and go to the cross, suffer, and die so that we might be redeemed, so that we who believe in him might be reconciled to the Father who so loves us that He gave us his only Son. The Way to the Father is made by Jesus becoming the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, and through his suffering and death, we who were dead in our sin are reconciled to the Father. Jesus is raised from the dead and ascends to heaven. Jesus ascends to heaven in a resurrected body. Jesus is the first human to go to heaven, and Jesus is currently seated in heaven at the right hand of God the Father and will come again and take us to where he is. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus reconciles us to the Father. Through Jesus' death we are given life. Through his death we are able to dwell in heaven. Jesus is both exclusive and inclusive. Jesus is exclusive in that he alone is the Way, the only way. There is no other way to the Father. No other religion has a Savior who, in love, dies so that those who believe in him might live in a reconciled relationship with our Father in heaven. Jesus is inclusive in that he invites, he draws, all people to himself. None is excluded. All are welcome.

Am I the only one who noticed the wind blowing this past week in the Northern Neck? On Wednesday of this week, the trees we can see across the field from the parsonage were being blown around and the wheat in the field was a sea of wind-driven motion with wave after wave of wind turbulence rushing across the field. The Hebrew word for wind and breath is "ruach." Say that with me: "ruach." When Holy Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, we are told there is the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. The Ruach of God comes as the sound of a mighty wind. As I watched the wind moving the trees, I could not help but wonder if the time in prayer we have been spending on Sunday afternoons was stirring Ruach, the breath of God, not to the stirring of trees but to a fresh outpouring of Ruach, the breath of God, into our hearts. I wondered if Holy Spirit was moving just above us in the tops of the trees and might be beginning to stir the hearts

of people whom Jesus is drawing to himself in this place. I wondered if we are close to the breath of God descending on us and blowing fresh into our lives and the people around us. I wonder if the winds of awakening are being stirred and if we need to open our hearts more to receive fresh wind and fire from heaven. The stirring of the wind reminded me that Holy Spirit is given to us and dwells in us. The dwelling of Holy Spirit in us is Christ in us, the Spirit of Christ poured out on us that we might be transformed and empowered to do greater works. In a few minutes we are going to baptize Tim Sorg, and after we pour water on his head for baptism, we will ask for Holy Spirit to be given to him. And as we welcome him into the body of Christ, the Church, with a capital C, will be built up. When Jesus walked the earth, he was filled with the Spirit. Jesus, as one filled with Holy Spirit, was able to heal, to do great works, and to work the signs that are described in John's Gospel. Jesus walked among us as one who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, restored the limbs of the lame, raised the dead, and brought Good News to people. The truth statement in verse 12 of this morning's reading, Amen Amen, "I tell you, 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"<sup>1</sup> is a surprising truth statement where Jesus tells us that we who believe in him are to do greater works than he did when he was on earth. We who believe in Jesus are those who have Christ in us through Holy Spirit. We are part of the body of Christ on earth, a massive body, a body that is now billions of believers strong. As members of Christ's body, we are to ask in Jesus' name in the will of God as we were taught by Jesus' example that we might be those who are doing the works of Jesus right here, right now. Greater works are now to be done and are being done by the massive worldwide body of Christ, greater than what Jesus did alone while he was on earth. Jesus healed where he traveled, healing those brought to him. Today, believers in Jesus are spread out all across the globe, and because we have Christ in us, we are now the body of Christ and are enabled in Jesus' name to do the works he did while he was on earth. As such, we are to be those who heal in Jesus' name and who are bringing the dead to life by sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who have not heard the Good News. We are not to be people who go to a church building on Sunday morning, leave, and then go on about life as if we are no different from the rest of the world. We are to be the Church all week. We are to do the things that Jesus did, and we are able to do them wherever we are because we have Holy Spirit power that connects us to Jesus in heaven. John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard church, after he came to Christ and began to read in his Bible the works Jesus did, one

day went to his pastor and asked him, “When do we do the good stuff?” He had read what Jesus did as he walked the earth—healing, transforming lives, making disciples—and his expectation was that he too as a believer in Jesus, that all believers, should be doing the same things Jesus did. He wanted to see the power of Jesus at work in the lives around him. Wimber’s idea should become our idea. We also should be asking, “When will we head out into this community as those who are filled with Holy Spirit and are praying in Jesus’ name for the greater works to be done through us?” We should be those who are asking this same question, “When will we do the good stuff?” When will we join with the body of Christ, the church universal, the catholic church, to do greater works, the same works Jesus did and promises he will do through us? When will we see a need in our path, stop, and immediately pray over that need in the name of Jesus, asking Jesus to meet that need? When will we go and share the Good News with those we love and those we meet as we are out in our community? Jesus Christ has been lifted up on the cross and is drawing all people to him. Many are being stirred by Holy Spirit but are searching on their own in the wrong places for Jesus. When will we join Jesus in his mission and go out into our community and be the Church, the body of Christ that does greater works? When will we become the body of Christ for the people around us who are searching for a dwelling place in heaven but have no idea about the Way to heaven. Jesus is looking to us, dwelling in us, and empowering us with Holy Spirit to do the greater works of the kingdom of God. Jesus set the example when he was on earth. Will we take the risk and be the Church, taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people?

Last fall I was given a simple prayer, “Help me. Change me. Lead me.” It is a prayer that is to be prayed when we have come to the end of our rope, when our strength has failed, when we understand that without God, we can do nothing. I have come to believe that I am not doing the “greater works” that Jesus asked, no, that he told me in the scripture I would do, that all who believe in him would do. And in that time of recognition and repentance, I have begun to pray, “Help me. Change me. Lead me.” I am not able to do the greater works and need Jesus’ help. I am not who Jesus is asking me to be and need to be changed into the man, my true self, God created me to be so that I might be doing the things Jesus did and is doing through his body, the Church. I am not able to see the path forward to being such a man and need Jesus to lead me on the Way. We as this body of Christ need to ask ourselves, “Are we doing the works Jesus did when he was on earth? Will we join together and confess to Jesus that we are not a church that is

doing the greater works Jesus told us we would do?” We come to church, but we are not yet a church that is doing greater works. Will we humbly repent, turn to Jesus, come before Jesus, and ask him to “help us, change us, and lead us” so that we might be a part of his Church, part of the body of Christ that gathers for worship and then goes out into our community and Jesus does greater works through us? Let me challenge us to turn to Jesus and start praying this simple prayer with hearts open to the movement of Holy Spirit that we might be transformed into a body of Christ that is doing greater works, right here, right now.

*Pray with me. Lord Jesus, we confess that we have too often been to church but have too rarely been the church. Jesus, strengthen us that we might turn to you. Help us, change us, and lead us so that we might become a church that is doing greater works in your name, right here, right now. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> NRSV John 14:12