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Beyond Belief: the Greatness Within

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John 14:12-14

Lately I've been running up against a lot of limits in my life. I can't get to everything I want to do in life. Husband, father, friend, successful, I can't be everything I want to be in life; let alone wanting to go beyond this life and live as a world-changer for Christ. The limits are all around me. And probably in me. Not having time, not taking the time for the really important stuff, missing out on God's best. Limits come from too busy schedules, or lack of emotional energy, or being distracted by less important things that the stuff God would probably love to engage me in. I wind up feeling pretty limited. And I'm not sure how to fix it. Maybe you're there too. And worse, maybe you've resigned yourself to living "smaller" or "lower" than you once hoped for your life. You never dreamed your limits would include having to share your children on 4th of July. You never dreamed your limits would include having to work so hard to supply your family with less that *you* had growing up. You never dreamed your limits would include your own brokenness or frustration or physical dependency on someone else.

But in the reading this week, Jesus got my attention, in John 14. And it reminded me of when I got made fun of as a kid. During a rough time in junior high, when I was in a puppet ministry at a church, some of the kids were teasing me pretty harshly, my sister Marcie led a small Sunday school class. In that class she said these words, which changed my life: **"If you're being yourself and somebody cuts you down, they're not cutting you down, they're cutting God down, because God made you."** Now, there are times when I'm not acting the way God created me, and there are times when I'm not living out God's way, and when someone cuts me down, I can take full credit. But for the rest of the time, they're not cutting me down, they're cutting God down. And from that moment on, for the rest of my life, I've never been alone. It's like having a bodyguard! So as they cut me down, I began to feel sorry for them. I pitied them: they didn't know Who they're messin' with! In 8th grade, I thought "That's really cool...what if the stuff they're talking about at church is REAL?!" What if, I really am a child of the King, made in His image, marred by sin, made again by faith in Jesus Christ, and empowered by His Holy Spirit (that's Christ in me) to be God's ambassador, God's jr. partner, God's agent, God's representative, God's friend, and one that God wants to work through to bring His Kingdom to earth? It sounds crazy...but it makes *so much sense*. I've tried the world's solutions: popularity, power, people-pleasing, and pleasures...

I knew right then where my confidence had to be: in God. I knew right then that if the world had passed me by, it didn't even matter, because God was for me. Who could be against me? (That's in Romans. (You'll be reading it for yourself on June 25th).

What if you start believing that, you start living it, and someone comes back at you with stuff like "How could you think God could use You for His purposes? How could someone with your past, with your specific talents and gifts, with the challenges you face, ever think you could do something great for God? If I were you, I'd start to wonder if God even notices you, let alone cares about you! **And what if that person cutting you down...is YOU, yourself?**

Then you better listen, and listen good, to Jesus' words to His disciples. This is the same day He will be betrayed by Judas. He knew the disciples were going to be scattered, then reunited, then challenged to change the world:

Truly Truly, 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." John 14:12-14

If these are Jesus' words, then we must confess that we've never really taken Jesus seriously. The least we have to confess is that we have been satisfied with far less than he has in mind for us who would be his disciples. So I want to challenge us today, as we are obviously a church full of people who have had rich learning, and great inspiration, and wonderful relationships. I want to challenge you today to claim the promise. If you can't claim it, and most of us don't, really; if you can't claim it, then what I want is that we at least begin to move in the direction of claiming this promise for us and for our ministry.

The dramatic power of the promise becomes more pronounced when we keep in mind who it is that is saying this. It makes a difference who says what. (Lots of people say and write lots of stuff, to be heard, to try to coin a phrase, to be known, to make money. But think about this: these words, these writing came in the 1st century. Neither Jesus, nor any of His disciples, had anything to *gain* in the world by speaking them or recording them. As a matter of fact, they faced persecution and death for them.) Our problem is we stack the Bible up next to People Magazine, and anything else that people write, like it's one choice among many, forgetting the uniqueness of Scripture. It makes a difference who says what.

Do you believe it?... Don't answer too quickly. Do you believe it enough? Do you believe it enough to live beyond your self-imposed limits? Our problem is we trust Jesus with some things some of the time. We need to trust Jesus with all of the things in our life, all of the time. (Even that thing I'm struggling with? Yes.)

If we can trust Jesus with this one, we must realize **you are more than you think you are.** Let me say that again. I believe that is at least a part of what Jesus is saying in that promise. "*Greater things than I have done will you do, because I go to the Father.*" **You are important to God....** In fact, you are an unrepeatable miracle of God. Try to remember Psalm 8:3—5. "*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is humanity that you are mindful of us, that you care for us? You created people a little lower than the angels, and crowned them with glory and honor.*" The *Word* is the authority, not your feelings. Jesus said the hairs on your head are numbered. Not a sparrow falls to the earth, that God doesn't take note of it; and you, you're more valuable than sparrows. That's what the book says! You are important to God. And that means there is a place in God's heart, that only you can fill. You see, God loves each one of you, as if each one of you were the only person in the world to love. Had there been no other person in the world, God would have still sent his only begotten Son to save you. So will you be open to the promise of greater things? You're more than you think you are.

There is a prayer that has come out of the Roman Catholic church's quietness movement. They suggest that you pray it every day. The prayer is this: "*O God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful it is.*" Isn't that good? "O God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful it is." You are important to God, and you are more than you think you are.

Now a second truth. **There is something you can be, but will never be apart from Jesus Christ.** 2 days ago I heard LeAnn Thieman's (Tee-man's) story. Her life changed forever in the '70s when she bought a dozen cupcakes at a bake sale in Iowa to support the war orphans in Vietnam. She got involved. She was going to fly to Vietnam and bring back 6 babies for adoption. But when she got there, the Vietcong army was approaching Saigon, and hundreds of orphans had been brought in to her orphanage for rescue. While looking for supplies, she came across a box of supplies from Iowa, and was blown away to see her handwriting on it. (What you give to and through the church goes further and does more than you know, when you do it in a way for God to get ahold of it). LeAnn learned God had bigger plans, scarier plans than escorting 6 babies to the US. She ended up helping to rescue 300 babies in 1975 in what was called Operation Babylift. She says she was just an ordinary person who said "yes" and ended up in extraordinary circumstances, doing what was right.

LeAnn said have courage—you've been given a few puzzle pieces to put together and you don't see how anything in your life fits, whether it's anonymous volunteering like giving \$ for mosquito nets, or the really difficult times. But God has the puzzle box top, and can see how each of us fits, if we'll do our part.

You are more than you think you are. There is something you can be, but will *never* be apart from Jesus Christ.

And **the source of power** to do greater things than Jesus did is found in verses 13 and 14 "*Whatever you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified through the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it.*" He says the same thing twice. Let the impact of that settle in our minds. He didn't say "Ask anything in my name and I just might do it; or ask anything in my name and I'll probably do it; he didn't say "Ask, and there's a good chance, that you'll get what you ask. He was very clear. Whatever you ask in my name and I will do it.

But, it's more than tacking "in Jesus' name" on the end of your prayer. Probably our biggest problem in going for greater things is we don't spend *enough* time on our knees, so we never even *get* to asking "in His name". When we are close to God in prayer, we receive more and more of a picture of what it's supposed to look like. We are more in touch with God's Holy Spirit in us, and how God wants to work through us. We can begin to operate by the Chief's authority, because more and more the Chief's mind is open to us, as we conform our minds to Christ. And God wants to share that blessing. God speaks the universe. God's Son is the Logos, the Word. In prayer, God speaks about what He wants done, in our lives, and in the world.

The problem is I focus on what little I know, and I miss what God thinks is great. And Jesus has said "*You will do the things that I do, and even greater things, because I go to the Father.*" Jesus empowered the church. And the United Methodist Church feeds over 1,000,000 children every day. What would it take to make it 1.5?

This week, I challenge you: For some, put your faith in Christ. For all of us, attempt something besides being busy. Keep on with the little things knowing God sees the whole puzzle. And for some, attempt something *so* great, *so* demanding, so Kingdom-like, so limit-breaking, that you know you will fail, unless you received the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Imagine a community where everyone was doing greater things than Jesus has done, because they choose to believe think of themselves and those around them without the prison of *self-imposed* limits? You're the vessel of God's Holy Spirit! There's something you can be but will never be apart from Jesus Christ. You were meant to live beyond limits for Him. Let us pray: "Jesus, some of us don't really believe we are as much as you say we are. So I pray you'll help us to see just how much you've done, and how much more we can do with you. Thank you that we were meant to live and serve you beyond any limits we've known thus far."

STUDY GUIDE

John 18-21, Acts 1

John now reports the all-too-familiar story, adding special insights:

Monday: Read John 18. Jesus Arrested & Tried. Jesus Arrested (1-11). A mob led by Judas arrests Jesus, who negotiates the release of His disciples. Peter strikes, but only cuts off the ear of a guard. When have you had a better way to deal with things than Jesus? What happened? Jesus on Trial (12-27). Jesus is taken at night to various leaders, and Peter is accused, denying any relationship with Jesus. The high priest questions Jesus' teachings. Jesus denies doing anything 'in secret.' (19-21). How does the story of Peter both humble & encourage you? When have you felt like Peter? Jesus Before Pilate (28-40). Interesting that both Peter and Pilate caved in under pressure. Why do we tend to scorn Pilate but honor Peter? How does Barabbas' release at Christ's expense illustrate the whole point of the Gospel?

Tuesday: Read John 19. Jesus Sentenced, Crucified, & Buried. The Sentence is Passed (1-16). John reveals the angry Jews shout "Crucify Him" because He claimed to be the Son of God (7). When have you made a decision based on fear & ambition, rather than on what is right? How do you feel about it now? The Crucifixion & Death (17-37). Which assassinations affected you most? If Jesus preached the same Gospel

today, who might the chief priests, the Peters, the Pilates be now? Who would you be? How would you explain the crucifixion to someone who really wanted to understand? How did the meaning of Jesus' death become real to you? The Burial (38-42). How does your fear of others and your love of Jesus sometimes conflict? In spite of past failures, what will you do this week to show *your* love for Jesus?

Wednesday: Read John 20. The Empty Tomb & the First Appearances. The Empty Tomb (1-9). John is with Peter when the two run to the garden tomb after Mary reports the stone is rolled away. What is the evidence you rely on most that Jesus rose from the dead? Jesus Appears! (10-31). Christ performs the ultimate miracle. Jesus asks Mary "Why are you crying?" and she doesn't recognize Jesus. What do *you* cry for? Have you ever been blinded by your own tears? How has Jesus spoken your name in a time of grief? Then Jesus appears to the disciples and Thomas, saying to them "Peace." Where could you use peace today? What doubts or questions about God are you struggling with?

Thursday: Read John 21. Jesus, the Catch, & Peter's Squirming. the Miracle Catch of Fish (1-14). Jesus now meets 7 of the disciples who have gone fishing, including a meal with them on the shore. Where do you go to get away from it all? How does God meet you there? Jesus Reinstates Peter (15-25). Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Now Jesus asks him 3 times "Do you love me?" and Peter answers "Yes." Isn't it good to know that our weaknesses don't have to disqualify us from serving God? Then Jesus speaks of Peter's death. Peter squirms and asks about John. Jesus says "What is that to you? You must follow me!" (22). What a truth! How do you try to 'pass the buck' when it comes to being Jesus' disciple? Do you struggle with 'the comparison game' (which is self-torture)? Who do you know that needs to feel forgiven by God? By you?

If you were writing a book about Jesus' work in your life, what would be some of the chapter titles? What has been 'brought to light' for you by reading through John?

Acts 1

Whew! We've made it through the 4 Gospels, though we're not done with the readings of the Gospel writers. Acts was written by Luke, who now portrays the emerging of the new Christian community. Acts was written around 60+A.D. The theme is summed up in 1:8, the spread of the Gospel to all the known world: the early church is forming & growing!

Friday: Read Acts 1. Jesus Taken Up to Heaven & the Disciples. Introduction (1-5). Immediately Luke mentions the theme of "the Holy Spirit" (5). The disciples are to wait in Jerusalem for His "baptism," which marks the beginning of the Church. It still amazes me that no one could officially "prove" Jesus' resurrection was a hoax. That they remained in Jerusalem is one of the most solid evidences of the truth of the resurrection. Power for Ministry (6-11). Jesus talks about His earthly kingdom, though there is no date, nor time; only the mission: "you will receive power...and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth." (8). A 12th Apostle is Chosen (12-26). What has been your best experiences in group prayer? What is your pattern of decision-making? Does this account compare? Which ingredients do you need to utilize more?