

Easter 05 A 2017  
May 14, 2017 :: John 14: 1-14  
Fr. Jim Cook

## “*The Greater Works.*”

When I was a very young Christian, I was willing to accept whatever Jesus is reported to have said at face value; kind of like those bumper stickers that say:

“God said it. I believe it. That settles it.”

But I’ve got to tell you that what Jesus said in our gospel reading this morning really challenges all that. For when I read how Jesus said

“Very 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”

when I read these words, my assumption is that the *followers* of Jesus should, at the very least, be able to reproduce the *miracles* of Jesus, if not, in fact, do “greater works.”

But generally speaking, and over the years, I have *not* found that to be the case. Oh, I’ve heard the usual *stories*, and I’ve even seen some unusual *things*, but none of them have been all that persuasive, or entirely free of alternative explanations.

So, I was left wondering what Jesus might have had in mind, with those words in our gospel reading, until I came across this true story, written by the popular Evangelical teacher and preacher, Tony Campolo. I’ll paraphrase it for you.

I was in Haiti, checking up on the missionary work we were doing there, which included maintaining 75 small schools back in the hills of Haiti. On my last evening there, I returned by taxi to the Holiday Inn where I always stayed before flying home.

As I left the taxi and was walking to the entrance of the Holiday Inn, I was met by three girls, the oldest of whom couldn't have been more than 15.

One of the girls said to me, "Mister, for \$10 I'll do anything you want me to do. And I'll do it all night long. Do you know what I mean?"

I did know what she meant. I thought for a few moments, and then turned to the next girl and I said, "What about you, can I get the same deal with you?" She said yes.

I asked the same of the third girl. She tried to mask her contempt for me with a smile, but it's hard to look sexy when you're 15 and hungry. But she agreed. So, I gave them my room number, and told them all to be there in ten minutes.

I rushed up to my room, and immediately called the front desk and told them I wanted every Walt Disney video they had. Then, I called down to the restaurant and ordered four of their biggest banana splits, with extra ice cream, extra *everything*, and I wanted them delivered to my room right away.

And then, at about the same time, the three girls arrived, and the banana splits arrived, and the videos arrived. And the four of us sat on the edge of the bed, watching the videos, and eating the ice cream, and we laughed until about one in the morning. That's when the last of them fell asleep, sprawled across the bed.

And as I watched those little girls sleeping, I thought to myself, "Nothing's changed. Nothing's *really* changed. Tomorrow they'll be back on the streets selling their little bodies to dirty, filthy johns because there will always be dirty, filthy johns who, for a few dollars, will destroy little girls. Nothing's changed."

I didn't know enough of their language to talk to them about God or faith, but I felt God's Spirit telling me: "But for one night, Tony, for one night you let them be little girls again."

The end.

Okay, first things first. At the same time, that is not only an extraordinary story, but it's also a horrifying story. It was arguably a foolhardy thing for Campolo to do. I mean, things could have gone wrong for him in so many ways. And it's a *lousy* model for outreach ministry. And I'm sure his wife wanted to shoot him when she heard him tell that story for the first time.

But I do think that it's also a story that illustrates what can happen when someone — seriously and honestly — asks "What would Jesus do in a similar situation?"

Now, in light of what Jesus said in our gospel reading — you remember, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these — you may be wondering if I'm suggesting that what Campolo did was equal to or greater than anything Jesus ever did. To be honest, I don't know. But I *am* convinced of this: If Jesus had to decide which was the greater work — healing the sick, or giving one night of childhood back to three little girls, who had it robbed from them — I think I know which Jesus would choose.

Here's the thing. It's easy, when we read the gospels, to be really impressed with the miracles that Jesus performed. And so much so that we forget that the miracles Jesus performed, really weren't about *power*, as much as they were about *love*; they were all about *demonstrating* how much God loves us. I mean, think about how many times Jesus did something really miraculous for someone, and then he tells that same person, "Don't say a word about this to anyone; I don't want people to get the wrong idea."

You see, I think one of the basic messages of scripture is that, whenever God breaks into human history — and especially when God became human in Jesus — it was never about trying to impress us with his power, but simply to show his love for us.

And maybe that's where the good news is located in our gospel reading this morning. I mean, even though we can't possibly replicate the powerful acts of God in Christ, nevertheless,

every time we welcome someone who is different,

every time we can find a way to joyfully agree to disagree,

every time we perform an act of love in the name of Jesus,

or every time we let our "light so shine before men,"

we are imitating Jesus. Because, in the end, the "greater works" that I think Jesus was talking about in our gospel reading, are always going to be

works of compassion,

and works of love,

and works of forgiveness,

works and patience.

And whenever we do these sorts of works, Jesus says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Well done."

Amen.