Since the beginning of John 14, Jesus has been comforting the disciples who are distressed by the news that Jesus is going away. As far as they are concerned, the absence of Jesus means the end of His profound impact upon their lives. No longer will they be able to feel secure in His presence. No longer will they learn from His brilliance. No longer will they be carried along by the power of God working through Jesus. Quite naturally, the disciples lament that the absence of Jesus will mark the end of their friendship. But Jesus knows something the disciples do not know. Jesus knows that the cross and the resurrection and His ascension to the Father will ultimately empower the disciples and deepen their relationship beyond anything the disciples could hope or imagine. Thus, Jesus states, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” Believing…placing their absolute confidence in Jesus at the very moment that all seems lost…is exactly what is needed at this moment.

Last week we heard Jesus say again to Philip in 14:11, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” Jesus doubles down on His call for belief, appealing to the years they have spent together and all they have witnessed as the evidence that Jesus and the Father are one. This morning Jesus will provide even greater assurance that His imminent departure will actually be the best thing that could ever happen for those who believe. Let’s pick up the conversation as we read John 14:12-14:

12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

The title of my message is The Rising Tide, and it falls under three subheadings: 1) Greater Things; 2) Asking in the Name; and 3) The Rising Tide.

I. Greater Things
I want to begin this morning by telling you a quick story. Many years ago when I was serving at First Presbyterian Church on Hilton Head Island, I was on my way to perform a wedding on Daufuskie Island. Some of you might know that Daufuskie Island is a small island directly across from Hilton Head Island, and the only way to get to Daufuskie Island is to take the ferry...or, in my case, to take my boat! So, on this particular day, I’m driving my boat to Daufuskie Island to perform a wedding, and I’m cutting through a winding creek that led from the May River over to Daufuskie. I was not particularly familiar with that creek, and I was in a hurry, which explains what happened next. As I was running full tilt down the center of the creek, my 19’ center console ran right into a submerged sand bar. I had been travelling at 40 mph, and in less than two seconds, I was at a complete standstill. Needless to say, that was a less-than-pleasant experience! I bruised my ribs and knees against the steering console, but worse than that pain was the realization that I was utterly stranded on that sand bar. There was zero chance of getting unstuck, and the wedding was set to take place in 30 minutes. I was still a mile from Daufuskie, my cell phone had no signal, and I was all alone...there was not another boat in sight and this was remote creek far off the beaten path. You see, what I had failed to anticipate was the tide. In my haste, I failed to take into consideration that the tide was ebbing out...which means that even though I could see water in the creek, I had no idea how much
water was there. Sadly, for me, there was not enough water for me to get to where I needed to go. So, there I was…I had a fully functioning boat, but not enough water to make it go anywhere. I was stuck, and in desperate need of a miracle. OK, I’m going to leave you hanging there for a bit, but I’ll tell you what happened and how that is at all relevant here in just a minute.

As we return to John 14, the disciples in the upper room are experiencing the sudden shock of going from 40 mph to zero in less than 2 seconds! They had come to this dinner with high spirits and the anticipation of a wonderful evening together. They had recently had an amazing experience when Jesus entered into Jerusalem to the songs and cheers of hundreds who cried out, “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” Things had been generally going along quite well. However, following the meal, Jesus reveals that He is going away, and where He is going, they cannot follow. It would seem that all forward progress has come to an abrupt halt. Surely the movement they had given their lives to will die. The fellowship will be broken. No doubt the disciples are worried, confused, and probably hurt to some degree.

Jesus, however, does not seem to be particularly worried at this moment. He tells them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” After giving them several reasons to be hopeful, Jesus turns to them with that very serious look of His and He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you…” He employs that phrase that He often used when He wanted His apprentices to pay particular attention, and He says, “Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do…"

Now, if you were a disciple of Jesus sitting in the upper room that night, how does that line strike you? Dubious, right? Jesus did works that no mere mortal would ever imagine doing. Jesus healed people; Jesus made the blind to see; Jesus raised the dead. But even more dubious is this unthinkable notion that as a believing disciple, I might actually do greater things than Jesus! Are you kidding me? Is that what Jesus is actually saying here…that as a believing disciple, I will actually do greater things than Jesus? Well…yes, but there is much to consider here.

First of all, we need to read the rest of the sentence. Jesus said, “Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater things will he do because I am going to the Father.” Herein is the main thrust of the passage: because Jesus is going to the Father, something new is about to take place. Because Jesus is going to the Father, those who believe in Him will do the works that Jesus has been doing; and they will do even greater things! (By the way, I am not using the term “greater WORKS” because the word “works” is not in the Greek. The better translation would be “greater things.”).

Now, it is common for us to think of the “works” that Jesus did as those supernatural signs and wonders such as healing, exorcism, and raising the dead, for example. Are these the “works” that Jesus is suggesting that believers will do because He is going to the Father? Well…possibly. We know the Holy Spirit empowered Paul and Peter to do some extraordinary signs and wonders, and even to this day we know that the Holy Spirit will often accomplish the miraculous works of Jesus through ordinary disciples. Many of us have stories to tell of miraculous works that we have seen and experienced.
However, I think there is a simpler, more obvious notion that we should not overlook. Jesus said, “The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do.” This is a basic tenet of discipleship. If we believe Jesus, then as His apprentices, it stands to reason that we will do those things that we see Jesus doing. Jesus ate with sinners; we will eat with sinners. Jesus was generous to the poor; we will be generous to the poor. Jesus was gracious to those who opposed Him; we will be gracious to those who oppose us. Jesus relied upon prayer; we will rely upon prayer. One of the great criticisms of Christianity comes from the observation that too many church goers do not live according to what they believe. That is inaccurate. The truth is: we all live according to what we believe! In fact, what we believe is revealed by what we do. If people claiming to be Christian blatantly live in a way that is contrary to the teachings of Jesus, it is because they do not actually believe the teachings of Jesus. This is precisely what Jesus just said: “Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do.” There is no category in the NT for those who believe in Jesus but then live completely contrary to the way that Jesus lived.
Believing leads to doing. If there is no doing, there is apparently no genuine believing. As Dallas Willard famously wrote: to believe something is true is to act as though it is so. If we believe in Jesus, we will do the works that we see Jesus doing.

Now, doing of the works of Jesus is only possible BECAUSE Jesus died, rose again, and ascended to the Father. Apart from the power of Christ made manifest in and through us, believers could never do the works that Jesus did. However, because Jesus goes to the Father, those who believe will also do the works. That is not a suggestion or a wish dream…Jesus states it as a matter of fact. Believers will do the works…they just will.

OK, one more point here and we’ll move on. I think we all know that even if I did the miraculous works of Jesus…even if I healed the sick, raised the dead, and walked on water, I would not be performing greater things than Jesus, right? So, what did Jesus mean when He predicted that the believers would do even greater things? To grasp the significance of what Jesus is saying here, I must once again appeal to my favorite old guy, Alexander Maclaren, who brings much needed light to this saying of Christ. Referring to the “greater things” Maclaren writes:
We need not be afraid that such great words as these in any measure trench on the unique and unapproachable character of the earthly work of Christ in its two aspects--Revelation and Redemption. These are finished, and need no copy, no repetition, no perpetuation, until the end of time. But the work of objective Revelation, which was completed when He ascended, and the work of Redemption which was finished when He rose-these require to be applied through the ages. And it is in regard to the application of the finished work of Christ to the actual accomplishment of its contemplated consequences, that the comparison is drawn between the limited sphere and the small results of Christ’s work upon earth, and the worldwide sweep and majestic magnitude of the results of the application of that work by His servants’ witnessing work.

Do you see the picture Maclaren painted for us? Jesus accomplished what no other person on planet earth could ever accomplish: He revealed the Father fully and perfectly…that is the “objective Revelation” Maclaren mentioned, and that perfect, objective revelation of the Father is accomplished. No one will ever again need to reveal the Father…that work is finished. Secondly, Jesus accomplished Redemption for all mankind through His atoning death on the cross and His resurrection. Again, no one else will ever have to satisfy God’s justice on our behalf. No one will have to defeat death on our behalf. Jesus did that work…and only Jesus, and that work is also finished! It never has to be repeated.
Now, the work that remains is for the Church to apply the finished work of Jesus in every age until He comes again, and we will do so through the empowerment of Jesus through the agency of His Holy Spirit. This is clearly what Jesus is pointing when He says, “and even greater things will the believer do because I am going to the Father…”

Think about this for a minute Church: When Jesus walked the earth, He did not have the good news of the Gospel as a tool to draw upon. According to His own testimony, Jesus came to fulfill the law; He came to reveal the TRUTH about the Father; He came to warn us of the very serious predicament of our sinful condition; He came to train up a group of disciples who would carry on His redemptive ministry after He departed; but in the end, Jesus ultimately came to die and give His life as a ransom for many! Even though His teaching was brilliant, even though He performed many miracles that blessed hundreds of people, Jesus accrued only a few hundred believers by the end of His ministry…maybe 500 souls. But let us not forget: Jesus could not proclaim the redemption of God until the act of redemption was first accomplished on the cross and the victory claimed at the empty tomb.

This is the point Jesus is now making to His fearful disciples. It is only in His going to the cross, rising again, and ascending to the Father that the believers will be equipped with the life changing, culture-transforming, world shifting Truth of the Gospel and the unmatched power of the Holy Spirit! It is only when Jesus rises and conquers death and ascends to the Father that the Church will be empowered to proclaim, “Your sins have been forgiven by the One who died in your place! Repent, believe, and be saved!” Herein is the “greater thing!” Because Jesus is going to the Father, the Church will be given the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and in a matter of years the number of believing souls would grow from 500, to 500 million to 2.5 billion! Jesus wasn’t wrong…greater things are being accomplished even to this day because Jesus went to the cross, rose again, and ascended to the Father…thanks be to God!

II. Asking In the Name

Now, in addition to predicting the works and greater things the disciples would accomplish once Jesus went to the Father, Jesus makes another promise. Again, because Jesus is going to the Father, He promises in vss. 13-14, “13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Church, I know this is a HUGE subject that raises many questions. But let us take a deep breath and first give careful consideration to what Jesus just said.

First of all, let us acknowledge that those who believe in Jesus will behave like Jesus, and that means that we will PRAY like Jesus, right? And notice, because Jesus is going to the Father, the disciples are invited to pray…to ask…“in my name”…and Jesus promises, “Whatever you ask in my name…if you ask ME anything in my name…I will do it.”

Now, I know I don’t need to say this, but I’ll say it anyways: Jesus is clearly NOT signing a blank check and handing it to the church, right? I think we all know that Jesus was not making a personal guarantee that we could have whatever our hearts desired, no matter how selfish or inappropriate, by simply tagging on to the end of our greedy prayer, “in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.” Lord have mercy…the cruelest thing Jesus could ever do is to grant us everything that
we think we want and need! Thanks to the movie *Bruce Almighty*, I think we have a pretty good idea of how that would go!

So let us consider what Jesus IS saying here. First of all, what does it mean to “pray in His name?” Arthur Pink makes three observations here that are quite helpful:

1) **We pray in His person.** To pray in the name of Jesus is to stand in His place, as fully identified with Him. When we truly ask in the name of Christ, He is the true petitioner. Maclaren agrees and expounds on this notion: Christ’s name is the revelation of His character, and to do a thing in the name of another person is to do it as His representative, and as realizing that in some deep and real sense—we are one with Him. And it is when we know ourselves to be united to Christ and one with Him, and representative in a true fashion of Himself, as well as when, in humble reliance on His work for us and His loving heart, we draw near, that our prayer has power to move the Hand that moves the world, and to bring down a rush of blessing upon our heads.

2) Secondly, to pray in His name means that **We plead before God the merits of His Son.** Pink writes: When men use another’s name as the authority of their approach or the ground of their appeal, the one of whom the request is made looks beyond him who presented the petition to the one for whose sake he grants the request. So, in all reverence, we may say, when we truly ask in the name of Christ, the Father looks past us, and sees the Son as the real suppliant.

3) Third, to pray in His name means that **We pray only for that which is according to HIS perfect wisdom and what will be for HIS glory.** To pray in Christ’s name is to seek what He seeks, to promote what He has at heart.

I know that’s some pretty heady stuff, but let’s think about how we pray for just a moment, because these observations actually make perfect sense.

First of all, if we are going to pray in Jesus’ name, I think it’s fair to assume that we should first know Jesus and be known BY Jesus, right? One should not lightly invoke the name of Jesus in his prayers if he does not even know Christ…that would be a mistake. Remember the sons of Sceva in Acts 19? Seven sons of the Jewish High Priest named Sceva thought they could cast out a demon “by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” That did not turn out well for those men! The demon mocked them and then gave them a sound whooping which led to them fleeing the house naked and wounded! If we are going to pray in the name of Jesus, we must be prepared to stand in His place and be fully identified with Him…as one who belongs to Jesus, one saved by Jesus, one loved by Jesus, and one claimed by Jesus. The privilege of praying in His name was given to BELIEVERS; it is a gift from the Bridegroom to His Bride. There is an intimacy that is assumed between the one who is praying and the Name by which the prayer is lifted up, and that is only reasonable and appropriate, right?

It is also reasonable to acknowledge that when we pray in Jesus’ name, we are invoking the only mediator between God and man. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5: For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The writer of Hebrews presents Jesus as our high priest. The High Priest enters into the Holy of Holies as our representative. Even more so, Jesus is the Paschal Lamb, the singular atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. So, we make our appeal based upon HIS merit, not ours. We cast out the evil from our homes by His authority, not our authority. We pray for deliverance from our addictions based on HIS victory.
over the Evil One, not our best efforts or good intentions. We pray for our salvation in Jesus’ name because our salvation is based upon His finished work on the cross, not our promises to do better.

Finally, to pray for something in Jesus’ name is to hand the prayer over to Jesus and walk away with empty hands. We cannot at one and the same time pray for something in Jesus’ name and then hold on to that thing in case Jesus doesn’t give us the answer that we desire. To pray in Jesus’ name is to hand over our request and fully submit to His will according to His perfect judgement. It is to yield to whatever affords Him the glory that He is due. It is to trust Jesus with absolute confidence that His heart and His purposes are perfectly trustworthy, regardless of the outcome of our request or the way it makes us feel.

Do not take this invitation to pray in the name of Jesus lightly…it is a weighty and serious thing. Maclaren writes:

Prayer in the name of Christ is hard to offer. It needs much discipline and watchfulness; it excludes all self-will and selfishness. And, if the end of the Son’s working is the glory of the Father, that same end, and not our own ease or comfort, must be the end and object of all prayer which is offered in His name. When we so pray, we get an answer.

III. The Rising Tide

OK, I know you are eager to hear how my story turned out. Well…let me first tell you…this day that I got stuck in Bull Creek was not the first time that I had run my boat aground on a sand bar near Hilton Head Island. Sadly, I had that experience on a few occasions the first few years that I lived there, and here’s how that typically played out. I would sit there for hours and hours waiting for the tide to turn. The most depressing part of that scenario is that for the first two to three hours, the situation would actually get worse. The water would keep ebbing out until my perfectly good boat was just lying there in the mud. I would literally get out and walk around, looking at sea shells, trying to find anything interesting to do until the water returned. I’m talking at least 4-6 hours before you could even think of getting the boat unstuck.

So, on the day I got stuck in Bull Creek, on my way to perform a wedding on Daufuskie Island, I was in a sheer panic. I raced through every option in my mind, but I quickly understood that I had no options. I couldn’t swim there; I couldn’t call for help; I couldn’t get my boat unstuck; and it was going to be at least 6 hours before there was any hope of moving from the place where I was stranded.

So, I did what any desperate pastor does in that situation…I complained to God! I may have said some things that I’m not proud of…I’m pretty sure that I did. But my complaining didn’t last long before I sensed the Holy Spirit say, “Be quiet and listen.” So, for the next 5 or 10 minutes, I just sat there and listened. It was then that I began to pray in earnest, repenting for my stupidity and simply acknowledging that whatever God wanted to do in this situation was perfectly acceptable. I was at fault, not God, but I asked the LORD, in Jesus’ name, to turn that situation into one that would bring Him glory. I admitted that I had no idea how that could possibly work out for His glory, but I was releasing my fear, anger, and frustration into His nail-pierced hands. I then felt a peace settle over me, and I realized that all around me it was absolutely beautiful. Yes I was going to miss the wedding, and people were going to be a bit angry, and I actually
couldn’t even imagine how that was going to turn out, but I was trusting God. I was in the process of thanking God for the beauty of His creation when out of the blue—literally out of nowhere, a beautiful young lady came flying up to my boat on a jet ski and asked me if I was OK and if I needed a ride! I kid you not, I have no idea where she came from. One moment there was no one around for as far as I could see, and the next moment she was there. So…I grabbed my garment bag with my suit in it, jumped on the back of her jet ski, and I made it to the wedding with 5 minutes to spare! Once the wedding and reception was over, I called my best friend Chris Sanders to come and get me with his boat, and by the time we got to my boat, the tide had returned and my boat was floating freely (thankfully God gave me enough sense to throw in an anchor before I left the boat!). Now…why did I tell you that story? Well…old man Maclaren brought it to mind when I read this final quote on this passage, and I think you’ll see what I mean when I read it to you. Maclaren writes:

Trust yourselves to Christ, and let your desires be stilled, to listen to His voice in you, and let that voice speak. Then we shall be lifted above ourselves, and strength will flow into us, and we shall be able to say, “I can do all things through Christ that dwells in me and makes me strong.” And just as glad, sunny waters of the incoming tide fill the empty places of some oozzy harbour, where all the ships are lying as if dead, and the mud is festering in the sunshine, so into the slimy emptiness of our corrupt hearts there will pour the flashing sunlit wave, the ever fresh rush of His power; and everything will live withersoever it cometh, and we shall be able to say with all humility, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me…because the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.”

Church, we are all likely to run up on a sandbar in this life that will absolutely stop us from going anywhere else. I can’t help but reflect on how often our lives are like a fully equipped boat with a wonderful motor that is lying as if dead on the mud, surrounded by the slimy emptiness of our corrupted hearts.

And, I suspect that many of our prayers, as illustrated in my story, are usually prompted by desperation that results from our own sinful choices, and even so, God has been faithful to rescue us time and again, as is His nature. But here is the picture that so moves my heart: Jesus went to the cross and conquered death and rose again and ascended to the Father to send us the RISING TIDE! He offers us not only the occasional rescue, but the “sunny waters of the incoming tide to fill the empty places”, to lift us off the mud in order that we might GO, that we might flourish and move according to the currents of His will. This is the life that is found in Christ and sustained by prayer in His Name! As we seek Him in prayer, as we move in His power, He provides us the gift of being able to use the boat that God has given us, buoyed and empowered by Him and for Him through the presence of the Holy Spirit. I can tell you from personal experience, there is a qualitative difference between sitting in a boat that is grounded in the mud compared to sitting in a boat that is gliding along the sunlit waters on the rising tide!

Church, let us indeed trust ourselves to Christ. Let us not grumble at God. Instead, may we be still, and listen. Then, as we ask in His name, let us do so with humility and total surrender to His perfect will. I can tell you with certainty…our prayers will be heard, and our prayers will be answered…and the Father will be glorified. Amen? Let’s pray.