

May 3, 2026, presented by Pastor Kath

## Great Things?

John 14:1-15, Acts 7:55-60

I don't know if any of you followed the Sauer family, and their five-year-old son, Benjamin, who passed away about 11 or 12 years ago from glioblastoma ... a very aggressive, adult brain cancer. It was an extremely sad story that too many young parents have had to face, of seeing a child die well before his time, but the reason I mention them is that it reminds me of the Great Things that can be done in Jesus' name, Great Things we could never do without the Power of the Holy Spirit filling us, leading us, comforting us, showing the way.

Ben's family is from Buffalo and his mom, Mindy, is a blogger – she wrote a journal on the internet for all to read, a journal that was a chronicle of her son's struggle for life – but it was also her witness to Jesus in her life, their family's faith that all was in Jesus' hands, that they were confident that Ben would take his last breath here on earth, followed immediately by his first breath in Heaven.

Mindy wrote about the joys they found in the extra months they had with Ben, after the doctors gave him only a few weeks to live. She wrote about Ben's ability to continue to play with his twin brother and younger sister, free of pain for most of those four months. She wrote about Ben's own joy found in his life, even as he eventually lost most of his abilities. She wrote about how very difficult it was for her and her husband, how they couldn't believe what they were going through, but how they held firm to their love of God.

Jesus said, *"In my Father's house are many rooms ... I go to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with Me."* Mindy's faith was so strong, that, all though she grieved for the loss of her son, she rejoiced in that room that awaited Ben.

We can also celebrate this Great Thing that Jesus does for each of us believers.

In Acts, we heard of Stephen's faith, of how he believed these things. He knew that, as he was being stoned to death, Great Things had been done for him – a room awaited Stephen in Heaven.

And what was amazing was that, as he was being killed, as he was praying, *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,"* words that Jesus prayed to His Father ... Stephen was also crying out, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them,"* again repeating Jesus' words. He was praying for mercy for those who were stoning him. He wanted them to know Christ as he knew Him.

Mindy Sauer used her suffering and the Holy Spirit's comfort to lead others to Christ – she has done Great Things through Jesus, who strengthens her.

Stephen used his faith in Jesus' promises for him to be a witness to others – to do Great Things through Jesus Christ, his Savior.

I placed a question mark at the end of my sermon title, not because I believe we can't do Great Things, but because the passage reads almost as if we, us humans, were going to be given the ability to do even greater things than Christ was able to accomplish ... *"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."*

Do I believe that alone we are able to do Greater Things than Jesus Christ? No, we can do nothing at all that even compares to Christ without the Holy Spirit working within us, therefore, it isn't us doing these Great Things, but it is Christ working through us that allows us to do good in Jesus' Name.

The disciples weren't going to do more amazing miracles than Jesus – raising the dead is about as amazing as you can get – but both Peter and Paul did raise someone from the dead. Rather, the disciples, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, would carry the Gospel of God's Kingdom out of Palestine and into the whole world, just as we are told to do, performing miracles with that same power ...

I took a look at Stephen's ministry, led by his faith in Christ, and found out a few things:

- Stephen fed the hungry. It wasn't complicated, no big explanations – he just fed the hungry.
  - Stephen's faith was turned into concrete, true acts of love. As Jesus said, *"You will do Greater Things than these."*
  - To be in ministry we need to feed the hungry – both literally and figuratively. Feed their bellies, their hearts and their souls.
- Beautiful and surprising things started happening around Stephen, things that made people stop and wonder, things that turned people toward God.
  - People should look at our lives and see God's grace, God's peace, God's presence, God's power working within us. They should see us living with a purpose that makes others want to turn to God. They should be able to see us as changed people that really want to spread God's love.
  - We need to let God do beautiful things through us. People need to see the difference in us.
- Stephen faced opposition.
  - There were a lot of influential and important people that didn't like what Stephen was doing and saying, and what was happening around him.
  - It's easy to do God's work when everything is all "peachy keen," but when things get tough – like they had for Mindy Sauer, her husband and children; like they did for Stephen as people started to hate him, plot against him – that's when some of God's work shines the brightest.
    - How did Stephen respond? As he stood before the Sanhedrin to face the charges against him, it is said in Acts 6:15, *"All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."*
    - As people told lies about him, he responded with grace, truth and Christ's beauty.
    - As we are lied about, as people speak horrible things about us, as they spread rumors about us – we are to respond in grace and truth – we are to allow Great Things to be done because of Jesus.
- As Stephen was called upon to answer to the lies told about him, he testifies to all the truths of God's relationship with Israel, their failures and Jesus' teachings.
  - In Matthew 10:19-20, Jesus tells us that *"When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*
    - Now, I have to clarify my belief here again – God has given us these great words to ponder on, to study, to commit to our minds, to call back when needed.
      - I do not believe that we are always promised the words that will get non-believers to ultimately believe every word we speak, every time we speak them. We WILL get words that are true, words that are a witness to what we believe, words that will give ourselves comfort. These words will come to us because God has given us the ability to READ these words before they are needed. They aren't going to magically appear if we don't read God's Word, as we are told to.
  - So, Stephen had been taught the history of the Jews. Stephen had learned of Jesus Christ's life through Jesus Himself. The words he spoke came to him because the Holy Spirit filled him and reminded him of what he knew – Stephen was a living witness.
    - Our own lives should be a living witness to all Christ has done.
- Stephen's ministry allowed the Holy Spirit to work through him and our ministry should open our lives up to allow the Holy Spirit to use us in ways we can't imagine possible and to allow Christ to shine through us as we follow the Spirit's leading.
- And after Stephen's death, Saul's - Paul's, life was eventually forever changed (not right away, mind you), allowing him to become one of the gospel's greatest proclaimers.
  - There are so many examples of those who have suffered because of their belief and did Great Things in Christ's name. We should desire to be like them.

As we ask ourselves how could God allow Stephen to be stoned to death, a faithful follower of Jesus Christ; how could God allow Ben Sauer, and so many other innocent little children, die so young, when their families love them and love Jesus Christ, too – we must remember that their deaths should not be in vain.

Great and Good Things came from Stephen's suffering, especially the continuation of the Gospel.  
Great and Good Things came from the death of Ben – especially when friends, family and strangers saw the strong faith the Sauer family continues to have, a faith that knows that Ben is in peace with God now.

When Jesus died upon the cross, we were not abandoned. He returned and showed Himself to many. He promised that the Holy Spirit would remain with us. He promised that there were rooms in Heaven just for us. Jesus said we would never be alone.

The Holy Spirit guides us as we continue the work that Jesus Christ started – making His love present throughout the world ... healing the sick, caring for the poor, loving the unlovable ... giving us goals that would bear eternal fruit. Jesus said, *"If you follow Me, I will make you fishers of men."* Our faith believes these things. Our faith lets us believe that we, too, will do Great Things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us.

John 14, verse 15: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*

Maybe we will face persecution because of our faith, maybe times will be difficult and contain great loss in spite of our faith, but at the end, we will be filled with great joy when we hear the words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant. In you, we have seen the Father. Come and live in the room our Lord has prepared for you!"*  
Amen!!