

GREATER THINGS

Fired by the Spirit of Jesus

Six conversation starters from Easter to Pentecost

1. The heads up from Jesus

Video Transcript

Welcome to 'Greater Things,' six conversation starters that will take us from after Easter to Pentecost. I'm Bishop Jill and, in honour of our new 'Fruitful' discipleship App here in the Diocese of Blackburn; Bishop Philip has commissioned me to do a series of conversation starters to look at the topic of what it means to be fired by the Spirit of Jesus.

This first session is called the 'Heads up from Jesus' and we'll be looking at two passages. On the night before he died, Jesus prepared his closest friends for the awful series of events to follow: Judas's betrayal; Peter's denial; the breaking of his body and his blood shed on a cross. But also, on the night before he died, he also prepared them for something wonderfully astonishing. It was going to be better that he left them so the Father could send his Spirit.

John 14:12-17

"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. And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in a son. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it. If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him or knows him but you will know him for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you."

And then again, before Jesus left a second time, 40 days later, he repeated the message. Again it was better that he left. Get this: it's better that he left so that the Father could send the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4-9.

"On one occasion while he was eating with them he gave them this command, 'do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father has promised, which you've heard me speak about. For John baptised with water but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

Then they gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said: 'it is not for you to know the times and dates the Father set by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After he said this he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid them from their sight."

I'm filming here in Dalton Square in Lancaster at the foot of a statue of Queen Victoria. It is the biggest statue of her outside London; she's a very common person to have statues about because she made a massive impact on our nation and beyond but her influence is very much in the past. We just have statues to remember her but that's absolutely the opposite with Jesus. Yes we may have statues, we may wear crosses with him on, but we don't just remember him; he is with us now. Jesus said, it's better that I go; it's plan A that I go. Sometimes I think wouldn't it be better if Jesus had just carried on his ministry? No, plan A was that he went so that we could be baptised with his Spirit.

Now today baptism is quite a techy word, we use it as a beautiful sign of initiation. When John first used it in everyday words, it was just a normal word you'd use in the dyeing industry - to soak a cloth in dye so that all the fibres were soaked through. I think Jesus is saying it's better I leave you so you can be soaked with my Spirit rather than just the Spirit filling just one person in one place at one time. He's saying my presence will be with you, with all people of all ages in every generation, across space and time. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. And on the day of Pentecost, which we'll be getting to in a number of weeks, we start to see the explosion of the Spirit which has had such ricochets through the generations.

Tom Holland, historian and a popular writer, noted that as the tide of secularism is receding at the moment we're realising that western culture is deeply and structurally Christian. People are hungry for supernatural faith and I think this has been accelerated by Covid. All the surveys show that the younger you are the more open you are to the gospel. You're also more open to the darker spiritual influences. We don't need convincing in our heads; science, in some ways, and those rational explanations have had their day. People are hungry to encounter Jesus with their hearts living and breathing today.

So what are these 'greater things'? Jesus said, we'll do greater things than he did because he is living in us by his Spirit. We'll look at some headlines of this in our conversation starters ahead; you may think of many more. We've got peace, we've got healing, deliverance, confession, repentance but they all point to our last conversation starter number six. The point is that he leaves his Spirit so we will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. We'll be witnesses in our smallest sphere of influence, maybe our family, then our workplace, our school, our community, our nation and beyond.


One of my heroines, I've got many heroines as you might know, is Henrietta Mears. She was born in 1892 in California, and you won't have heard of her but you may have heard of some of the people she influenced - Billy Graham and the Campus Crusade missions. She was not known but she had a real sense of calling out the next generation of Christian leaders. When she was an old lady, people went to interview her and said, it's incredible, no one really knows your name and yet you've had an astonishing influence, do you have any regrets? And she said this, 'I wish I'd asked Jesus for bigger mountains; I wish I'd dreamed bigger dreams.' I think that's what we're looking at today; asking Jesus to give us his bigger mountains and his bigger dreams - his greater things.

Now is that all just a bit overwhelming, Bishop Jill's power trip on big power, greater things, big stage? No, no, no, actually with Jesus and with his Spirit, the important work doesn't happen on the big stage, on camera, in the middle of Lancaster; it happens behind the scenes. In Jesus' very first miracle in John's Gospel, the turning of water into wine. The man running the banquet had no idea; he thought it was just nice wine. It was behind the scenes that the servants realised an incredible miracle had taken place and that is absolutely still the way he works today. I've written in my book quite a bit about the hobbits in the Lord of the Rings, only the humble ones are trusted with carrying the ring of power, not the big leaders and that's exactly how Jesus approaches it in Luke 4 with his manifesto. He says, "*the Spirit of the Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, the broken-hearted, the prisons, the captives, because they will renew, restore and rebuild the ancient ruins*". He (Jesus) was quoting from Isaiah 61.

The less ego, the more room there is to be fired by Jesus. The less ego, the greater things he's able to do. I'm convinced that the renewal of our county and our nation and our continent will come from unlikely people in unlikely places, behind the scenes, quietly welcoming the Spirit of God to baptise, to soak them and then, going out with Jesus, to ask for those bigger mountains, to dream those bigger dreams and to do those greater things.

We'll finish with a song that's been important to me from childhood which you'll hear playing in a moment and I'll pray for us.

Lord Jesus Christ, would you come and live in us afresh, would you soak us with your Spirit. I especially pray for those of us who feel we're forgotten, we're in unlikely places, unlikely times where our egos have been crushed. I pray that you would fill us afresh with your Spirit and that we might have dreams and visions of those bigger mountains - those greater things. We ask this in Your name, for Your glory. Amen.



Lord Jesus Christ, we would come to you,
live our lives for you, Son of God.
All your commands we know are true,
Your many gifts will make us new,
Into our lives Your power breaks through, Living Lord.
Into our lives Your power breaks through, Living Lord.

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Guidance Notes

Gathering

Welcome members of the group and ensure they all know each other. Consider inviting members to share briefly how their week has been and any stresses or distractions they may have.

Introduction and Prayer

Share a short introduction to today's topic.

Open in prayer, inviting God to speak to us as we read and ponder scripture.

Scripture

Read the passages John 14:12-17 and Acts 1:4-9 aloud.

Conversation Starter

Play this week's video or have the transcript read aloud.

Discussion

Either in your group or alone, reflect on the following questions:

- What stands out to you from the two passages we have read?
- In John 14:12-17, Jesus promises that those who believe in him will do greater works than he did. What do you think he means by this? How does Acts 1:4-9 relate to this?
- How does the metaphor of the cloth dyeing process deepen your understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- Henrietta Mears expresses regret for not asking Jesus for bigger mountains and dreaming bigger dreams. How does this challenge us?
- What does 'unlikely people in unlikely places, behind the scenes' look like in your community? How can we encourage more of this?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in our witness? How can we be a witness in our own sphere of influence?

Prayer

Conclude by leading the group in a time of prayer.

Check out [Thy Kingdom Come's prayer station ideas](#) to be praying for your 'Sphere of Influence'.

Consider using the 'Daily Prayer' section of the Fruitful App to pray the service of morning or evening prayer.