

GREATER THINGS

Fired by the Spirit of Jesus

Six conversation starters from Easter to Pentecost

6. Translation Innovation

Video Transcript

Welcome to our final week of Greater Things, I really hope you've enjoyed the course, it's been lovely getting feedback from around Lancashire, plus those further afield who have tuned in, in fact one of you is having a starring role later on. Thanks also go at this stage to Sarah Marston who's done a brilliant job of writing the study guides each week. This is our final conversation starter and so I'm going bonanza, it's a bit longer than usual so fasten your seatbelts.

Our theme this week is translation innovation. We finally get to the day of Pentecost when the spirit came so that people could hear the wonders of God in their own languages. But first a quick recap. You are his plan A. On the night before Jesus died he prepared them for something wonderfully astonishing, it was better that he left them so his father could send the Spirit, so it's not just one man at one time in one place but that everybody could carry the Spirit. This is John 14:12; very truly I tell you whoever believes in me will do the works I've been doing and they will do even greater things because I am going to the father.

And together we've looked at some of these greater things; week two we looked at carrying his peace from heaven itself; week three we looked at healing; week four at deliverance; week five that unbinding, that forgiveness and release from sin and darkness but most important of all, the climax I think, week six, Jesus sent his spirit so that people could hear the wonders of God in their own languages. Translation innovation. I'm filming here outside the exchange building in Blackburn, right in the heart our seat in the diocese. The exchange was built in 1865 as a cotton exchange. Blackburn rose to prominence as a centre of innovation and commerce and this is what happens when the spirit comes, an incredible innovation in translation.

This is Acts 2: 1-12.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

What was the result of this fire and wind of God's spirit? Incredibly it was people from all across the known world at the time hearing the wonders of God in their own languages. People from all sorts of backgrounds could suddenly hear and understand. It was a translation innovation.

Now we can all relate to what it feels like to lose something in translation. During lockdown I found myself running a secondary school and a school canteen in my spare time and one day I remember my oldest son asked me if he could help with his GCSE revision. Yes of course, what's the topic? Mission evangelism and church growth. Brilliant, I leapt up from my desk like a Labrador to help. That's exactly my brief as Bishop of Lancaster. Right mum, what do you think of this question about evangelism? And he played this YouTube clip he'd been given by his teacher.

My heart sank, it was men on the streets of New York with his big cross and placard saying repent the end is nigh. I laughed, that's not evangelism, can you imagine that working? It's actually quite embarrassing and off-putting and I'm not sure even Jesus himself could have made that work but that's another story. Our heart-wrenching, life-changing message of God's longing for us to come home can so easily be lost in translation. Yes we talked last week about repenting but putting out there straight on the street, that's like Morse code without the code book. We need it in our own language, a language we can understand. But the challenge is that we all hear and speak differently.

Even in the county of Lancashire there's thousands of subcultures, ages, gender, geography, ethnicity, social setting our list drags on. I mean it's interesting how our advertisers are very good at pinning this down. Have you noticed how often your adverts on say YouTube are very tuned in with your preferences? Although I have to say I had one the other week where it talked about, they sent me an advert for a cute smiley baby saying one more smile.

It stands out in my memory because it jarred so much. That said shortly after I received a news feed about a supermodel Naomi Campbell having had a miracle baby at age 51. So perhaps it's a subtle encouragement to go with the flow. Anyway watch the celebrity trend there.

But here's the incredible thing about that moment about the coming of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost. He comes to innovate. He's the painter. He made the universe. He put together the intricacy of the Milky Way. He understands quantum physics in a way that we can't possibly do. He is the creator of language and surely that creator can loosen our tongues and unblock our ears to hear.

And my experience in the UK is that God's spirit has a wonderful way of unbinding tongues so people can speak the wonders of God in their own language. Let me give you an example.

In the 7th century there was an incredible flowering of mission in the north. You'll have probably heard me tell this story before but you may have heard of Hilda who set up a mixed monastery in Whitby that sent out bishops, evangelists all over Britain. But you may not have always heard of Caedmon. He was a cattle herder who looked after animals in the monastery.

He was shy and tongue-tied and he found it very difficult to make himself understood. But one night he falls asleep and he hears this heavenly song and when he wakes up in the morning he could not only hear it he can sing it. He tells his boss and his boss tells Hilda and Hilda gets him to sing this song at the feast and it's basically the first example of the gospel being sung in the local Anglo-Saxon language in the language people could understand. And here's the thing. I keep spotting Caedmons everywhere. Often in hiding, tongue-tied, unable to get their words out. But it seems that when the Spirit of God comes he can release us to speak the wonders of God in our own languages. And maybe that's not an experience of you. You find it quite hard to speak about your faith. You find it hard to get your words out. Well actually you're in prime position for the Spirit of God to unbind your tongue.

You might know the story of Smith Wigglesworth. He used to preach in 1930s in Preston. He described himself as a straight-talking Yorkshire lad with little education, no training, no credentials. But he shook his generation with miracle-producing faith. And for four decades there were spectacular healings, deliverances, (that) followed his preaching gospel across nations and the world. But early on in his story he was so fearful to speak when he was preaching he had to get his wife to speak for him because he couldn't get his words out.

Across our nation today I believe there are people hiding away tongue-tied but I believe the Spirit of God can do those greater things. To call us out of hiding, to release our tongues so people can hear the wonders of God in their own language, a Pentecost today and every day.

Here's another example from living memory. In the 20th century the Church of England declined in every decade apart from one. I wonder if you can guess what decade that was. The late 1940s. After a national trauma, the Second World War, the Church grew. Why was that? Not because of great bishops but research suggests there were a number of writers and artists who were able to put the gospel in a language people could understand.

It's what C.S. Lewis did brilliantly on the radio, Dorothy Sayers, T.S. Eliot, Simone Weil. And I am praying for writers and musicians, filmmakers who can find their gifts afresh with courage and use them to put the gospel into a language that people can understand.

God knows that one size doesn't fit all. He knows we all hear differently. He knows we hear and speak on different frequencies. He knows we need an innovation in translation.

God's good news isn't just for one particular people at one place at one time. His news is for everybody and that's what I love about being a bishop in the Church of England. The calling on our church is literally to be a church of people around here. That in my mind is the best definition of Anglicanism, a Christian presence in every community so people of all backgrounds, ages, stages, races across Lancashire can hear the gospel in a language they can understand. This is the plan all along.

Back to our reading. As people accuse him of being drunk, Peter grabs the microphone, so to speak, and takes his audience back to the words of the Prophet Joel several centuries earlier.

Acts 2:17-18 "In the last days I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy."

Across our nation I'm convinced the Spirit of God has been giving prophecies, visions and dreams but people think they're mad. They're too ambitious, this will never happen. So I want to underline that you're not mad if you're seeing visions from God. We desperately need you in our church and our society. We often rationalise away the wonderful things of God and even we apologise for God's incidences but these are often the calling cards of his Spirit.

The book of Acts is full of visions, like the vision of a man from Macedonia, Acts 16, guiding a whole shift of the gospel from the Middle East into Europe, sorry, the message of Jesus from Europe into the Middle East. I'm really pleased that they listen, that Ananias listened to his vision in Acts 8, to go left, right, left, right, left, right, to Straight Street and find a man called Saul. If you're seeing visions, don't apologise, you've been given them for a reason. Act on them, don't keep them to yourself. You're like the spiritual GCHQ, like troops who have special night vision goggles to spy at the terrain ahead. And you're not ambitious if you're having dreams, from God. I think there's people, probably listening to this, who've had dreams from God that seem so big you can bind them to fantasy land. They can't possibly happen. No, he is the one, this is Ephesians 3 verse 20, he's the one who's able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

The dreams of God are always beyond us. I'm praying that he will wake up our dreams today. And I shared in week one about the story of one of my heroines, Henrietta Mears, who went to an old lady, was asked if she had any regrets and she said, "I wish I'd asked Jesus for bigger mountains and I wish I'd dreamed bigger dreams." I would love to see Jesus unleash his dreams today.

And finally, you're not mad if you prophesy. This is 1 Corinthians 14:1: "eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."

And I remember this verse jumping off the page, probably about 10 years ago. So I thought, I've no idea what that means. What does it mean to prophecy? What does prophecy look like today? And I simply had a sense that Jesus, to ask Jesus to coach me, and that's maybe where he's guiding you.

Tune into scripture for those verses that seem to resonate into the situation you're speaking into, to expect his words and his promptings and his pictures. When I was director of St Mellitus Northwest, I, at the end of the first year, I remember being overwhelmed with a workload and I had these mega reports to write on all the students and I couldn't see how I'd do it. And I had slumped in my chair and like, Lord, would you help me? And I always said, sense of prompting will ask for a word for each one. So I sat down literally 10 seconds each, a word for each one. Then when I have a one-to-one with students about their reports, I would talk around the report for a bit. And then at the last minute I'd share this Bible verse or word or picture that comes to me in prayer.

I knew every time it would unleash the conversation. Now I'm a lot more confident. I don't spend 30 minutes beating around the bush. I often try and get to it sooner than that.

If you want to grow in this area, by the way, I do recommend Bill Cahusac's book, *That Gentle Whisper*. You'll find those beautiful stories of how he tunes in gently without fuss in the supermarket, on the street, with colleagues at work. And so maybe Jesus is wanting to give you his gift of prophecy today. It's a gift that can shape organisations, churches, workplaces, and governments.

But back here in Blackburn, I still believe that Blackburn has a calling to innovation, which is to set a tone for our Diocese of Blackburn. There may be a corrosion in this calling. Often some of God's most precious callings are corroded. So, for example, here in Blackburn, we are now the international headquarters for vaping innovation, if you've seen the Wicked brand. But often these shadows are a clue to reality. Blackburn has been a centre of enterprise.

What if this calling was renewed in our day? But not the enterprise that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer, but the enterprise of the Spirit that calls out colours and gifts from everyone.

My oldest son did work experience in our finance department just after Easter a couple of weeks ago. And it's interesting hearing him describe our diocese with fresh eyes. And one thing he said, because he went out with our lovely property team to see different properties in Preston and Blackpool, he said, I was really struck by the inequality, how often the rich are right next to the poor, very swanky buildings are next to really like run down areas. But when the Spirit comes, everyone is included.

The final bit of our reading, Acts 2: 14-21.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

So note that even on my servants, even my slaves, that's the translation, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit. So I wonder who is missing from your community, who is most excluded, who in your networks or who do you know who's not able to hear the Gospel in their own language?

As you know, I'm a super fan of *Strictly Come Dancing*. In 2021, Rose Ayling-Ellis from *EastEnders* invited us into her world with this award-winning dance. [BBC clip from *Strictly Come Dancing*] Rose is profoundly deaf but she hears and feels on different frequencies. That was, in my mind, a really prophetic moment in our nation, unlocking doors to a community who often carry the Gospel in ways that we never get a look in.

One of my friends who discovered the Fruitful app has been joining us on this journey of Greater Things and she's called Ruth Fabby. She's a creative writer, formerly artistic director of Disability Arts Cymru, director and founder of DaDaFest, council member of the Arts Council of Wales. And I invited her to offer her own reflections on the Spirit's coming on the day of Pentecost.

[Ruth Fabby speaking and signing]

Are you here in my thinking, giving me words that make sense? Are you here in this scripture, giving me meaning to reveal truth? Are you here in my heart, giving me love to share my life? Are you here in my soul, giving me comfort to carry on? Holy Spirit, you are here in all I am, in all I do, in all I say. Fill me again to grow in power, to heal my being, to breathe your Holy presence this day.

So when the Spirit comes he brings an explosion of colours, of people who could hear the Gospel in their own language and you'll be surprised how He can coach you to speak like this. There's no such thing as a textbook or a course for how to communicate the Gospel. This is the work of the Spirit. When you we're with the rugby dads, ask him to interpret and open doors. When you we're with the school mums, do the same.

2 Corinthians 5:5. "God who has given us a spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." The Spirit enables us to do greater things because he brings the very reality of heaven into the present as a deposit of what is to come.

So as we land on this final session of Greater Things, I want us to land with that vision, that vision of heaven, that deposit of heaven. It may be as part of your reflections you want to draw a picture, write a song, draw a poem of what it might mean for heaven to come to earth where you are, the heavenly Lancaster, the heavenly Blackburn, the heavenly Blackpool, the heavenly Chorley. There's so many visions of heaven in the Bible, a river of life with trees on the edge for healing of the nations, a time in creation when no animal will hurt another one, but a little child will lead them, a city of light where God makes his home with us, where he wipes every tear from our eyes, where there's no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

So may you find ways to speak the gospel in a way people can understand. In this season of Thy Kingdom Come, maybe you're praying for five friends to come to faith, maybe you could be praying for an opportunity to speak of heaven, of their home in heaven in a way that people can understand. Perhaps as you're in the church community, perhaps you want to host one of our parish missions in 2026, our centenary year.

We're really hoping that every parish will host a mission. Maybe you've been involved in planting a new congregation, we've had over 200 of these new local congregations across the diocese since 2019. Maybe you want to try running an Alpha Course or an Emmaus Course or Christianity Explored or one of our lovely curates ran a series on gin and job - alcohol connected with an Old Testament book. I've forgotten all the posh things that she managed to do. May he send his Spirit so that you do greater things than Him.

He's spoken his words, he means what he says and he will do everything that he's promised.

May Jesus breathe his life-giving Spirit over you. May He bring his peace from heaven, may He bring healing and may He use you to heal others in His name. May He bring deliverance, may He unbind the darkness and the fabric of our lives.

But most of all, may you speak the Gospel in words that people around you can understand and may you find that on the day of judgment when we meet Jesus face to face, you have many more brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Great children, great grandchildren and great grandchildren possibly. Every one of them.



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.

GREATER THINGS

Fired by the Spirit of Jesus

Six conversation starters from Easter to Pentecost

6. Translation Innovation

Guidance Notes

Gathering

Welcome members of the group and sharing a quick overview of the conversation starters to date.

Introduction and Prayer

Share a short introduction to today's topic. and opening in prayer

Scripture

Read Acts 2: 1-21 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 passage we have read?
- +Jill says "God's spirit has a wonderful way of unbinding tongues so people can speak the wonders of God in their own language". Can you tell us how you have experienced that in your lives?
- What are the different 'languages' being spoken in your communities?
- Have you ever received a dream, word or vision from Jesus?
- How can you invite Jesus to help you speak the gospel in a way your friends and family can understand?
- How can your church speak the gospel in ways that your communities can understand?

Prayer

Conclude by spending some time as a group in prayer prayer, asking Jesus to release our tongues so people can hear the wonders of God in their own language.

Consider creating a time for creative reflection on what it might mean for heaven to come to earth in your community though drawing, or writing a song or poem.

Consider using these creative prayer ideas to pray for 5 friends; that they would hear the Gospel and that God might use you to speak it in their language [24/7 prayer \(click here\)](#) or [Thy Kingdom Come \(click here\)](#)

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