

GREATER THINGS

Fired by the Spirit of Jesus

Six conversation starters from Easter to Pentecost

2. The Peace of Jesus

Video Transcript

Welcome to week two of Greater Things and the title of this week is 'The Peace of Jesus'. This is the first time that Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection.

John 20: 19-22

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After this he showed them his hands and his side and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Sometimes talk of God's Spirit can make people feel afraid. Perhaps that's your experience. We think of fire, wind, signs, wonders. I think his main way of working is ever so, ever so tender. Jesus breathes out, we breathe in. Jesus breathes out, we breathe in. We breathe in his peace. He calls us home with a taste of peace, his atmosphere of heaven. Again and again through scripture we see that the presence of God brings peace. Moses, Elijah, Isaiah. And in all the gospels when the Holy Spirit first comes on Jesus, he appears in exactly the same way; like a dove, the symbol of peace. I only noticed this prominence of peace when I started teaching about evangelism in my previous role. I based my teaching on the go-to passage for Jesus's teaching on mission which is in Luke 10. When he sends his disciples out to towns and villages ahead of him, his top tip in evangelism is to 'look for the person of peace. And if your peace rests on them, stay with that person. If not, move on'.

And this advice came as a big relief because I'd grown up in a family where I was really the only active Christian. I'd worked in secular workplaces and I found that some people were open to conversations about faith and the big questions in life and some people weren't. That can change through time. But I always found that peace preceded an encounter with God. So I've now become more proactive and in new situations and new places I always try to invite his peace ahead of time and end the conversation with, "can I pray for you?"

And I remember a conversation with one of the rugby dads actually, and he still remembers this, we had a conversation over breakfast about faith and at the end I said, "can I pray for you?" And as I did that, the atmosphere changed. He'll say to me to this day; "I still feel quite teary remembering that time".

Here's a few favourite stories which you may have heard me tell before about my experience of the peace of Jesus in Mission: So where we used to live was in the middle of Widnes, which you know in its day was a beautiful little village, became an industrial heart and we lived on the town square where now the town hall was no longer a town hall but it was a nightclub, as were the other seven nightclubs around the town square. That was quite noisy, they had a five o'clock in the morning license on a Friday or Saturday; but the plus was they had amazing takeaways! So it was Friday night and I was just literally going just across the square for my curry and I bumped into these three girls. It was seven o'clock, it was dark, it's February and I said, "what are you doing out on the streets at this time of night"? And they said, "well, mum's at bingo and Chloe's been kicked out of school and we are kind just around really" So I said, "can I pray for you?" So I prayed that the peace of Jesus would come and I prayed that Chloe would get back into school.

When I looked up the heads were like meerkats, their heads were all up. I could feel a different atmosphere and they said to me, "well where do you live?" I said, "I just live at that vicarage there and you can come along on a Sunday, we have a service at four o'clock for kids and families". Thought nothing else of it. (The) next Sunday I was doing the children's work in the little vestry of the church, about five kids all on the emergency chairs between five and eleven (yrs old); complete chaos. We were doing the story about blind Bartimaeus when Jesus says to him, 'what would you like me to do for you?' So these three girls swing in, I think, oh no this is so age inappropriate. So I say, "well we're doing this story and we're just drawing pictures of what you'd like Jesus to do for you." So they sat down, flicked their hair and said, "I want Jesus to give me £1.20" - that's what the first girl wrote. A second girl in a mutiny copied her, "I want Jesus to give me £1.20." Third girl, same thing. And then the first girl flicked her hair and said, "this is so boring" and then marched off. I just thought, oh no, I'm so disappointed in that.

Next Sunday (they) came back. Chloe had got back into school. That night, they've been walking down the street, a tramp literally crossed the road, shoved some money into their hand - £3.60. So when they come back that next week, Chloe, as well got back into school, she's brought her boyfriend and the boyfriend says, 'this is so boring' and Chloe goes, 'well she prays and stuff happens'. So praying for the peace of Jesus.

I also did that with my dentist. It was in the middle of lockdown when there'd been so much extra cleaning we had to do. I could feel the tension in the room and I said, "I believe that Jesus can bind up fear and he can bring his peace from heaven. Would you like me to pray?" And she said okay. And so I again just prayed a simple prayer for peace and as I looked up, both her and her dental nurse were wiping tears from their eyes and it was something they spoke about after that.

And that was also something I really prayed for as a school chaplain in Liverpool, not that people would understand the Christian faith and of course we talked lots about it in chapel; but that they would encounter Jesus and particularly they would encounter the peace of Jesus. I'd often pray that in going into chapel. And I remember one particular occasion when, it's quite a formal service; me and the head of house are walking out and she said, "did you notice that atmosphere?" There really was a peace in that place. And after that, I'd often find that she slipped into the chapel ahead of time just to, as she said, get her mind straight. But I would just encourage you to pray for the peace of Jesus. Where in your workplace or school or wherever you go.

This is St. Seraphim (of Sarov), he was a 19th century Russian Orthodox hermit and he said this, "that I am a monk and you are a layman is of no importance, rather that we're both in the light of the Holy Spirit. Acquire peace and thousands around you will be saved."

And I think we see this longing for peace all over our media. We're longing for Jesus to breathe his peace. I remember a story of when the Poor Clares Nuns from Arundel featured on Good Morning Britain. They'd made this song called 'Hope for the World'; it's still worth listening to and it kind of literally gone viral; and these are women who live in an enclosed order, almost like a permanent lockdown. And I remember Holly Willoughby wiping a tear from her eyes and she said, 'when you speak to people like that, they make you think it's going to be okay'. These nuns were effectively singing and carrying the peace from heaven.

And so maybe that's the greater thing he's calling you to today; to call down his peace on your school, your office, your family, your church, or maybe that quite painful situation you're going through at the moment. The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, is much bigger than peace in your heart or tears in your eyes. Shalom is not just inviting God's peace into individual lives, but inviting rivers of peace overflowing to wherever people find themselves. Not just neat, tiny, tiny canals, but rivers in flood, bursting their banks to drench the fabric of society. Healing and deliverance, reconciliation, restoration in communities and spheres of influence. And as I drive around the diocese, particularly with our valleys where we've got rivers, I'm literally praying at the head of the valley, particularly in Whalley and Colne, for a breaking of the dams that he would release his rivers of peace down the Ribble Valley, down the East Lancs Valley. And that river of peace would reshape the landscape of our county.

May you encounter the peace of Jesus today. Let's pray.

Jesus, Prince of Peace, the first time you met all your disciples together after the resurrection, you breathed on them and said, receive, peace be with you, receive the Holy Spirit. Peace be with you, receive the Holy Spirit. And may you breathe on us now. May you breathe your peace into our hearts, into our lives. And may we carry that peace. May we call down that peace in the places you call us to, so that people might encounter greater things and come home to you. Amen.

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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 John 20: 19-22 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?
- Sometimes talk of God's Spirit can make people feel afraid — how do you feel when the Spirit is mentioned?
- Why do you think Jesus' first words to the disciples is "Peace be with you"? Why do you think he repeats it?
- Why do you think Jesus breathing on the disciples and saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" right after giving them their mission is important?
- How do you think the peace of Jesus relates when talking about our faith with friends and family?
- "Sometimes talk of God's Spirit can make people feel afraid" — how do you feel when the Spirit is mentioned?
- Bishop Jill talks about 'peace preceding an encounter with God' and gave examples from various interactions. Have you ever experienced a similar sense of peace in your conversations about Jesus?
- Where are you 'calling down his peace' in your community?

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.