

Spring Harvest, text of Celebration Talk 1, Bishop Jill Duff: Unleashed Power (Acts 2.1-21). [Video](#)

“Even on my servants both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”

There is something very special about the prophetic role of Spring Harvest in our nation. Since I first came across Spring Harvest as a teenager, I’ve always had a sense of anticipation about the *naming* of each year. Names are important, and I sense that very often you have captured something significant, something from God, something prophetic in the naming of the conference theme each year...

So, my heart leapt when I read this year’s theme:

UNLEASHED

- Very powerful imagery, very Biblical imagery
- Often in Scripture, it’s used in the context of unleashing or unbinding a person ...
 - o Luke 13: Jesus unbinds the woman who was bent over: “Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be *unleashed* from what bound her?”
 - o OT: Isa 58: to unbind the chains of injustice, and unleash the cords of the yoke
 - o Matt 16: commission to Peter – I give you keys to kingdom of heaven – whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, you unleash on earth will be unleashed in heaven;
- The word unleashed is often used in the context of binding the power of hell and unleashing the atmosphere or reign of heaven. And that’s quite simply what we’re about this week at Spring Harvest.

And we’re now UNLEASHED ... AT HOME.... That might seem a contradiction in terms. Many of us are bouncing against our walls with cabin fever.

This is a prophetic step of faith amongst Christian conferences in offering Spring Harvest free at home. I think this is a prophetic act that the Church is being called to step up in faith in this season. “Freely, freely you have received... FREELY GIVE” taught Jesus.

This sets a whole new tone in Christian conferences. Usually when it comes to the main speaker, there’s been 3000 of us in a packed auditorium, worshipping together. The scene is set for this amazing speaker to stride on and impact you with her stage presence.

I have none of this. I’m in my study, filming this through my iPhone. But my hope for our time together across the internet is expressed in the words of 1 Cor 2: “I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on God’s power”.

In the history of Christianity, key step changes in the spread of the Gospel have been during the shift to a new technology:

1st century: Portable technology called ‘books’ were invented! Papyrus was folded into sections and sewn together rather than one big cumbersome scroll that was difficult to transport

15th century): The invention of the printing press had a massive impact on the Reformation in Europe

21st century: We have the internet which can bring live words and pictures and interaction across local and international boundaries bringing gospel into houses that are locked down because of Coronavirus. Ha! The Spirit, He is no respecter of boundaries!

That’s my prayer for our experience of *Spring Harvest* this year that in our confined circumstances, cramped in our homes, many in fear of our livelihoods and our lives, that in our great fear and trembling, in our weakness God is doing a new thing in His Church in this nation, so that our “faith may not rest on human wisdom but on God’s power”.

As we come to look at our passage for this evening – Let’s Pray:

Come Down O most powerful Holy Spirit and subdue us. From heaven where the ordinary is made glorious and glory is but ordinary. Open our eyes so we may see the wonderful truths in your Word. And bathe us in the brilliance of your light like dew.

In a moment we’ll be looking at our passage for this evening which is Acts 2.1-21. You may want to find it in your Bible or on your phone.

But first a word about our title for tonight: UNLEASHED POWER

I’ve been given amazing brief. Get this: *“The whole week at Spring Harvest hinges on these opening verses in Acts introducing our theme of UNLEASHED Power which will form the foundation of every theme addressed. The hope is that our churches, our lives, our families and workplaces would begin to be transformed by the power of God in a way we haven’t seen before.”*

And I want to say a massive Amen to that... may it not just be a hope, but even as we listen, in our weakness in our unusual circumstances in these strange and fearful times, may we experience this as a reality in our hearts; “On the Day of Pentecost [day when the Jews remembered the giving of 10 commandments at Mt Sinai, which re-purposed the nation of Israel who had been bound up in slavery for generations]....

“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 languages as the Spirit enabled them”.

So UNLEASHED POWER: Acts 2.1-21 ...

Three ways in our passage in which we see the UNLEASHED POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT...

1. Power of speech:

Tongues were unleashed so people could hear the wonders of God in their own languages.

I absolutely believe that the Holy Spirit can give people the ability to speak and understand in languages they have never been taught.

My experience in the UK is that the Holy Spirit has a wonderful way of unbinding tongues so that they can speak the gospel in new languages. Let me give you an example

In the 7th century, there was an incredible flowering of mission in the North. You may have heard of St Hilda – she was abbess of a mixed monastery in Whitby that sent out bishops, evangelists all across Britain. You may not have heard of Caedmon. He was a cattle herd, who looked after the animals in the monastery. He was shy and tongue tied: he found it very difficult to make himself understood.

But one night he has this dream that he can sing a heavenly song about the creation of the world. When he wakes up, he can remember the song – in fact he can still sing it. He tells his boss and his boss tells Hilda who invites Caedmon to sing at the feast. This was the start of an incredible ministry – Caedmon would sing the gospel in the local Anglo-Saxon language in words that the ordinary people could understand.

The thing is - I keep spotting Caedmons everywhere. Often in hiding, tongue-tied, unable to get their words out, but it seems the Spirit of God releases them to speak the wonders of God in their own language. It is beautiful to behold.

In Preston, Lancashire, Smith Wigglesworth used to preach in the 1930s. Early on in his story, he was so fearful to speak he used to leave the preaching to his wife because he couldn't get his words out.

Across our nation today there are people hiding away, tongue-tied, but I believe the Spirit of God wants to come to call you out of hiding, to release your tongues so that people can hear the wonders of God in their own language.

A new Pentecost, today and every day.

What if we had people on fire with the Spirit of Jesus 'break out' in every sphere of influence in our society: in our families, our churches, in our schools and universities, in the media, in business, in law, in government, in entertainment and sport - so people could hear the wonders of God in their own language? What might this look like?

On the first Easter Day, Jesus appears in a lockdown. John 20, he breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit"

What would it look like for Jesus to breathe on our nation today? To unleash his power in our lockdown?

CS Lewis describes this with beautiful imagination in his children's book: *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*.

The lion Aslan, back from the dead, ransacks the White Witch's fortress where she has taken hundreds of creatures captive, by turning them into stone.

Aslan bounds up to a stone lion and breathes on him. What happens is a bit like someone putting a lighted match to newspaper in a grate.... At first nothing seems to have happened, then the flames creep along the newspaper... and so colours lick all over the lion who opens his mouth, warm and living and gives an enormous yawn. I quote: *"Everywhere the statues were coming to life. The*

courtyard looked no longer like a museum; it looked more like a zoo... And instead of the deadly silence, the whole place rang with the sound of happy roarings, braying, yelping, barkings, squealing, cooings, neighings, stampings... songs and laughter". [Chpt XVI]

2. Power of visions, dreams and prophesy (v17-18)

V17: "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".

Across our nation, I am convinced the Spirit of God is and has been giving prophesies, visions and dreams. But people think they're mad, they're too ambitious and it'll never happen. Those are three lies from the pit of hell. And I want to unleash you today.

You are not mad if you are seeing visions from God. We desperately need you in the church in our society. In part, our scientific age has rationalized away the wonderful things of God. We apologise for "godincidences". But these are the calling cards of His Spirit.

The Book of Acts was full of visions. Vision of a Man from Macedonia – precisely guiding a whole shift in missionary work. I'm really pleased that Ananias listened to his vision in Acts 8, telling him to go to Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus called Saul.

If you are seeing visions, please do not apologise. You are being given them for a reason. Act on them. Don't keep them to yourself. You are like the spiritual GCHQ, like troops who have those special night vision goggles to spy out the terrain ahead. We need your intel.

You are not ambitious if you have dreams from God. I think there are people listening to this who have had dreams from God that seem so big that you have put them to one side. They can't possibly happen. No... He is the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine. Dreams from God are always far beyond us. I am praying that He will wake up our dreams today. Remind us of His beautiful whispers in the night.

Let me tell you the story of another heroine – Henrietta Mears. She was born in 1896 in California. But God gave her dreams that she would influence the next generation of Christian leaders.

You won't have heard of her, but you may have heard of Campus Crusades, the Billy Graham missions. When she was an old lady, they came to interview her and said: "No one knows who you are but you've had an astonishing influence. Do you have any regrets?"

She replied; "I wish I'd asked God for bigger mountains and I wish I'd dreamed bigger dreams".

Maybe the Lord is wanting to unleash in you his bigger dreams today.

You're not mad if you prophesy. 1 Cor 14.1: "Eagerly desire the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy".

I remember this verse jumping of the page in my 20s and thinking: what's that about? I simply had a sense that the Lord wanted to coach me. To tune into Scripture for those verses which seem to resonate into that situation you're in; to expect his words, his promptings, his pictures.

I used to lead a theological college training vicars for the CofE. I remember my first year of writing reports for the bishops. Overwhelmed by the size of the task. Came to God in my weakness. "Ask for a word for each one". For my group of eight, I asked for a word – scripture or image – 10 seconds each. I was so desperate I just went with what I heard.

In each meeting about their student reports, I'd waffle on for half an hour then have the courage to say the verse or picture ... does this mean anything to you? Every single time, it unlocked (or unleashed?!) a new deeper level in our conversation. Now I don't wait for half an hour. I ask for words and pictures and prophecies as I'm speaking. May your wells be unblocked.

Maybe the Lord is wanting to give you the gift of prophecy today. It's a gift that can shape organisations, churches, workplaces. It's basically about calling heaven to earth or calling the future into the present. And then doing – what – He – says. May the Spirit unleash His prophesy afresh on the church today.

And let's not forget the past. We are still surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses, the saints who have gone before us.

In the British Isles we have an incredible spiritual inheritance.

This is our multi-million-dollar inheritance. It's in the bank. Let's use it. Here's some headlines of our spiritual inheritance in the British Isles:

- Giants of Faith
- Dealt with the strongholds in the land
- Unique relationship with kings and authorities
- Holistic ministry – Monastery – School – Hospital – Evangelism

Many heroes of faith in Britain who have had faith opposite to reality. Some examples:

- William Carey, called to India as a missionary; during that time his wife died, his son died, then his Bible printing press burnt to the ground; others would have gone home but he acted in the opposite direction to reality. He went to the spot where the press burnt down. He prayed for more visions. He prayed there would be more Bible printed and more people reached with the Gospel.
- William Wilberforce – 20+ years of opposition to bill to outlaw slavery – 'slow cooker miracle'. Maybe he is calling some of you to have faith for the long term.

Maybe God is calling you to believe his visions which seem opposite to reality today. There is a difference between reality and truth.

Luke 1.45 the words of Elizabeth to Mary: "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said will be accomplished"

Then the final way in which we see the unleashed power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Power to save

- V 21: "And everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved"

The Holy Spirit is the power that raised Jesus from the dead: Eph 1.19: I pray that you might know ... His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms".

This unleashed power of the Holy Spirit has already shattered the course of the universe.

So, it's not too hard a thing for him to change the course of our nation. This is His speciality. We have seen incredible answers to prayer in our nation.

On 4th August 1918, the Queen's Grandfather, George V called for a National Day of Prayer; 100 days later the armistice was signed to end the First World War. On 22nd May 1940, George VI called for a National Day of Prayer, thousands queued round the block to pray in Westminster Abbey.

Two events immediately followed. Firstly, a violent storm arose over the Dunkirk region grounding the Luftwaffe which had been killing thousands on the beaches. And then secondly, a great calm descended on the Channel, the like of which hadn't been seen for a generation, which allowed hundreds of tiny boats to sail across.

They hoped to rescue 20-30,000 troops, instead they rescued 335,000 soldiers. This was known as '*the miracle of Dunkirk*'. We are asking for miracles again.

We are asking for God to stop the spread of this virus around the world, to protect all those whose lives and livelihoods are at threat, to give our government great wisdom. May he banish fear and sow seeds of faith and hope that cause us to serve outwards as a community and nation.

That's the big picture. What about on a personal level, in our networks, communities, workplaces and churches. Where would you like to see his unleashed power? Well just ask.

"Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved".

It's not complicated. Call on the Name of Jesus. He never disappoints.

Maybe He is inviting you to call on His power to save today.

To finish I'm going to ask Jesus to come with the unleashed power of His Spirit, wherever you are. He's no respecter of boundaries, internet connections. I'm simply going to pray in the Name of Jesus for his unleashing today in each of these three areas:

- Tongues
- Visions, Dreams and Prophecy
- Power to Save

Follow with prayer in the Name of Jesus ...