

Sunday School Notes: Acts 1: 6-14: On Purpose!

When you were about three years' old your favourite word was probably: 'Why?' At that age you suddenly began to realise that you were in a big, complicated, exciting world, and you wanted to understand how it works. Of course, you couldn't really understand everything, and often you didn't even understand that you didn't understand so you probably just went on and on with 'Why?' 'Why?' 'Why?' all day long! This can drive anyone mad! But wise Mums and Dads try to explain as much as they can because they realise that it is good to try to understand things.

Now today we are going to ask – and try to answer – some 'why' - questions about what we have just watched in church.

The first special occasion was a baptism. Why do people bring their babies to be 'baptised'?

The first reason is that the Mum and Dad want to say thank you to God for the baby they have been given. But there is another answer too: The parents come because they know that looking after a child is a scary job and that they can't manage it on their own. And so they come to church, which is God's family, so that it can help them to teach their child about God's love.

But there is also a third answer: Right through history God has made it clear that he isn't just interested in grown-ups, but that he wants to be involved right from the beginning in the life of children. Jesus made this very clear when he insisted that the children must not be sent away, but must be allowed to come to him (Matt 14:19). So those who follow Jesus know that God wants children to come to his house so that they can grow up in his home as one of his children with all the privileges of being a child of God.

And that answer takes us right on to the second special part of today's service when the teens stood up in church to declare that they wanted to be confirmed.

They have grown up learning about God (probably just as their parents promised at their baptism). Now they want to show people that they don't just believe in God because their Mums and Dads do. They wanted to tell people that they themselves have decided to become part of God's grown-up family. That's great.

But no-one wants them to say they believe in something they don't really understand. That's why for quite a few weeks in this year, leaders in the church are going to re-answer some of their questions in more grown-up ways so that they understand how much God loves them and how they can show him that they love him. They'll get a chance to ask some 'why' questions too!

Later this year they will be able to confirm that they really do want to be a grown-up member of God's family at a Confirmation service. We shall all share in that service too.

When Jesus lived on earth he was often asked the 'why-question'. Sometimes he knew that people wouldn't be able to understand completely, but he always gave an answer which helped to explain things. But then the day came when he went back to heaven to be with God again, full of power and no longer limited by being 'human'. Wonderfully that wasn't the end of his caring for us.

While he had been on earth, he had prepared certain people to make sure that his words and his love could be shared – even if he wasn't actually here. He had chosen 12 disciples – sounds like a very small number, but he knew what he was doing. When Jesus died they had probably thought that they would have to go back to their earthy jobs and become ordinary workers again. But the risen Jesus visited them and insisted that nothing would ever be the same now that he had risen and that they had a new purpose in life.

And there is our P-word for this week: PURPOSE.

They were to become 'fishers-of-men'; they had to become 'feeders-of-sheep-and-lambs'. What does that mean? Yes, they had to carry the message over so that people would know why Jesus had come and why he had died. Their 'why' questions had been answered so that they could tell others about Jesus.

But as long as Jesus was around, they had left the answering to up to him.

That was why one day, the disciples found themselves on a hill with Jesus. There was chance for a last question-and-answer session and then, as he was talking, a cloud covered him and he was lifted up to heaven – out of their sight. They were amazed and stood there, looking up trying to make out what was happening.

Then two angels appeared and asked them a 'why-question'! "Why are you staring up towards heaven like this?" The angels explained that Jesus was gone – for the time being. One day he would come back in a way which would enable everyone to see him. But they gave no clue as to when that 'one day' would be.

The disciples didn't really understand all of the answer, but they somehow knew that this was the end of their earthly friendship with Jesus. Obedient to Jesus' last words, they went back into Jerusalem, back to the upper room – no longer terrified, however, at being alone. They realised that they were to be witnesses to everything they had seen and even though they couldn't see Jesus any longer, they knew with great joy that he would direct their actions.

It was a pretty big purpose that Jesus had given them: "Go be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria (nearby parts of Israel) and then in all the ends of the earth" Wow! .

In Jerusalem they waited and prayed together with other believers. They knew that at the right time Jesus would show them how to fulfil their new purposes for him.