

11 June 2017: Power to live in God's way (Acts 3)

God made the world perfect and put Adam and Eve into the world to “keep it” or look after it for him (Genesis 2:15). Sadly Adam and Eve forgot that creation wasn't all about them. They put themselves first, and set a bad example of selfishness, saying: “I want...” Their oldest son, Cain, copied them and murdered his younger brother, Abel, because he was jealous and wanted to be Number One! And things went on like that from generation to generation.

In time God gave his people laws to show them that they had got things wrong. The laws made it clear that they were to put God first (Exodus 20:3) and that they were to care for each other. There was to be no murder, no stealing, no disrespect, no jealousy. When God's people got the law, they said: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient” (Exodus 24:7).

But, things didn't get any better. The people forgot their promise immediately because people put themselves first!

God knew that they needed an example to follow. And so he came down to earth as a Man to show them how to live. We don't understand how God could be a man on earth and still be God in heaven. The nearest we can come to understanding is to call Jesus God's “Son”.

Jesus made it clear that - even though he was God – it wasn't all about him. Jesus spent many hours talking to his heavenly Father so that, even while he was a human – a man like Adam or Cain –, he lived as God planned people should live.

This meant that he looked after his friends, the 12 disciples. But he also cared about everyone else, especially those no-one cared about: the homeless (eg lepers), the poor, the unimportant (eg women and children), the sick and the bad. He even cared about the rulers who had robbed God's people of their land.

Gradually his disciples began to learn from his example. They began to realise how God's laws worked! And when Jesus was put to death, they knew how they should be living.

But God knew that even with Jesus' perfect example, they would still go wrong. So God gave them his power (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this power ‘the Holy Spirit’. This was his way of describing something which, once again, we can't really understand. God with his Son, Jesus, is in heaven, but he was still part of their lives! Amazing!

Perhaps if we think of how a rechargeable battery contains energy, we can understand it a bit. A battery is just a small thing but somehow it has grabbed and stored some of the energy of the universe and it uses this to power things. The Holy Spirit is also God so he contains all the power of the universe and, if the disciples recharged constantly, they had power.

How did they recharge? Acts 2:42 tells us they allowed God to go on teaching them and then practised what they were taught.

And, wow, did this make a difference! Instead of everyone trying to be Number One, we read (Acts 2:44) that they became generous and shared everything that they had! Think of that 3000 people sharing – the rich with the poor, the educated with the uneducated, men and women and children learning together. This was amazing!

I am sure the whole of Jerusalem heard about this and that curious people came to see what was happening and stayed when they saw that this was how people were meant to live.

There is a lovely story in Acts 3 which has survived from those days:

Peter and John went up to the temple to pray so they could recharge. At the gates of the temple was beggar – a lame man who had never been able to walk although he was 40 years old (Acts 4:22). Every day his friends or family carried him there so he could beg and get some money to live. He hoped that after people had prayed they would be more generous.

I am sure Peter and John had seen him before, but this day the Holy Spirit reminded them that they must also be generous to this man. What could they do for him? “Heal him!” whispered the Holy Spirit. And so they did, in Jesus’ name. The man was soon leaping and walking and praising God in the temple.

This wasn’t a quiet miracle and so soon a crowd gathered. The Jewish leaders were furious that this Jesus whom they had killed still had followers. They threw Peter and John into prison for the night and then these two uneducated fishermen were put on trial in front of the learned men. But the Holy Spirit gave them power to be brave and to witness about Jesus.

The leaders were amazed (Acts 4:13). They couldn’t deny the miracle had happened – not with the healed man there in the court next to John and Peter! But they didn’t want any more problems as a result of Jesus – they thought they had killed those problems off!

When the leaders told them not to preach in Jesus’ name, Peter warned them that they would not stop speaking about Jesus! , Eventually Peter and John were released. Immediately they went back to their friends who had been praying for them and the Holy Spirit showed himself again by shaking the building where they were meeting. They were recharged!

But this power wasn’t just for them in those days. It is also for you and me! We have God’s laws in the Bible; we have the stories of Jesus as our example and we can have the power of the Holy Spirit if we switch on. We may not feel the building shake; we may not see tongues of fire; we may not speak in tongues. But we will receive power to put Jesus first and to put others before ourselves as we try to be like him.

PUZZLE

What word do you find when you combine the important first letters from this statement?

Put **J**esus first, then **O**thers, then **Y**ourself last.