

4 June 2017: Power to be brave

Some of you may know the story of the *Wizard of Oz* where the lion is afraid. Do you remember how his problem was solved? He was given a magic potion to drink and from then on the lion was brave!

The disciples received the gift of bravery too – along with the power to tell others about Jesus. But the power they received was real!

Think about it. Last week's story last week took place in Jerusalem, the very place where the high priests had captured Jesus and where the Romans had killed him. Before Jesus had risen, these same disciples had been hiding behind locked doors, terrified that they might be arrested too. And yet, there they were bravely speaking out in public.

Perhaps they shouldn't have been surprised to receive this gift. There are so many stories in the Old Testament of people being brave for God. Can you think of any of them?

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel chapter 3) tells us of their bravery and also helps us to understand why the disciples could be brave.

Long before the New Testament stories, there were 3 young friends. The city of Jerusalem where they lived had been captured by the powerful king, Nebuchadnezzar, and they had been taken captive and marched thousands of miles over the deserts to Babylon. Because they showed that they were intelligent and wise, the king had appointed them to be leaders in the province of Babylon - although they were Jewish.

The Babylonian leaders hated them because they wanted those promotions and couldn't believe that the king preferred Jews to them! They looked for every chance to trap the three men doing something wrong so that they would fall out of favour with the king.

Their big chance came when the king made a giant statue of himself and called all his leaders to admire it. Then came the command: "When you hear the king's musicians playing, you must fall down immediately and worship this statue! If you don't, you will be thrown into the fiery furnace. "

Now Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had never forgotten that they were God's people. They knew that there is only one God and they wouldn't bow down to an idol! And so they didn't. Bravely, they stayed standing when everyone else fell flat on their faces before the statue of Nebuchadnezzar.

At last! Their enemies saw their chance to destroy these irritating young men! They rushed to the king to report them immediately. The king called the young men in and gave them one last chance. They refused to bow. Instead they pointed out that their God could rescue them if he wanted to but, even if he didn't, they would rather die than bow down to an idol. They were prepared to die for God.

The king was furious. He gave commands and the three friends were immediately seized by the king's strongest bodyguards and tied up, fully dressed in all their many layers of grand clothes. Meanwhile Nebuchadnezzar ordered his men to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual. It

was so hot that the men who took Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the furnace were overcome by the heat and died. No-one expected the prisoners to last for even one minute.

And yet they did. They were soon seen, freed from their ropes and walking around quite comfortably in the fire. And even more amazing was the fact that instead of three people, onlookers could see from a safe distance that there were now four men in the flames. Who was that fourth man? That was God or God's messenger, proving that God knew about their situation. The friends came out of that fire without even a smell of fire on their clothes or hair!

And that is pre-picture of how the Holy Spirit works. Jesus promised us that he would always be with us and would be the extra person, walking alongside us no matter what.

Today on Pentecost Sunday – 50 days after Easter – we celebrate the arrival of the extra person!

Puzzle

Jesus promised that he would not abandon us. He explains this in John 14:18. How does this make you feel?