

The Moped and the Paraclete – Epiphany 1 2012
 Genesis 1 vv 1-5 p3, Psalm 29, Acts 19 vv 1-7 p1115, Mark 1 vv 4-11 p1002

You've heard of the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*? Well this address is called *The Moped and the Paraclete*. Cast your mind back to the year 1970. You're a disaffected teenager. You live on a rundown post War housing development. The old people go on about the community spirit in the old slums and the way they came through the blitz, and how all that disappeared when they built these spanking new tower blocks in the 1960s. Only they're not so spanking new anymore. A combination of vandalism, poor workmanship and untried new materials have left families besieged in rotten flats surrounded by litter-strewn, crime-infested, graffiti-disfigured communal areas. You've left school at 15 with no qualifications and the days of full employment are rapidly drawing to an end. You're heading for a dead end job or a life on the dole. Everyone went on about the sixties as a time of liberation and new ideas in music and on the fashion scene, but the stars of ten years ago are either dead (of drugs suicide or murder) or they've sold out and turned commercial. And the fashion! Does anyone remember seventies fashion? At school you were told about Great Britain, but the empire's going, going, gone and some people are saying it's more something to be ashamed of than to be proud about. If Britain was once the workshop of the world, it isn't going to be for much longer. All the cheap stuff is made in Hong Kong or Taiwan and the decent stuff comes from Germany or Japan, the countries that lost the War.

So you're pretty fed up and you hang around the streets mostly bored and occasionally getting into trouble just to relieve the monotony. Then this new detached youth worker arrives on the estate. His name is John and he's a bit weird, but he's cool really. He tells the kids something's going to happen, something big and they've got to be ready for it when it comes. People listen. When word gets out that he's chilling in the park, they all hang out with him. You go down to find out what it's all about. You're going on a quest. He might look like a rocker with his old leather coat and his greasy long hair, but he's done a deal with a metal dealer for twenty scrap mopeds. He says you're going to do them up and embark on an adventure. This could be your way out, but you've got to be ready.

There's only 20 mopeds. The younger kids have got to go back to school. The more conventional boys and girls turn their backs on the project and go and get jobs. The Mummy's boys won't take a chance. So there's just 30 of you left and 20 mopeds to do up for the quest.

First you've got to fetch them from the scrap yard and scrap is pretty much what they are. None of them runs. In those days mopeds had to have pedals as well as motors, but it's harder work riding them than pushing them. So it takes a real effort to get the bikes to John's workshop and ten boys drop out the first day. They were up for a laugh, but they didn't reckon it was going to be hard work. The 20 of you left slave like nobody's business under John's direction. You strip the mopeds down to their constituent parts. Every bit is cleaned, repaired, or replaced if necessary, greased and reassembled. While you work, you talk. John's really wise and he tells you lads what's what about a lot of things. A lot of what he says is the same as what your dad and your teachers have been telling you, but it comes

better from him. You feel better about yourself because you're achieving something really worthwhile. Eventually you have 20 gleaming, perfect mopeds. They still don't run. They're a bit easier to push or pedal, but you can't start the engines yet. John won't let you. You can't afford the petrol. He says you've all got to wait for his mate Josh who is the real business. When Josh comes, you'll be cooking with gas. Till then, it's clean, polish and pedal round the yard and you start to wonder whether the quest is ever going to take off.

Then Josh comes, pushing his own immaculate machine up the road. John looks out of the workshop and shouts, "There he is". You all rush out. Josh says to John, "Just check over my machine, would you?" John says, "What me, check your machine?" Josh, "Says, yep. I want you to do the same for me as you've done for these lads." So John gives Josh's machine the once-over and Josh pushes his moped into the petrol station and fills up. Josh pays the petrol pump attendant for all of you and you all fill up and for the first time you start your engines. Every cleaned gleaming machine starts the first time and you're off.

John stays behind, but you follow Josh out on to the open road. You follow your quest and what adventures you have. You see new places, new people, new things. You're free. You're gone for months. You find you can do things you never knew you could do. You make plenty of mistakes, but Josh is always there for you. You think it's going on for ever. Whenever you run out of fuel, Josh tops up your tank. You travel thousands of miles and it's just amazing. You stop caring about the object of the quest. The journey is just so awesome.

Then one day, you're devastated. Josh tells you he's got to go. He'll never forget you. You'll never forget him. He gives you his credit card (which had only just been invented in 1970) and tells you you can have as much petrol as you need. It's up to you now. You've got wheels. You're free. You can go on holiday. You can get a job. You can visit people. You can fetch and carry. Instead of hanging about on the estate getting bored and making mischief, you will be a useful member of society, a giver, not just a taker. You can make a contribution. You've got wheels. You can use them to do some good in the world. Indeed you can do more than Josh ever did, because there are 20 of you and you can pass on the good news. You can tell other people, recruit them into the Josh movement. Give them Josh's credit card. He won't mind. He wants you to do it. They can be set free too, given wheels, become givers, not just takers, and they can recruit others too and so can those others and the movement will spread across the whole world because the spirit Josh freely gives out sets them free to serve the whole world. And not to forget the quest. The journey is awesome, but the end is spectacular. Josh says he can't tell you what it's like now, but you will see him again and then you'll really know what it's all about. Just do what he did, what he told you to do. He's already given you everything you need – a set of wheels and a tiger in your tank. Just do it. And they did and that's why we're here and it's our turn now.