

**A Spirit-Shaped Community: Part I – the Fruit of the Spirit: Galatians
5:16-26**

(With the Children)

Can you make any shapes with your body?

What kinds of things made shapes?

You can use a pencil or crayon and draw shapes in whatever colours or patterns you like.

You can use a cookie cutter to make shapes in all kinds of things – cookie dough, wet sand, clay... Which is great because then you get a whole bunch of neatly cut out identical and uniform objects. But there isn't a whole lot of variety...

You can use your hands to sculpt and mold material into shapes, limited only by your imagination, the material you use, and the skill of your hands.

I like to use needles to sculpt wool into shapes – balls, birds, animals, hearts...

And then there is water. The flow of the water, the current, carves out shapes in the riverbed. If there is ice in the water or lots of force, deep shapes are cut into cliffs to form canyons and caves.

Wind can makes shapes too – the way it blow the leaves through the trees, or bows the branches and trunks. It can flatten a field of wheat or send ripples out across the water.

Whatever kinds of shapes we make, we usually use some kind of a tool to make it: pencil, hands, water, wind, cookie-cutter...

Well, God likes to make shapes too. Out in creation he makes all kinds of shapes: spheres, stars, tree branches, leaf shapes, tall cliffs with rocky outcroppings or caves cut into them.

And God uses tools as well to make those shapes. He uses wind, water, nutrients in soil. He uses his imagination to make new shapes. And he makes us into shapes as well.

One of God's shaping tools is the Holy Spirit. It's hard to see the Holy Spirit, but you can see the shapes it makes. Just like you can't see the wind or a water current, you can see the shape they make. The Holy Spirit works a bit like that sometimes as well. So, we might not see the Holy Spirit working among us, but we can see what kinds of shapes the Spirit forms within us.

Now, the shapes the Holy Spirit forms aren't like circles and squares – things you can draw or make from clay. The Holy Spirit shapes us into a community that looks a certain way.

The way we shape something gives it certain characteristics and determines how it behaves. What are the characteristics of this ball of clay? And what is the ball designed to do? And what about a cube? If I shape this clay into a cube, it won't roll, but it will be solid and steady so I could stack something on top of it.

The Holy Spirit shapes us, the church, this group of people, into Jesus' body. And the shape that we are will determine how we behave, how we act, what we say... Just like water will follow the course the current creates for it, as we are shaped into Jesus' body, we will follow the path he sets out for us. If we are in the shape of Jesus' body that will look a certain way and produce certain kinds of characteristics. The bible calls these characteristics the fruit of the Spirit.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity/goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control

What do you think the shape of love looks like? Or the shape of kindness? Or the shape of self-control? Those are hard kinds of shapes to imagine. But remember we talked about how you can't see the wind but you can see what the wind does. The Spirit is like that too. You know the Spirit of God is working when you see its effects: when God's people love God and others, when we are kind to one another, when we are generous with our time and resources, when we control our impulses so that we don't hurt other people, when we are patient when we get frustrated instead of impatient, when we trust God and are faithful (obedient) to his calling in our lives instead of going our own way.

When we see these things evident in the community that is the church, we know that God's Holy Spirit is forming us to look more and more like Jesus' body. When we see these things more in our own lives, we know that God's Holy Spirit is working inside us to make us more and more into his disciples.

And you kids (and all of us) can be a part of Jesus' body (a Jesus shaped body) even when you leave here – when you go to school or in your families or when you hang out with your friends. How do you think your friends might see the evidence that God's Spirit is working in you?

So, if I were to ask you to look for signs that God is creating us into a community that is shaped by his Spirit, we should be looking for those signs: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity/goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

As you go back to your seats (after we sing a song) I want you to look at the words on this bookmark (the Fruit of the Spirit), and think about how what those things would look like. You can use the playdoh to make those ideas into shapes, you can use paper and crayons to draw pictures of what you think those things look like. You can think about where you see love, joy, peace... in the things that you do at home or at school and in the things that your family does, and in the things you see happening here at church. But try to stay focused on those nine words and see where your imagination takes you. And

wherever you see these fruits working, you see how God is making us into a community that looks more and more like he wants us to look as followers of Jesus.

A Spirit-Shaped Community: Part II – Where Jesus is proclaimed as Lord.

As we think more and more about what it means to be a community that is shaped by the Spirit of Christ, we have seen that where there is evidence of the work of the Spirit where the Spirit is working and active to form Jesus' body in us. As the Spirit forms that body more and more profoundly, we begin to resemble it more clearly to the world around us. One of the ways you know that the power and presence of God is at work when you see the fruit of the Spirit.

Another way you know that the power and presence of God is at work is to look for the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. We touched on this briefly last week: it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can confess that Jesus is Lord and mean it. And mean it to the extent that nothing else is Lord. Nothing else can demand our allegiance, attention, or obedience (1 Cor 12:3).

Now probably I should have talked about this before we talked about fruit of the Spirit, because the proclamation that Jesus is Lord really comes first above all things. But that would have meant the kids were sitting too long without something to do! So, we are getting to the first last, so to speak.

Proclaiming Jesus as Lord necessarily entails a number of things. Proclaiming Jesus is Lord first and foremost is an act of worship. But it's not a passive act of worship (that's an oxymoron). It means that God is actively praised, adored, and obeyed, and not just spectated. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord means that when we show up to worship, we participate in worship, rather than having worship being done for us.

In addition, it means that nothing else is Lord – not powers, principalities, ideas, customs, cultures, traditions, ideas, philosophies... Unfortunately, in the world we live in, we proclaim that something else is lord all the time. We do it when we self identify as anything other than a child of God and follower of Jesus. If we say that we are a conservative or liberal, or of a particular sexual orientation, or a lawyer or barista, or even a mother or grandfather *before* we acknowledge we are children of God and followers of Jesus, we put those self-identities first, over and above the lordship of Jesus.

We proclaim that elements of our culture are lord when we bring cultural elements into our worship that don't belong there. We see this profoundly at Christmas when we allow Santa and all that represents into our homes and churches, or when we give into the marketing of Christmas or get caught up in the buying frenzy that starts November 1st. These might be important elements of our culture, but they don't have anything to do with the Incarnation of God who came to dwell among us, be with us, rescue us from death and decay, and bring us to live into the relationship with God that God created us for in the first place.

I'm sure that if we evaluated the way we think, the decisions we make, and the action we take, we might find that we implicitly (and sometimes not so implicitly) proclaim that something other than Jesus rules, reigns, and invites us into fellowship with him, demonstrated through obedience and love.

So, what does proclaiming that Jesus is Lord look like in our culture? Does it mean that we go stand on the street corner and shout it out to everyone who can hear? Probably not every effective.¹ Proclaiming Jesus is Lord happens when we act in his name and no one else's. It is when we love and serve our neighbour for their sake, and for God's glory, rather than our own. It is when we act not because it is the right thing to do, but because God is bringing about his heavenly kingdom here on earth, and we are a part of it.

What does proclaiming Jesus as Lord look like here at St. Andrew's? It looks like welcoming the stranger into our midst no matter how bad they smell or how "irresponsible" their lives may look to us – welcoming them without condition with the love and acceptance that Jesus does. It looks like opening up our homes and lives to refugees who have suffered in ways we can't imagine, and for whom our community could become that place of green pasture, quiet waters, and restoration that God promises. It looks like visiting the shut-ins and those with limited mobility to let them know that they haven't been forgotten, they are not alone, and they are still very much a part of the community of God's children. Where do you see the proclamation that Jesus is Lord here at St. Andrew's?

Wherever these things happen (and all those other things you can think of), we proclaim by the power of the Spirit, to the world around us that we belong to a different kingdom than the kingdoms of our present powers. And we serve a different King and Lord that the ones of the world we live in.

It's no secret that there is significant anxiety here in our community about who God is calling us to be and what he is calling us to do, and how he is calling us to do it. And we might, at times, be worried about the survival of the church or the direction things are going. But if we really are a community that is shaped by God's Spirit, empowered and vitalized by the Spirit of Christ, and are being re-created and re-formed by this same Spirit, we have nothing to fear. Jesus *is* Lord, and the evidence of God's work in us and among us is all around us. So, let us "provoke" one another, encourage one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). And let us look for the power of the Spirit in the proclamation that Jesus is Lord and in the fruit the Spirit creates – look for it, get in on it, and be shaped by it, and we will see that God can do (and will do) immeasurably more than we could ever imagine for the glory of his kingdom!

¹ Though not always effective, proclaiming the gospel from the street corners isn't entirely out of the question. We are called to proclaim the gospel from all kinds of places. We are to be the 'heralds' of the Good News. Sometimes 'heralding' happens in uncomfortable places!