

The Shack Series: The Garden
John 16:7-15
January 31 - February 1, 2009

My life is a mess. And I don't just mean the house, and not just because we are moving. Of course it is a mess for those reasons. Moving boxes and To Do lists, suitcases and piles of clothes, travel plans and all in all general chaos. My precious little ones have, in the last few weeks: bit the head off one of my original Star Wars figures, found new ways and new colors of pens to mark the wall, and run through the screen door ... without opening it first.

But more than that, my life is a mess emotionally and spiritually. Limited time, finite energy, overwhelming transition, it adds up fast.

So here is one thing, of many, that I have learned in my time here at RBCPC. You all are a bunch of messes too! And so is this church.

And here is another thing I've learned. This great mess is wild, and beautiful, and perfectly in process.

We are now in the fifth week of this series on *The Shack*, and this week we focus on the character Sarayu, the Holy Spirit.

Pray.

Read John 16:7-15.

It turns out, preaching one message on the Holy Spirit is *really* difficult. I feel like I have run to the ocean, scooped up a handful of salt water with cupped hands; now I am running up the beach getting ready to tell you what the ocean is like. "Look at it! It's huge, and there are waves, and all sorts of fish and creatures are alive in there!" And you are just going to be looking at my wet hands, with a few drops of salty water.

What does the Holy Spirit do? [Slide showing these]

CONVICTS US	John 16:18
ILLUMINATES US	John 16:12-15
TEACHES US	John 16: 12-15
GUIDES US	John 16:13; Romans 8:14
ASSURES US	Romans 8:16
INTERCEDES US	Romans 8:26
DIRECTS US	Acts 20:22
WARNS US	Acts 20:23
INDWELS US	Ephesians 1:13-14; John 14:16-17; Galatians 3:1-5
GIFTS US	Luke 12:11-12; I Corinthians 12, 13, 14

And this is not a complete list! The Holy Spirit initiates and makes change. The Spirit works in, around, and through our lives. The Spirit works outside of us and our expectations. The Spirit loves.

I have often thought that the disciples had it so good. They got to walk on the shores of Galilee and learn from the Master. Certainly, living with Jesus had to be the best time for any follower and disciple of his to be alive. But no, Jesus said, "(John 16:7) ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Jesus tells us *we are better off now*, with the Holy Spirit active and present, than we would be if Jesus was still here in the flesh. Do you believe that?

Why is it so hard to embrace this claim that we are better with Jesus gone? I think Jesus was being sincere, and honest. I suspect it's against his nature to lie about anything, but especially something that important.

One reason I think it's difficult to believe Jesus is what I think of as the "Act of God" clause. Living here in San Diego over the past couple years, I have learned more about homeowners insurance than I was ever hoping to. Some of you who have lost your home to wild fire, you have become experts on insurance. Some have horror stories, others have beautiful stories. One thing we are all familiar with in home insurance is the Act of God clause.

If you have ever read your insurance policy, you have seen that little line about "act of God." The definitions of an "act of God" vary, but all refer to natural disasters or extreme weather events such as lightening, tornados, hurricanes, or earthquakes. We often refer to these disasters and extreme conditions with negative consequences as acts of God.

For some reason, we don't call them "acts of Jesus." The quick associations we have with acts of Jesus tend to be more pastoral, loving, healing, warming images. And I've never even hear the expression "acts of the Spirit." "Fruit of the Spirit," and "gifts of the Spirit," those I have heard. But we don't often, if ever, conceptualize the "acts of Spirit" as good things in our life.

One theologian and author described the Holy Spirit as the "shy member of the Trinity." The Holy Spirit loves to point people to Jesus. That is what the Spirit wants and that is what the Spirit does best. The Spirit keeps pointing us to Jesus. So that might be one reason we don't recognize all the work of the Spirit and why we really don't believe Jesus that we are better off without him here.

Another reason we find it difficult to believe that we are better with the Holy Spirit is we don't have perspective on our mess ... or our life. In the midst of my own mess, I find it very difficult to position myself to get perspective.

In chapter 9 of *The Shack*, we come to a part of the story where Mack has a one-on-one conversation with Sarayu, the Holy Spirit character. In the book up to this point, Mack has found himself in this incredible place, having significant time and life changing conversation with each person of the Trinity. In this chapter, Mack walks out into a garden with Sarayu on the way to do some work together. The garden is described as "chaos in color." There is no regard for order or certainty, and Mack finds it confusing, stunning, and incredibly beautiful.

As if hearing his thoughts, Sarayu says, "From above it's a fractal."

A what? And that was Mack's response too.

And here is how Sarayu describes it. "A fractal... something considered simple and orderly that is actually composed of repeated patterns no matter how magnified. A fractal is almost infinitely complex. I love fractals, so I put them everywhere."

What is a fractal? I decided to find out what do they look like in nature. So a little research on fractals in nature turned up some very interesting things. Common things that are fractals: broccoli [show picture]; feathers of a peacock [show picture]. Here's another amazing fractals from creation: Romanesco (a cross between broccoli and Cauliflower, which accentuates the great fractal spiral patterns on the top.) [show picture]. Other naturally occurring fractals: lightning, pineapples, snowflakes, coral, and ferns. These fractal patterns are everywhere.

So Mack and Sarayu are in that garden and she says “from above” it’s a fractal. In other words, with a different perspective, you can see the pattern. So how do perspectives and patterns influence our perception of our mess?

Here are some images that will be more helpful than words alone.

The first is what many people called “an act of God” in the insurance world. The first picture is a ground shot of Hurricane Katrina aftermath. [Show image] Standing on the ground, in the midst of a hurricane, has got to feel like chaos; definitely a huge mess. But from the perspective of a satellite, it is easy to see pattern and design. [Show image] In the midst of our storms, it is difficult to see God’s pattern.

This second series is a corn field. Years ago I actually did one of these corn mazes. It was a blast. It was hard. [Show corn maze aerial] People actually grow fields of corn just to cut a maze in them. You could not see anything, [Show corn- ground level] but you had to keep going. You had to trust there was a design to it. When we feel lost, it requires faith to believe God has a design for our lives.

This one will be a familiar feeling for some of you. [Show traffic picture] Sitting in a traffic jam is one of my least favorite things in the world. I have thought certainly they could design these roads better. [show traffic aerial] From the sky, you can see the pattern and the flow, and even diagnose when there is congestion. When we feel stuck, some insight from the Spirit’s perspective might be just what we need.

Finally, sometimes our life is a mess because we get so focused on ourselves. [show domino from ground perspective] Even those closest to us become a bit fuzzy because we get so consumed with our own needs, focused on our own mess. When we get like this, [show domino aerial picture] we forget that we are connected to so many others. Part of God’s nature is community and connection, and we are designed with that connectivity. We each are part of a larger design and God’s larger story. When we turn inward, we neglect the story God is unfolding all around us.

All we see is the mess. God sees a pattern. It’s wild, and beautiful, and perfectly in process.

What is your pattern? God is working with you for a purpose, in the midst of your mess, creating a pattern. At the end of chapter 9, Mack and Sarayu have been working in this wild, beautiful, confusing garden. As they worked, they had a fascinating conversation. But the end of it might be the message the Holy Spirit would want us to hear.

SHACK DRAMA (pg. 137 from Mack “But don’t I have the right ... through pg 138, Papa “Mackenzie, Jesus would like to take you for a walk ...”)

The Spirit is at work here! I have seen it. I have heard it talked about. I have experienced it. Can you imagine the feeling Mack had when he understood that the garden was his soul? And that he and Sarayu had been working on it together, with a purpose? Wow!

If you can capture that feeling, even for just a moment, cherish it. Embrace it. Open up to it. I am telling you, it is happening here. Right now.

One of the reasons I am most sad to leave this place is because of how much I see the Spirit at work. Through this series, in our worship, in small groups and discussion groups throughout the week, in our giving, in our serving, in our mess.

You are a mess, and God sees you as beautiful and perfectly in process.