Sermons at All Saints Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Canon Geoff Read on Sunday 25th October

SHAPE 4 - how would I know it's God speaking and not just a good idea?

Text: 5:1-2, 15-21, 6:23; John 15:13-17



Learning together
from John 15 & Ephesians 5

I guess everyone here has the experience of learning a second or even third or fourth language

That may be the norm in your country of origin, that you grew up with

For others of us it's been as a result of hard work and sometimes blank looks from others

And even when we carefully learn vocabulary we need to also carefully learn how to use those words in the right way and sometimes even in different ways in different settings

Knowing who we are talking with and the dynamics of the setting is important





I never had formal lessons for German. I learned and used it in the workplace way back in the early 1980s on an American Army base where it was nine German women and me in an office - I heard words and phrases, and I learned how to use them there - but I also came to realise they sometimes used pretty strong language

The other place I used German was around the meal table at my future mother in law

I had to constantly check out with Marie-Louise if that was an OK word to use in front of her

Getting it right in that context was crucial!

And that is what Jesus in our gospel and Paul in our other reading are talking about

Knowing who we are talking with and what we are talking about and understanding the dynamics of the setting



Spiritual gifts
Heart/Passions
Abilities
Personality
Experience

We are exploring how God shapes us and about a SHAPE way of seeing ourselves - S for our Spiritual gifts, H for Heart's desire/passions, A for Abilities, P for our Personality, land E for life Experience

Knowing that it is God who does the shaping, not us, is transformative to how we hear things like this

- "… be imitators of God …" (v1)
- "… understand what the will of God is …" (v17)
- "… be filled with the Holy Spirit …" (v18)



"Be imitators of God …" (Ephesians 5:1)

If it's done by us, in our own strength how do we begin to imitate God?

But if it is by God then things are very different

Knowing it is God who does the shaping, not us, transforms how we hear things like

"understand what the will of God is …" (v17)

If it is done by us, in our own strength, how can we possibly with limited minds understand the infinite mind of God

But if it is God revealing His will to us, helping us discern in prayer, then things are very different

And finally knowing it is God who does the shaping, and not us, transforms how we hear things like

"be filled with the Holy Spirit …" (v18)

How can we possibly do that?

But if it is God who does the filling then the command to overflow with love is very different

The clue to all of this is in our awareness of the shift Jesus talks about in vv15-16 - from servants to friends

It's the same when Paul talks about knowing deep, deep down that we are children of God (v1) in Ephesians

Think for a moment about being a servant or employee

Often told what to do

or if entrusted with responsibility is nevertheless as answerable to another

However committed the employee is, there is always a gap between the employer and employee

It's made up of all sorts of things - power dynamics, rights, unwritten expectations and obligations, ultimate lack of autonomy - its rooted in contract



How different between friends or between a parent and a child - those are relationships rooted in covenant

From servants to friends – John 15:16, 17

I do not call you servants any longer, because ***the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends****, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father*

Jesus spells it out as he says in v15:

> *I do not call you servants any longer, because* ***the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends****, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father*

and He goes even further in the next verse saying this:

> *You did not choose me, but I chose you. And* ***I appointed you*** *to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.*

Choosing isn't about you but not you, being better than others

It's a way of expressing the dynamic I spoke about a couple of weeks ago - only child who can call me papa

And appointing is the language of entrusting, sharing in a task

"… we are utterly loved and, as we trust that, we are inspired and taught by Jesus … to live a life of daring love as he did."

David Ford, Meeting God in John, p25

Listen to what one writer says about what is at the heart of what Jesus says in John's gospel

"What happens is that we have a new family identity as "children of God". We are brothers, sisters and friends of Jesus, the Son of God. And at the heart of this is not only being born into this family but also maturing in it together. Its deepest, open secret is love: we are utterly loved and, as we trust that, we are inspired and taught by Jesus, "the Son who is close to the Father's heart (1:18), to live a life of daring love as he did." (David Ford, Meeting God in John, p25)

and that word "inspired" is about much more than Wow, I want to do that



"inspired" = filled to overflowing – breath or liquid

The origin is "being breathed into" or poured into to overflowing - so it is about being filled in an ongoing way with the life and love of God, the Holy Spirit

God the Father and God the Son invite us into the love that is between them.

And as we do, what Jesus calls "remaining" in His love, any loving we do starts to come not from us, but from them

So all of these things like imitating God, understanding His will, loving as He loves are something He is shaping in us

God-shaped fruit of the Spirit





God-given gifts of the Spirit

And that shaping includes what we heard about last week - the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit

- the fruit are attitudes towards others and ourselves - as we find ourselves in situations where we need love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - if we ask and allow, God will shape that into us

- the gifts of the Spirit are abilities needed and God-given to each one of us as children and friends to join in with what God is doing and inviting us to help with - take a look at some of these in one of the NT lists here in Ephesians 4:11 (last week's reading)

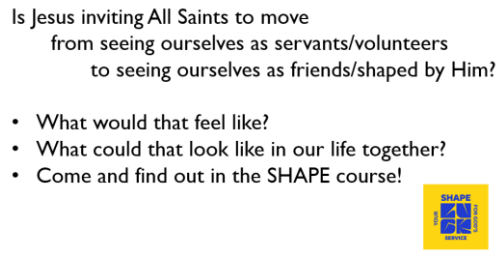
This is the **shift from** at best seeing need and feeling compassion and trying hard

or sadly sometimes feeling obligation and volunteering and then giving up through exhaustion or just feeling put upon

It is the **shift to** discerning what God is doing and hearing His call, or not, to join in based on how He has shaped us and what He is saying to us in prayer

All Saints is a very well-meaning church, that is often moved to compassion and love

But I sense we are at the limits of that



I think Jesus is inviting us to move from seeing ourselves as His servants/volunteers to seeing ourselves as His friends/shaped by Him

- What would that feel like?
- What could that look like in our life together?
- Come and find out in the Shape course, running from January 2027 - book the dates now

I believe He wants us to discover how to love out of a different place, out of the very love that is between Him and His Father and into which we are invited and out of which we will bear fruit, fruit that will last