

**The Shack: Part 4**  
**“Three-in-One is not a Can of Oil”**  
(John 14:25-27 and Acts 2:1-4, 13-21)

In our study of *The Shack* we have talked about how the circumstances of our lives influence the image we have of God. Our image of God then affects our understanding of God.

We have also talked about our response to God in a world that sometimes doesn't make sense. That response is directly related to the way we see or understand God at work or not at work in the world. As such our response is directly related to our image of God. As we have seen through the eyes of Mack, many times our response is to hide from God.

Last week we discovered that even though we may hide from God, God still wants a relationship with each one of us. God desires that relationship, but the transcendent nature of God makes it difficult for us to enter into that relationship. So God meets us on our own turf and comes near to us in Jesus. This is helpful because we know Jesus is a part of human history. In a sense, we could say that Jesus mediates God's offer of relationship.

God in Jesus desires to have a personal relationship with us. God desires to have a relationship with us that is horizontal in the sense that there is no hierarchy, no one is higher than the other. In this relationship God comes down to our level in Jesus. In our conversations around *The Shack*, this personal relationship is modeled by Papa, Yeshua, and Sarayu.

Those of us who were raised in the church typically don't have a

problem seeing Jesus as a corporate savior, the one who died for the sins of the world. In this corporate image, however, we unknowingly violate the model of the horizontal relationship God wants to have with each of us. In that model God is fully submitted to us and we are to be fully submitted to God.

As a corporate savior, however, we have elevated Jesus to that divine status of God that is in the creeds of the early church. This makes it difficult for us to see God in Jesus as being submitted to us – on our human level. We can't accept that in Jesus, God has leveled the playing field and has become our peer. This defeats the purpose of the Incarnation. The good news is we also have the Holy Spirit. Please pray with me.

God of Grace, you have come near to us in Jesus, offering us a personal relationship. Still, we have trouble fully submitting to this relationship as well as understanding you to be fully submitted to us. Through the scripture read and your word proclaimed help us to understand how the power of the Holy Spirit continues to mediate that close personal relationship you desire to have with each of us. Help us to always be aware of and open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, your Spirit, in and through our lives. To the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

As we conclude our study of *The Shack* it's appropriate to say something about the Holy Spirit. During his weekend at the shack, Sarayu, the Holy Spirit, was the most difficult of the characters of the Trinity for Mack to understand. And for a good reason. The Holy Spirit is most likely a problem for most of us. I can remember as a young boy hearing the creeds of the early church. They emphasized that God is known to us in three persons. God is "three-in-One" – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! I was able to grasp the father-son connection, but that third character – the Holy Ghost – just didn't make sense.

When you were a kid did you sometimes have really weird thoughts? Weird because they weren't really your thoughts so much as they were like a subliminal message from the devil? Well, whenever I heard that God was three-in-One, I could just never resist thinking of God as a can of oil.

For those of you who don't know, Three-in-One Oil was very popular back in that other century most of us were born in. Three-in-One Oil is a rust protector and a lubricant. It has a third characteristic, I think, of being a degreaser, hence the name Three-in-One! I was surprised to discover that Three-in-One is still around after 106 years. Well, I'm sure you all know the Trinity is not a can of oil, as did I, even in those early, impressionable years.

In all honesty, however, the Holy Spirit is the one aspect of the Trinity that is difficult for many of us to get our arms around. Listen to one of Mack's early observations of Sarayu:

"He had a difficult time focusing on her; she seemed almost to shimmer in the light and her hair

blew in all directions even though there was hardly a breeze. It was almost easier to see her out of the corner of his eye than it was to look at her directly."<sup>1</sup>

As difficult as it was for Mack to understand Sarayu, as a guest at the shack he had the benefit of actually seeing the Holy Spirit. Now let's not presume his image of Sarayu to be anything more than that. It's his image! The Holy Spirit just happened to appear to Mack in the physical form of an Asian woman. Hear how Mack describes the Holy Spirit in the book: "From what he could tell this wiry-looking person was maybe of northern Chinese or Nepalese or even Mongolian ethnicity. From her clothing, Mack assumed she was a groundskeeper or gardener."<sup>2</sup>

Later in the weekend Mack discovers that Sarayu is in fact a gardener. The image of the Holy Spirit as an Asian woman, however, is not too far from the realm of traditional Christian thought. Even in the early church, the Holy Spirit along with Wisdom were personified as feminine. And the mystery surrounding the Holy Spirit is typical of the mysticism in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The image is still strange to Mack and at first he just doesn't get it. He recognizes Papa to be God and Yeshua to be Jesus. But this Sarayu is troublesome until Papa fills Mack in.

"Speaking of Sarayu, is she the Holy Spirit?' 'Yes. She is Creativity; she is Action; she is

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<sup>1</sup> William Paul Young. *The Shack* (Windblown Media, copyright © 2007 by William P. Young), page 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, page 85.

the Breathing of Life; she is much more. She is my Spirit.’ ‘And her name, Sarayu?’ ‘That is a simple name from one of our human languages. It means ‘Wind,’ a common wind actually. She loves that name.’”<sup>3</sup>

She is Creativity; she is Action; she is the Breathing of Life; she is much more. She is the Spirit of God. That’s actually a pretty good description of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is an action verb because she is always at work, always working in our lives, whether we realize it or not.

Think of the Holy Spirit as the connective tissue that binds us to Jesus. Using Paul’s metaphor of the wholeness of the body, the Holy Spirit connects the gathered community of faith we call the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit connects us all one to each other.

The Holy Spirit mediates between the transcendent, all-knowing, immutable nature of God and the all-caring, all loving immanent nature of Jesus. If God is knowable through Jesus, and comes near to us in Jesus, the Holy Spirit connects us to the risen Christ and further mediates our relationship with God making it personal!

We experience the Holy Spirit as that unseen motivating force that appeals to our senses – to our physical, emotional, and intellectual senses. It’s the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that makes us laugh and cry. It’s that same indwelling presence that makes us comfortable with silence or motivates us to speak out. We experience the Holy Spirit through a broad range of human emotions.

It’s the Holy Spirit at work in our lives that connects us to God in Jesus and sharpens our awareness of God’s presence in our lives. And often times, the work of the Holy Spirit is simply so ordinary that we fail to connect certain events with God. And other times the work of the Holy Spirit is boldly felt in ways that startle us. We each experience the work of the Holy Spirit in different ways and not always through the same physical, emotional, and intellectual senses. But the Holy Spirit is sensual and real. She is Creativity; she is Action; she is the Breathing of Life! And she is so much more!

The best way to experience the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to always be aware of and open to God’s presence. The metaphor used in *The Shack* of the Holy Spirit tending the gardens of our souls is powerful. Before Sarayu taught Mack this metaphor, she gave him the opportunity to work in his own soul garden.

Mack noticed that the garden included weeds and dangerous, even poisonous plants as well as beautiful flowers. This symbolizes good and evil in the human heart. After a morning tending the garden with Sarayu, Mack said that the garden was *a mess*. Despite the mess, Mack acknowledged that he felt “... strangely at home and comfortable ...” in the garden. Listen to Sarayu’s explanation:

“And well you should Mackenzie, because this garden is your soul. This mess is *you!* Together, you and I, we have been working with a purpose in your heart. And it is wild and beautiful and perfectly in process. To you it seems like a mess, but to me, I see a perfect

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 110.

pattern emerging and growing  
alive – a living fractal!”<sup>4</sup>

Our soul gardens, just like Mack’s soul garden, are a mess and wonderfully incredible all at the same time. Our soul gardens are a work in progress moving us close to that deeper personal relationship with God. Look at the beautiful flowers in your garden. Do you know where the dangerous plants are? And are you tending to the weeds in your soul garden?

Tending to the weeds in our soul gardens is exactly what we have been asked to do during this season of Lent.

To be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, to accept that personal relationship God wants to have with us, we need to look at the gardens of our souls. Don’t miss the beauty that’s there among the weeds. And there is beauty there in our soul gardens if we will only look for it.

To close this message I would like for us to join in a special prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to be among us. Please join in the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you will renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 138.