**Philippians 3:4b-11 (focussing on 3:9, union with Christ)**

Who here has learnt about solids, and liquids? You might have talked about them at school, or seen them at home. And even if you don’t think you’ve ever learnt about solids and liquids, I think you already know a bit about them. So where you are, shout out for me is this a solid or a liquid? Yes, it’s a solid! And what about this one? Yes, a solid again. And what about what I’ve got inside here? Yes, it’s some squash, which is a liquid!

We can tell the difference very easily between solids and liquids. One of the properties that we use to tell is something is a liquid, is that it changes its shape depending on the container that it’s inside. You can see that as the liquid goes from one container to another, its shape changes to be the same as the container that it’s inside.

And it’s not just that the containers are really strong, and bending and forcing the liquid to be the same shape as it – although that is part of it – but the liquid just can’t help taking on the shape of its container. A key part of what it means to be a liquid, is changing its shape to be like the container that it is in. You know even if a liquid could think, and could try and do things. And even if a liquid really, really wanted to be a different shape, and really, really tried to be that different shape. It could never do it! In the end, it’s still a liquid, and it always falls back into the shape of its container.

Did you know that God made all of us to have the right shape in front of him? That includes our bodies, but I’m talking about the shape of our behaviour – the shape of how we talk, the shape of what we do, and the shape of how we think about everything. God said there is a right and good shape to our behaviour. And the thing is that because God is so right and good and perfect we need to have the right shape of our behaviour to be friends with him.

The problem is that the shape of our behaviour is a bit like the shape of a liquid. We can try really, really hard to have the right shape, and sometimes it might even look like we’re beginning to make ourselves into the right shape…but in the end we always fall back down. We’re in a world, and we’re part of a world, that is all the wrong shape, and the shape of our behaviour becomes like it. But it’s not just the world’s fault, because it is something inside of us that always falls down. Just like the liquid, it’s a part of all of us to become like our container.

But for us, there is way a for our behaviour to be turned into the right shape, and kept that way forever. There’s a way for our behaviour to be the right shape so we can be friends with God. And that’s because God made a way for the shape of our behaviour to be right. He sent Jesus, who lived a perfect life, and so was the right shape in his behaviour; and he God made a way for us to be *in* Jesus. He made a way for us to be in him, and then to take his shape, for the shape of our behaviour to look like the shape of Jesus behaviour. And God sent a seal to put on top and keep us there. And sometimes we still slosh around but if we come back to him the shape of our behaviour is the right shape, because it is the shape of Jesus and we are in Jesus. The bible promises that if we have faith in Jesus – if we believe in who Jesus is and what he has done for us, if we stop trying on our own and trust him completely, then he will make us the right shape, and seal us so that we can always be friends with God. People who have faith in Jesus are in Jesus, and so have the right shape of their behaviour and can be friends with God.

* May have learnt about solids and liquids
  + Examples of each
* Important characteristic of liquids: they take the shape of whatever they’re inside and surrounded by
  + Pour water into different shapes
  + Not that they are forced to be that shape (although that is true)
  + A key bit of being a liquid is not being able to help taking the shape of the thing that it is inside
  + Even if water had thoughts, and really, really wanted to be a different shape, and really, really tried to be that different shape. It could never do it! In the end, it always falls back into the shape of the solid it is surrounded by
* Did you know that God made all of us to be a certain shape in front of him?
  + That includes our bodies, but mainly the way we behave
    - Think, talk, do
  + God is so perfect, that the only way we can be friends with him is if we have the right shape in our behaviour
* Problem is: our behaviour shape is a bit like the shape of water
  + We might try really, really hard to be the right shape
    - (sometimes it might even look like we’re doing well!)
  + But in the end we fall down
  + We’re in a world that is all the wrong shape, and we become like it
  + But it’s not the world’s fault, because just like the water, it’s a part of who we are to become like the world
* But there is a way to get the right behaviour shape
  + God sent Jesus
  + And made a way for us to be in Jesus, in Christ
  + And he sent a seal to hold onto us, and to make sure we stay in Christ
  + We on our own can’t make our behaviour shape the right shape for God, because it’s part of who we are to fall into the shape that is around us
  + The bible promises that if we have faith in Jesus, if we believe in who he is and what he has done for us, if we stop trying on our own and just let him help us, then he will make us the right shape, and seal us so that even though we might still slosh around sometimes, if we come back to Jesus) we will always be the right shape in the end

[Read Philippians 3:4b-9]

Who knows what this is? Yes, It’s play dough! Now play dough is really fun, because you can make all sorts of shapes with it – I can make the shape of a ball, or I can make the shape of a sausage, or I can make the shape of a pancake – on Monday mornings I help at tiddlywinks, the toddler’s group here at Eden, and some of the children there make all sorts of clever shapes.

Did you know that God made all of us to have the right shape? I’m not talking about the shape of our bodies though. I’m talking about the shape of our behaviour. The shape of all that we do, the shape of all that we say, the shape of all that we think. The shape of our behaviour.

And because God is so good, and so perfect, and so brilliant, we need to have the right shape of our behaviour in order to be able to come near to God. The word the bible uses to talk about having the right shape of our behaviour – the shape of all we do, say, and think – is ‘righteousness’. We need to have righteousness in order to be friends with God.

The problem is that we sometimes make mistakes, and sometimes do things wrong, or say things we shouldn’t, or think in a way which is not right. Sometimes we even do those things on purpose. And all of those things twist the shape of our behaviour so we no longer have the right shape of our behaviour, we’re no longer have righteousness, and we no longer can get to God – we can’t be friends with him! Sometimes we try really hard to get back into the right shape, but we can never do it. Sometimes people around us will tell us that you need to do this or be like this in order to be the right shape, but that’s still not good enough for God. In fact, those things just pull us even further from the right shape.

But God wanted to be friends with us – in fact he wanted us to be in his family. So he sent Jesus into the world. And you know what? Jesus had the right shape to his behaviour. And Jesus lived a perfect life and died for us and came back to life all with the perfect shape of his behaviour, he had righteousness, and the bible says that there is a way that we can be in Jesus.

It might sound a bit funny that we’re in Jesus, but that’s the promise that the bible says is true for us if we believe in Jesus. And one thing that being in Jesus means is that no matter how much we get things wrong, no matter how much we are twisted out of the right shape; God gathers us in and puts us in Jesus so that the shape of our behaviour is transformed into the shape of Jesus behaviour – and God puts a seal on top so we can never lose that shape. We are in him, and so we get his shape – and so we can, by Jesus, come back to God, and come into his family! Because we are in Jesus we have the right shape of our behaviour, and because we are in Jesus we have righteousness. Sometimes we still get things wrong, but when God looks at the shape of our behaviour he sees Jesus.

If we have faith in Jesus, if we believe in who he is, and accept that he has done everything for us, then we can have righteousness. We can be in Jesus, not having a righteousness of our own that comes through doing the right things, but a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus – a righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.