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Sermon 4 OCT 2020

OTL 1: The Silent Sermon

- Good morning church--church friends and church family. We welcome you this morning to the LargsNaz online service. We are so glad to have you with us today, wherever you are and whenever you're listening, you are welcome here—If you're new here, we are glad to have you with us -- we hope you'll take some time to listen to some previous services, and get familiar with what's there, and we'd love for you to become a regular and continue to join us each and every week. If you are a regular, we appreciate your dedication and your faithfulness to the church.
- Once again, I believe that God has something profound and life-changing to say to each and every one of us if we have ears to hear.
- Today is the first Sunday in a new sermon series called "On the Level," and we'll be in this series for the next 4 weeks, and then on the 25th of October, the last Sunday of the series, in addition to the morning service we'll meet in the evening at 6pm on ZOOM, and we'll have a Second Helping Bible Study that will review all that we will have heard over the past four Sundays.
- Now for the past two months we've been in the gospels, examining the words of Jesus, and for the next four weeks that much is going to stay the same--but in this series we are going to be looking at only one of the gospels--the gospel of Luke--and only one part of Luke's gospel.

- This series, called “On the Level”-- is going to be based on what is known as Jesus’ “sermon on the plain,” --that is a lengthy discourse toward the end of chapter 6. Now, the "sermon on the plain" bears some resemblance to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew--there are similarities-- but the biggest, most obvious difference, of course, is its geographical setting—Jesus preaches this sermon on a “plain,” on a “level place.” That’s why the series is called "On the Level."
- And today’s sermon, this first of 4 parts of the series, is called “The Silent Sermon,” because I want to suggest that Jesus’ sermon on the plain begins before Jesus has spoken a single word—that he preaches a silent sermon to his disciples and apostles, and to us, through his actions, through his behaviour, even before he has begun to preach verbally.
- I first started thinking about this sermon, and this whole series, back a couple of years ago while Pastor Tasha and I were travelling to the states for a visit at Christmastime. While we were in the US, I met a friend of mine at a little coffee shop in downtown North Augusta, South Carolina--that bustling metropolis--now, my friend, we'll call him Jack to protect his identity, he’s what you might call a good old boy from South Georgia-- and I TRIED to tell him what I had been thinking about, and planning--and the conversation went something like this--let's listen in:
 - (coffee shop sounds)
 - Pastor Steve (PS): This is good coffee.
 - Jack: It is good coffee. What you drinking?

- PS: Just coffee. Large. House blend or something. With half and half.
What's that you've got there?
- Jack: This right here is a Triple Java Chocolate Peanut Crunch Frappucino with Caramel, Whipped Cream, Cocoa Nibs and Espresso Sprinkles.
- PS: Is that what that is?
- Jack: Yep. Yes it is.
- PS: That right there is a milkshake.
- Jack: Yeah, yeah, this right here is delicious is what it is.
- PS: I bet it is. (Pause) So, um, on the flight over here I was reading the Gospel of Luke--and I was doing some thinking about creating a short sermon series, just 4 weeks long-- and I had some time to sort of outline the series and the first message
- Jack: Oh yeah, that's great—I mean, the flight is like 8 hours or something isn't it? You got lots of time to think and pray and read and write—I bet it's really a good time to focus—you can get a lot done—
So, whatcha preachin' on?
- PS: I was thinking about the Sermon on the Plain.
- Jack: Yeah, I know, but what's, like, your SUBJECT?
- PS: I was thinking about the Sermon on the Plain
- Jack: You said that. But what are you preachin' ABOUT?
- PS: The Sermon on the Plain.
- Jack: What?

- PS: That’s what I’m preaching about. That’s my topic.
 - Jack: What’s your topic? All you said was you was thinking about the sermon on the plane.
 - PS: Yes.
 - Jack: Yes what?
 - PS: I was thinking about the sermon on the plain. That’s what I’m preaching about.
 - Jack: Now hold up. Just look, back up here. Now, think back-- you’re on the flight to Atlanta, cruising at 30000 feet, you got your tray table down and your Bible open--Gospel of Luke-- and you're thinking about your sermon. Now, what are you thinking about?
 - PS: (SLOWLY) I’m THINKING about the SERMON on the PLAIN.
 - Jack: Fine, don't tell me--I don't even want to know. I'm just trying to make conversation--I'm just trying to be polite. I'll just sit here and drink my milkshake. I thought we was friends, though, I thought if I asked about somethin' you be straight up with me, not be all evasive and whatnot, but no, you gotta be all "I was thinkin' about the sermon on the plane--that's what I'm preachin' about . . . (audio fades)
- Words can be confusing—actions, however, are usually much clearer—they speak louder than words, you know.
 - Now before we get to the Sermon on the Plain, which is at the end of Chapter 6 of Luke’s gospel, let’s see how Luke, the physician and artist, paints the background here—at the beginning of Chapter 6 we find a situation that we

have seen again and again throughout the gospels over the last few weeks-- we find Jesus and his disciples at odds with some of the religious leaders, some of the Pharisees, who are watching Jesus and his disciples in order to accuse them of being outside of the law, and Luke gives us two examples of the way that Jesus and his disciples fail to live up to the expectations of these particular Pharisees—

- In the first instance Jesus and his disciples are out in a cornfield on a Sunday—on the Sabbath—and they're hungry so they pick some grain and eat it—these Pharisees can't handle this and they accuse Jesus and his disciples of disrespecting the Sabbath—Jesus tells the Pharisees that he and his disciples are hungry, **and he is not going to ignore their need**—he basically says, don't tell me about honouring the Sabbath--“The son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath,”
- Next Luke says that on another Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples are at the synagogue, where Jesus is teaching, And Jesus asks, “is it lawful to do good or to harm on the Sabbath?”
- and then Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, **again meeting a need that the Pharisees would rather ignore**
- And Luke tells us that these Pharisees aren't just annoyed with Jesus' actions, they're not just concerned about his behaviour-- they're FILLED WITH FURY—
- These are the same Pharisees that, in Mark 7 and Matthew 15, accuse Jesus and the disciples of disrespecting tradition by not washing their hands before

they eat—Jesus and the disciples have been out in the marketplace and people—unclean people-- have been touching Jesus and he's been touching them—and healing them—making them clean—but the Pharisees are disgusted by this—they say “wash that uncleanness off before you contaminate yourself”—

- Now before you jump to any conclusions I want to remind you that the Pharisees were not thinking about COVID or any other viruses--they would not have even known what a virus was--their concern was not epidemiological, it was pharisaical
- And so Jesus calls them hypocrites and says they honour God with their lips but not with their hearts and their lives—**that they are all talk**—Luke tells a similar story about Jesus when he's eating at a Pharisee's house in chapter 11
- And Jesus says to these Pharisees, You have replaced God's commands with human regulations—
- Jesus suggests that when the way you follow the law, the way you honor tradition, the way you keep the Sabbath, not only ignores the needs of others, but prevents you from meeting those needs—it has nothing to do with honouring the tradition of your Elders, nothing to do with honouring God, nothing to do with keeping the Sabbath holy—it only has to do with making yourself LOOK holy—upright, elevated, better than others, clean as opposed to the unclean— these Pharisees are so concerned with preserving their authority and their elevated positions, their status--they're disgusted by the

thought of being associated with the unclean and needy—and the Kingdom of God that Jesus ushers in calls that kind of hypocrisy into question--

- and you'll remember I'm sure the way we've seen Jesus call out that kind of hypocrisy over the last few weeks in places like Matthew 23 and Matthew 5 and Matthew 19--the way Jesus shows us that a person can DO certain things or avoid certain things but still have an unclean heart--even if their hands are clean
- So Luke is reminding us here at the beginning of Chapter 6 of the stark contrast between the empty RELIGION of these Pharisees and the actions, the MINISTRY, of Jesus and his disciples — **between these Pharisees whose religion is all talk**--who ignore the needs of others, who use the Law to separate themselves from those they deem unclean, who seek to preserve their elevated positions--the contrast between them and the Son of Man who has come to redeem the world--—so we're thinking of that contrast as we read about what happens next
- So what happens next? Luke tells us that Jesus climbs up a mountain and prays all night long. What's he praying about? Well Luke doesn't tell us, but it makes sense that he's praying about what he's going to do in the morning, and when daylight comes, he calls his all of his disciples together and chooses 12 of them to be his apostles
- Now remember that the Gospel of Luke is looking toward the ACTS of the Apostles, that's the second part of Luke's work in the New Testament--so this is a pretty significant moment—the choosing of these 12 who will be tasked

with carrying the message of the Kingdom of God, the PREACHERS, the missionaries, who will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of the gospel—which they don't fully understand yet—so it makes sense that Jesus would want to teach them—and so they're about to hear Jesus speak about the Kingdom at length in the Sermon on the plain—but Jesus' gospel is not just about what he says, it's about what he does and who he is—and so before he speaks a word, he preaches a silent sermon to his apostles and disciples

- And because Jesus is a good Nazarene, his silent sermon has three points, each of which illustrate who Jesus is, what the Kingdom of God is all about, and what it means to be a follower, a disciple, of Jesus
- So what happens now? Do they stay up on that mountain?
- Let's look at the SCRIPTURE together again, starting with verse 17
- 6:17 He **came down** with them and stood on a **level place**, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people **from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.**

6:18 They had come to **hear him and** to be **healed** of their diseases; and those who were troubled with **unclean** spirits were cured.

6:19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

- And there it is, Jesus' SILENT SERMON—three verses, three sentences, and three points that I want to suggest to you this morning

- First point: He **came down** with them and stood on a **level place**, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people **from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.**
- The sermon that Jesus is about to preach is referred to as “The Sermon on the Plain,” because the phrase “level place” is sometimes translated as “plain”-- the Greek word that is translated as "level" is *pedinos*--and it means just that--flat, level, like a plain (P-L-A-I-N) or like a P-L-A-N-E, come to think of it
- There's a good chance that the word "level" has positive connotations for you. That it sounds like a good thing.
- In conversational English, when we say that someone is "on the level" (like the title of this series)-- we mean they're honest--they tell the truth--if a person says "let me level with you" they mean that they're not being deceitful or withholding anything, but that you can believe what they say.
- And we use that imagery in our language because, in general, we like for things to be "level" in the real world.
- I like for things to be level. You probably do too. When you see a frame hanging on a wall and it's crooked, you probably can't resist the temptation to straighten it.
- When we hang up framed pictures-- our diplomas or degrees, or a mirror or a bulletin board-- on our walls at home, and Pastor Tasha will confirm this, I'm sure--I will put a little 6-inch level--you know the tool with the bubble-- on the frame to make sure that it's hanging straight--and every now and then I'll check that things haven't shifted--that things aren't crooked

- A few weeks ago we purchased some new shelving units for our kitchen-- now these are big, heavy duty shelves, and there were 4 separate units, each about 5 feet high and 3 feet wide--they hold a lot of jars and cookbooks and appliances and all sorts of things we use to cook with--all together they are about 12 feet long
- And we put them together and put them against one of the walls in our kitchen, and when we got them in place it became painfully obvious that the floor in our kitchen was not level at all--in fact from one wall to the other I imagine the floor inclines at least 4 inches or so
- And so we looked at the shelves, you know, and they were solid--they were stable--they weren't wobbling or anything--but man, they were NOT level--you looked at them and you'd wonder if maybe one of your legs was longer than the other--it made you a little seasick--or it did me anyway
- And Tasha tried to be nice about it--she said--they're stable, they don't move--once we get them filled with things you'll never notice.
- And we were both tired, so we thought--ok, that's fine, let's put all the books and jars and appliances and tins of things back on them. We got them all filled up and we went to bed.
- The next morning we got up, walked into the kitchen to get our coffee, looked at the shelves, looked at each other, and Tasha said, "you're not going to leave them like that are you?"
- Nope! I said, and I spent the rest of the morning taking everything off the shelves, putting blocks and shims under the legs of each unit, and securing

fasteners and checking and double-checking, but by the afternoon those shelves were not just solid and stable, they were straight and plumb and no longer crooked--in short they were LEVEL. And I was happy, because level is good.

- And so when I read about "a level place" I think that sounds like a good place to build a house--a nice level piece of land will make for a nice solid foundation.
- But when Luke uses the phrase "a level place" here in the 6th chapter of his gospel--it does NOT carry those same positive connotations.
- Many Old Testament prophets used the image of the "level place," or "the plain"—and I believe Luke uses it to remind his readers of the words of the prophets. For prophets like Jeremiah and Daniel and Joel and Habbakkuk and Zechariah, "level places" would have referred to desolate locations where there are corpses, disgrace, idolatry, suffering, misery, hunger, annihilation, and mourning (see Jeremiah 9:22; 14:18; 30:4; Daniel 3:1; Joel 1:10, 20; 2:22; 3:19; Habakkuk 3:17; Zechariah 12:11).
- The level place—in the words of the prophets—is a wasteland, a place you don't want to be --it might be helpful to think of a city or a neighborhood that's destroyed by a hurricane or a tornado or an atomic bomb--we say that the buildings were "levelled"--that's the feeling Luke is going for here
- But it's important to remember that the OT prophets like Ezekiel and Isaiah also foretold that God would renew the level places. When the Messiah, the Son of Man, comes to usher in the Kingdom, the glory of God—salvation--

would be revealed in the transformation **even of the level places**. (see Isaiah 40:4, 18; Ezekiel 3:22, 23; 8:4).

- **And so Jesus' mere presence in the midst of a broken, levelled world is an indication, a proclamation, of the present and coming renewal and revival through the Kingdom of God.**
- Jesus is teaching the way of the Kingdom with his disciples and apostles **in the midst** of a level place. **Not on the mountain**, but having come down to the level place with the multitudes who are there. The disciples have not yet seen the crucifixion and resurrection, but Jesus is showing them an example of what the incarnation means—that God has come down to the level place—stepped into humanity and history—meeting people where they are—in the midst of their brokenness
- What does this mean for the followers of Jesus? For his disciples and apostles? Jesus calls them and immediately leads them INTO the level places, into the needy and broken and unclean crowds—I believe this is true for followers of Jesus today as well --just as Jesus called his apostles, he calls us—and if you follow Jesus he is not going to call you simply to stay on the mountaintop with him, but to follow him into the level places—if you're part of the people who call themselves Christians, but even more so if you're part of the people who call themselves Nazarenes—you are a follower of Jesus—and he will always lead us into the broken, level places—
- And who's in this level place? A great multitude—people from everywhere—from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon--now this is where

we remember that it is Luke who is giving us these details--and his gospel is going to continue into the book of Acts, where he tells us of the spread of the gospel and of the church from the innermost parts of Jerusalem, out into all the world--even the Gentile world--and you may recall that when Pastor Tasha told us about Jesus' meeting with the Syrophenician woman she told us about the region of Tyre and Sidon where it took place--Jezebel's stomping grounds--these unclean, Gentile cities that were not friendly with Israel, these places that the Pharisees would have avoided like the plague, but into which Jesus enters, and whose inhabitants have come to find Jesus

- And why have they come to find Jesus? They had come to **hear him and** to be **healed** of their diseases; and those who were troubled with **unclean** spirits were cured.

6:19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him

- They had come to hear him **and** to be healed—they were unclean--they had diseases and unclean spirits-- and all in the crowd are trying to touch Jesus. So what do Jesus and his disciples do? Do they tell these people how unclean they are and that they better step back? Do they avoid being contaminated by their uncleanness?
- No--all of them are healed and made clean by their contact with Jesus, and the disciples are alongside them—in the midst of them
- And this is the second point—before he speaks a word, Jesus meets the needs of the multitude

- Now notice why the crowds have come-- They had come to **hear him and to be healed** of their diseases
- They show up not just to HEAR, but to make contact with Jesus, to be made clean, to be made whole—they come because they know they are broken and unclean, because they have needs that they expect Jesus and his disciples to meet
- And here is a lesson for the church today--before the spoken sermons begin, we must engage the community and meet their needs
- We hear so many critics today who bemoan the decline in interest in the church, in Christianity — Not just outside the church but within the church as well, there are folks who wonder why people just don't seem to want to listen to what the Church is saying—who wonder why the multitudes aren't seeking out the Church, asking how can I worship, what must I do to be saved?--where are the crowds, they ask-- Why are the people rejecting Jesus?
- I wonder if it may be that they're not rejecting Jesus—but they're rejecting churches that bear no resemblance to Jesus, that do not act like Jesus, that don't follow Jesus, that don't love like Jesus—in short, it could be that the crowds don't expect to find Jesus in a church service--in-person, online or otherwise—they do not expect to touch Jesus and be made clean, they only expect that they'll be told how unclean they are—and this crowd here in this level place knows that already

- So that's not what Jesus does at all. And that's not what Jesus calls his followers to do— Jesus provides his disciples, his followers, an example that contrasts with the example of the Pharisees at the beginning of the Chapter
- When we examine what Jesus DOES here in his silent sermon, we see that
- **Jesus' first action after calling the apostles is to go down to the level place with those in need and to meet their needs—to make the unclean clean—to make contact with them, not being fearful of being made unclean, not afraid of losing his elevated position by being associated with this crowd—He pours his power out in order to transform the broken places and the lives of the people who dwell there**
- And this is the third point--6:19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.
- Jesus does not keep his power to himself—his power comes out from him—and it is this power, the power of the Holy Spirit that transforms, that heals, that meets the needs of this multitude—Jesus, the incarnate one, empties himself out, and calls his followers to do the same
- You may ask, but how do we do that? We don't have that kind of power
- The graphic that we're using for this sermon series, it's got an image of a level on it--the tool with the little bubble that floats back and forth inside it—that's sometimes called a Spirit level—and it reminds us that **the same spirit that filled Jesus, that was the power that he shared with the crowds and brought transformation, that same Spirit that filled his disciples at Pentecost, the same spirit that filled the early church, the same Spirit**

that brought Jesus back to life, empowers the church today-- The Church IS the Body of Christ and is filled with the SAME Spirit, the same power—and the church is called not to hang on to that power, but to empty it out in the level places—to transform those places and the broken lives within them—this is what revival is, and we will see revival when we allow the Spirit in all its power to go OUT—**that** is when we'll see transformation, that is when we'll see lives changed, that is when we'll see communities changed, **that is when we'll see justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream**

- We are filled with the same POWER that Jesus had—do we believe that?
- We are called to live like Jesus, to love like Jesus, to be the body of Christ for the multitudes in the level places
- When the church puts aside the lip-service and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and doesn't JUST talk the talk, but walks the walk-----when the church proclaims the good news of the gospel not just with its words but with its actions as well—then we will see the level places renewed, then we will see revival.
- But it is all too easy to equate the Christian life with simply signing up to watch--or listen to-- a show on Sunday morning, or with mere intellectual assent to a set of beliefs and doctrines, and to forget the practical, lived-out, day-to-day reality that Jesus calls us to
- As St Francis reminds us “It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching.”

- If our walk contradicts our preaching, it negates it. Church, we need to practice what we preach.
- Yes, the words are important—and Jesus uses a lot of them in the Sermon on the Plain—but don't forget the silent Sermon that precedes them, the silent sermon that reminds us that actions speak as loudly as words, that
- The life that Jesus calls his disciples to—that he calls the church to, that he calls those who are the body of Christ to, is one that does not seek to remain separate and elevated, but one that goes down to the level where people are, and empties itself out, sharing the power of Jesus and meeting their needs--feeding them, healing them, making them clean—that is the kind of life that enacts the Kingdom of God, it is a life that sees the renewal of the level places through the power of the Spirit, that is a life that will see revival spread beyond the virtual walls of this online sanctuary, beyond the walls of brick and mortar buildings, beyond our denominational boundaries, beyond the streets of this town, beyond the borders of this country, out into the whole world, until all the earth is filled with the power that fills the body of Christ. Let's not just proclaim the good news with our words, let's also preach a silent sermon with our lives today and every day.
- Be a blessing to others this week, and God will bless you as well--more than you can ask or even imagine.