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Sermon 11 OCT 2020
OTL 2: Poetic Prophecy

- Good morning, and welcome to the LargsNaz online worship service--
whether you are a faithful regular attender here or a first-time listener, we are glad that you are here with us and we trust that you'll be blessed by what you hear. We also hope that you'll feel free to participate actively in worship--the lyrics for all the music are with the sermon notes that you can download--so join right in where you are. If you are new here, 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 second Sunday in our sermon series called "On the Level," and we'll be in this series until the 25th of October, and on that 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.
- This series is called "On the Level" because we are looking at the Sermon on the Plain in the gospel of Luke, chapter 6--when Jesus and his disciples come

down to a level place, a plain—and today’s sermon is called “Poetic Prophecy,”—but it could also have been called “prophetic poetry,” because the 6 verses that we are going to be looking at today are, on the one hand, poetry--they are poetic--they are crafted in a certain way and they have a certain structure to them that is recognisable, in the same way that we might recognise a Shakespearean sonnet by its 3 quatrains, and a concluding couplet, and a certain way that the lines rhyme--in the same way we might recognise a limerick or a haiku, and so we'll learn a little bit about the poetic craftsmanship of these verses, but we'll also see that verses 20-26 are not just poetry, but they're also prophecy--they are prophetic--and in them Jesus is speaking with the prophetic voice, with the voice of a prophet who speaks the word of God into a situation and calls for repentance and promises forgiveness--or judgment.

- But before we get into all that, let me remind you of what we learned last week, in the first sermon in the series, called “the Silent Sermon.” Now last week we considered the idea 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, even before he has begun to preach verbally.
 - We saw the stark contrast between the empty RELIGION of some Pharisees and the actions, the MINISTRY, of Jesus and his disciples — **between the Pharisees whose religion is all talk--those Pharisees**

who ignore the needs of others--the contrast between those Pharisees who seek to preserve their elevated positions and the Son of Man who has come to redeem the world

- We saw that Luke tells us that Jesus climbed up a mountain and prayed all night long-- and when daylight comes, he calls his all of his disciples together and chooses 12 of them to be his apostles
- And then we saw 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—not afraid of losing his elevated position by being associated with this crowd in this level place—He pours his power out in order to transform the broken places and the lives of the people who dwell there
- We were reminded also that Jesus' presence in the midst of a broken levelled world is an indication, a declaration, fulfilling the words of the OT prophets who proclaimed that the renewal and revival of the level places, the wastelands, would take place through the arrival of the Kingdom of God.
- We saw that Jesus leads his disciples and apostles INTO the level places—and we saw that this is true for followers of Jesus today as well—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—and because the Body of Christ is filled with the same Spirit, the same

power that was in Jesus, the Church is called to pour that Spirit out
and to transform those places and the people in them

- So when we look at today's text, Jesus has come down to the level place, and with the power that comes out from him, he has healed all of those who were sick and unclean who were trying to make contact with him
- And we're looking at what happens next, as Jesus moves beyond his "silent sermon" and speaks
- And when Jesus speaks, his words have a very noticeable structure to them-- he says four times "Bless-ed (or blest) are you"--Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who weep, and blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.
- And then there's a pause--a sentence expanding on that last thought--telling those who are hated and reviled and excluded to rejoice, because this is the way that the prophets were treated historically
- And then, Jesus says four times, "Woe to you"--woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full, woe to you who are laughing, and woe to you when all speak well of you--and just as before, Jesus adds a thought, "because this is what was done to FALSE prophets."
- These four blessings followed by four woes -- This is an example of a style of poetry often used in Hebrew scriptures called parallelism--in which one statement is balanced by another statement—

- There are different kinds of parallelism--one kind is called "synonymous parallelism"--that's when the two balanced parts say something similar--like in the book of Amos (5:24), where we find: Let judgment run down as waters, AND righteousness as a mighty stream.
- On either side of that "and" there's a similar statement--in the same way in Isaiah (2:4) and Micah (4:3) : They will beat their swords into plowshares AND their spears into pruning hooks.
- But there's also ANTITHETICAL parallelism, where one statement is paired with another that offers the OPPOSITE perspective, the antithesis-- like in Proverbs (10:1) when we read " A wise son makes a glad father, BUT a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.
- You'll recall that we talked about the parallel **antitheses** that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 (43-44), when he says things like " 43 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." 44 BUT I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"--
- you'll also find in Matthew 5 what we call the Beatitudes, where Jesus describes those who are blessed in a similar way to what we see here in Luke, but WITHOUT the parallel, antithetical "woes"
- And so what we see in these 6 verses in Luke's gospel is an example of antithetical parallelism--because each statement about who is blessed is paired with an opposing statement about who isn't, each blessing is matched with an opposite "woe"

- So we see "blessed are you who are poor," BUT "woe to you who are rich," and "blessed are you who are hungry," BUT "woe to you who are full," and "blessed are you who are hated and excluded on account of the Son of Man, for that is what they did to the prophets," BUT "woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what they did to the false prophets."
- In each of those first four statements, the root of the word that is translated as "blessed" is the Greek "*makarios*" and it means "happy, content, cared for"--it's used of one to whom God has extended his provision--one to whom God has conferred his grace
- And that word "*makarios*" comes from the word "*makar*," that means "blessed and happy and cared for--in an enviable position"
- And if you're anything like me you might wonder whether that Greek word "*makar*" had anything to do with, or was the origin of, the word "macaroni."
- And I would love to be able to tell you that it does, and was, but it doesn't and it wasn't
- But I sure wanted it to, because when I think of macaroni I think of macaroni and cheese, and I'm not sure that there is any food, any single dish, that's any more comforting and satisfying and enjoyable than macaroni and cheese--I'm talking about GOOD macaroni and cheese, now, not the stuff that comes in a box--now you think about it--if you're having good macaroni and cheese--like Pastor Tasha makes, or like your Mother made--you are having comfort food--you are happy and content and cared for--you are in an enviable position--you are blessed--and that is exactly what the word macaroni, I mean

"*makarios*" means--it's like macaroni and cheese--and by the way, macaroni and cheese just might be on the menu for the meals that the church will distribute to folks this week, so make sure to make your requests known if you'd like some

- Now on the other hand, the antithesis of blessing is woe--and the antithesis of macaroni--sorry, of *makarios*--is the word that is translated as "woe," and that's *ouai* (oo-ah'-ee)
- Despite how it may sound, *ouai* is not where Honolulu is--that's Oahu, Hawaii--and the Greek word *ouai* is also not just simply the noun that means "woe," or "sorrow"--it is an **expression** of grief --it is an exclamation, an interjection--it's a word like "alas" or "oh wow" or "ouch" that a person would say to express the FEELING of woe--and it does sound like an exclamation, doesn't it? Ooh-ah-ee!
- Now I don't know what complicated etymological pathway it took for this word to make its way into the dialect of the American South, but I do know that in the Southern part of the US, and other parts too--when we hear something remarkable--it can be something good or something terrible, we respond with a similar exclamation--but it's not *ouai*, it's "ooh-wee"--and that is an actual word that you can look up in the Oxford dictionary--ooh-wee
- In a negative, unfortunate situation, "Ooh wee" is used like this-- if somebody said their house was levelled in a hurricane, we might respond, "ooh-wee, that's terrible," or if they said their great-grandmother broke her hip in a hang-gliding accident we might say "ooh-wee, that's awful!"

- And so we can think about what Jesus is saying here like this: the poor and the hungry and the weeping and the reviled are as happy and content and cared-for as if they had a big bowl of macaroni and cheese, but, OOH-WEE, not the rich and well-fed and the laughing and the popular.
- But this is a paradoxical thing to say. This is counter-intuitive. Isn't it GOOD to be rich and happy and well-fed and popular, and isn't it NOT GOOD to be poor and hungry and sad and hated?
- This sounds like the kind of thing that we would have talked about in our "Jesus Says What?" series--how does this make sense?
- To answer that question, we need to consider the way that these lines, these words of Jesus, are not JUST poetic—they're also "prophetic"
- We've talked about the "prophetic voice" before when we've looked at John the Baptist and others—and you'll remember that a PROPHET in the Biblical sense is not simply one who sees the future, or foretells the future—a PROPHET is one who is anointed by the Spirit of God to proclaim a message—most often a message of judgement on the way things ARE, and a warning about what will happen unless folks REPENT and CHANGE THEIR WAYS
- The role of the prophet is to look at the current situation and proclaim **salvation AND wrath—blessings and woes, *makarios and ouai*, macaroni and ooh-wee.**
- And we see as we read the first chapters of Luke that he is quite intentional in reminding his reader of the place of "prophets"—we read of the

foretelling of the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist, we hear about Anna the prophetess, we see John the Baptist call for repentance and tell folks how they should live—we read of his prophecy against all the EVIL DEEDS that HEROD had done—which gets him locked up in prison—but nowhere do we see JESUS as prophet more clearly than in chapter 4 of Luke’s gospel, after Jesus is tempted in the wilderness

- When we find Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth—the scroll containing the writings of the PROPHET ISAIAH is given to him and he reads in verse 18:
- “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”
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- And those who were familiar with Isaiah 61 would have finished that thought, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour—**and the day of vengeance of our God**
- Jesus says to everyone in the Synagogue in Nazareth, his own hometown—“today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”—and he refers to himself as a prophet, adding that no prophet is accepted in his hometown—which he’s very much correct about—since he winds up getting driven out of town—and almost thrown off a cliff
- Being a prophet can be a tough gig—because when you’re a prophet who proclaims that things are going to change, that the Kingdom of God has

arrived—a Kingdom that calls into judgement the values and the actions of the dominant culture—when you proclaim and prophesy that some are going to be blessed and others cursed, then people who are comfortable and content with the way things are, they’re not going to like it—when Jesus calls his apostles and followers to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour”—then you can expect that those who are rich and well-fed and happy and well-respected in the current system but who are the target of God’s vengeance are not going to welcome you—and they don’t

- You’ll recall that we heard Jesus saying this to his followers several times in our Jesus Says What series--his followers, like the prophets before them, could expect to be met with conflict and persecution and discord from those who did not want to heed the warning they sounded
- And so these 6 verses are poetic and prophetic, but let's back up to the very beginning of verse 20 and consider what happens just before Jesus speaks these poetic, prophetic words
- In verse 20 we read:
 - 20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:
 - Let’s stop there for a moment
 - Now Luke COULD HAVE said “Jesus looked at his disciples—and that would have meant essentially the same thing, right?”
 - But he didn’t

- He said Jesus LOOKED UP AT his disciples
- One word, up, is added
- Therefore we have to assume that Jesus' position, his perspective, is important
- And if we back up just a few verses we remember that Jesus has been on the mountain with his disciples and has come DOWN to the LEVEL PLACE with the multitudes
- Remember now, that the disciples have not yet seen the crucifixion and resurrection, and so I think that Jesus is teaching them, and
- I think Luke—WITH ONE WORD—that word, UP-- is reminding US of the way the incarnation works—that GOD himself has stepped down into humanity, has humbled himself, and emptied himself out, as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2
- Christ Jesus. . .
 - did not regard equality with God
 - as something to be exploited,
 - but emptied himself. . .
 - and became obedient to the point of death—
 - even death on a cross.
- You may recall that in theological terms this is called “kenosis”—emptying out—it is what happens in the incarnation—it is what that AGAPE love that we've been talking about lately does, it is what God's love through Jesus is ALL ABOUT—

- and Paul says in PHIL 2: Let the same mind/the same attitude be **in you** that was in Christ, who humbled himself and EMPTIED HIMSELF OUT
- **Let this same attitude be in you**
- A couple of years ago I heard about a church in Glasgow –not Nazarene, unfortunately but they can't all be--and their church had about 50 people in the congregation--and it was doing well by most standards.
- But the Pastor and the board had a meeting, and really considered their role in the community, and where other churches were--and what they realised was this--they came to understand "If we keep doing things the way we've always done them—it looks like about 90% of the people in the larger area of our community will probably never hear the gospel
- And they said, "That's not what we're called to do—we're called to make disciples, to proclaim the good news" and so the whole church, not just the pastor, not just the board, not just the trustees--decided that they would commit to being emptied out over the coming year—emptied out financially, spiritually, physically—with their time and prayers and resources—and that became their mission statement—to be emptied out
- And do you know that in the months that followed, that church planted EIGHT new churches around Glasgow?
- And the cynical might say, sure, they emptied out their congregation of 50 into those 8 new churches—how many were left at the original church? 10, 12?

- That original congregation of 50 worshippers became a congregation of 350, PLUS the 8 new churches! Now what does that tell us?
- I believe it tells us that **when the power that is in the body of Christ is emptied out, transformation happens—abundance happens even in the place of scarcity**
- Now you might say, "well that's all very nice but that was some time ago-- things have changed--we live in the reality of COVID-19--there is a pandemic going on"
- And I've been thinking about that thing--and I think that for all that this pandemic situation has taken from the church in general and from individual churches--the use of our buildings, our times of fellowship, our corporate worship together in one place--this pandemic has forced the church to be emptied out--emptied out into our communities, emptied out of our sanctuaries and our fellowship halls, emptied out of the safety and security of the structures of our programs and events
- And churches have been given the opportunity to choose--either to embrace being emptied out, to see the Kingdom built and the gospel proclaimed in ways we'd never even thought of before, or to try to hang on to the status quo, to keep hold of what we had and the way we've always done things
- I think something similar is going on in these verses--that Jesus is prophetically contrasting TWO VERY DIFFERENT WAYS OF LIVING—on the one hand, the blessed, those who live a life that is emptied out in abundance, assured of God's faithful provision, and on the other hand those to whom he

says "woe to you"--those who exemplify a way of living that hangs on to what it's got, that hoards, that says "I got mine and I'm keeping it," and questions God's ability to provide

- And if we look ahead to the second part of Luke's work, the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the early Christian church was made up of followers of Jesus who considered everything in common—who did not consider anything they possessed as belonging to them but as belonging to the Kingdom of God—and so as any had needs, those who have resources meet that need—
 - and so Jesus can say "blessed are the poor" because
 - Theirs is the KOG: they **have very little--they might even have nothing---** but they have **everything, because THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD**
 - They exemplify the difference between Sacrifice and storing up, between a life that is emptied out in the knowledge that the abundance of the Kingdom of God will always meet our needs, and a life that holds back, that thinks God won't supply their needs, that **there won't be enough for themselves if they meet the needs of others**
 - And in verse 24, about such self-centered, selfish folks Jesus says "woe to them" because
 - They have received their consolation—Jesus uses that same language in Matt 6, when he says that the hypocrites in the synagogues make

sure that everyone knows when they give to the poor, or pray, or fast—they do so so that everyone can see them—and **they have received their reward**—and just after that Jesus says

- 6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;

6:20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

- You'll remember Jesus' advice to the rich young man in Matthew 19 that we heard just a couple of weeks ago--if you want to be perfect, store up treasure in heaven--**empty yourself out and come and follow me--**
- You know, growing up in the Nazarene Church, I can't tell you the number of times when committed followers of Christ, even when they were struggling themselves, heard about a need and said—whatever I have, however I can help—whether it be time or resources or effort or prayer—as it has been given to me I will freely give--that's the kind of life Jesus is calling blessed
- But in these verses Jesus is not only contrasting the blessedness of those who repent and are emptied out to live lives of abundance with the woe that is faced by those who do not-- Jesus is not only being PROPHETIC, but he's also calling his followers to be prophets as well—to follow the example of the true prophets of old—and to shun the behaviour and attitudes of the false prophets

- And the way to tell the true prophet and the false prophet apart, Jesus says, is by their popularity—Jesus says:
- 22-23 “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.” **BUT**
- 26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”
- Now, I want to point out two phrases--first
 - “on account of the Son of Man”—there’s nothing blessed or worthy or admirable simply about being hated, excluded, reviled and defamed—plenty of people are hated, excluded, reviled and defamed simply because they’re jerks—the point is that you’re blessed when people hate, exclude, revile and defame you ON ACCOUNT OF THE SON OF MAN, on account of Jesus—and make no mistake, they will
 - But on the other hand, Jesus says WOE to you when all speak well of you—now note that—when ALL speak well of you
 - That is, when you please EVERYONE and offend NO ONE—the way to do that, Jesus says, is to be a FALSE prophet, but
 - A TRUE prophet risks his reputation
 - JTB is a perfect example—he does not hesitate in chapter 3 of Luke’s gospel to call those he prophesies to a “BROOD OF VIPERS”—nor does he shirk from telling them what they’re doing wrong, nor what they

should do—and many people WANT to hear what he has to say—but when he Prophesies against HEROD, the ruler, and when he rebukes him because of all the evil things he has done, John gets locked up in prison, and he finally winds up beheaded

- And Jesus reminds us, speaking out against injustice, inequality, oppression, unrighteousness, materialism, and idolatry can get you hated, excluded, reviled and defamed—and even killed—
- and certainly in our culture today proclaiming the gospel will get you criticised, called intolerant, a bigot, a threat to the status quo—as our DS Jim Ritchie said some time ago, "if you're proclaiming the gospel and witnessing and you're not getting criticised for it, you're not doing it right"
- But what if we said, nevertheless, this is what God says,
- What if we committed to being emptied out for the sake of the gospel?
- What if we were willing to make available all we have and all that we are --our time, our effort, our resources, our prayers, even our reputations—for the sake of the Kingdom?
- What if even in this strange and unprecedented time--**in this level place**-- we embraced the opportunities that God has placed before us?
- I'll tell you what would happen—we'd see the level places renewed, the broken, unclean places transformed, we'd see healing and reconciliation,

- We'd see needs met and lives changed, we'd see families restored, addictions overcome, sins forgiven, guilt expunged, we'd see the gospel lived out in every corner of this town, of this country, of this world—in short we'd see revival, and I believe it's coming--in fact I believe it's already here and happening now—more than that, I believe that the Spirit of the Lord is upon His church, that the Body of Christ is anointed to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." And that is what we must do—that is what we will do--that is what we ARE doing.
- Let's keep on doing it. Be emptied out for the Kingdom.
- We hope you'll join us again next week. Until then may God bless you today and every day.