

THE FOLLOWING IS THE SCRIPT THAT PASTOR STEVE USED TO PREACH FROM. IT IS NOT WRITTEN FOR PUBLICATION, AND MAY CONTAIN TYPOS AND/OR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS. IT MAY ALSO DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE RECORDED SERMON.

Sermon 25 OCT 2020

OTL 4: Followers, Fruits, and Foundations

- Thank you, Pastor Tasha. May God bless the reading of the Word this morning.
- Welcome church family—and church friends! Today is the Fourth and final Sunday in our sermon series called "On the Level," and we'll be finishing up this series today, and then we'll meet this evening at 6pm on ZOOM, and we'll have a Second Helping Bible Study that will review all that we have heard over the past four Sundays. We hope that you'll join us for an inspiring and encouraging—and informative-- time of discussion and fellowship.
- We are so thankful to have you with us this morning, and we welcome you again, wherever and whenever you're joining us.
- Well, I guess it's officially Autumn here in Largs now—Daylight Saving Time is over--we turned our clocks back last night here in the UK —or early this morning, I guess it was, 2am--, and many of us no doubt got to enjoy an extra hour of sleep—what I call the "bonus hour"—we got a "bonus hour"—and it's nice to get that extra time to rest—I know I enjoy it—and I needed it, too, because I had a pretty difficult time getting back to sleep after I had to get up at 2:00 to turn all the clocks back—that's a real inconvenience—
- But I reckon this evening we'll really notice how short the days are getting—and the weather is really beginning to feel like Fall—or Autumn—outside—it's getting darker and cooler—but that's how the seasons work I guess, and I know

we're all thankful to be able to see another change of season—and we can all start to look toward Advent and Christmastime now—but I hope you have had a good week—

- You know, Pastor Tasha and I were feeling a little nostalgic earlier in the week—missing our families a little bit—don't get me wrong, we love living here in the most beautiful place in the world, among some of the finest people on earth—but it's been a year since we saw any of our family—and my Mom has had some health issues lately, and it's hard to be 4000 miles away sometimes—but we certainly appreciate the prayers for my Mom and the encouragement that we have received from our church family—and we are so thankful your commitment to the work of the church and the Kingdom, and the way that the people of our church family lift each other up, not just with prayer, but with positive words and attitudes, and simple actions that say you care and want to share the love of Jesus with others.
- You know, on those rare occasions when Pastor Tasha and I do get a little nostalgic, one of the remedies that helps to lift our Spirits is a good old Southern breakfast—so sometimes we'll make shrimp and grits, or cheese grits, or, just plain grits--or like we did on Tuesday of this week, biscuits and gravy. Now some of you will know what I mean when I talk about biscuits and gravy, but maybe some of you don't—now I am not talking about McVitie's digestives and Bisto—I'm talking about fluffy Southern buttermilk biscuits—they are something LIKE savoury scones, but that comparison does not do them justice—and sausage gravy—we call that Sawmill gravy, too—and so on Tuesday I made up a mess of

biscuits and baked them—slathered them all over with butter—and we rehydrated some sawmill gravy that we had made 3 years ago.

- Now you probably wonder what that means. Well, several years ago we had some American Guinea Hogs processed and we turned one of them, for the most part, into sausage—now that particular hog’s name was Basil, and we had raised him on our farm from the time he was just a tiny piglet, but he had grown to about 350 pounds—that’s about 25 stone--and so Basil made way more sausage than we could ever eat or even give away before we moved over here—so we made a lot of that sausage into sausage gravy—using my secret recipe—and then we freeze-dried it—we preserved it-- and put it in mylar bags—so it could last as long as 25 years—and we brought a bunch of these bags of gravy with us when we moved to Scotland, and so whenever we want sausage gravy, we just open one of those bags, add boiling water and in a few minutes that rehydrated gravy tastes just like it did when I made it several years ago.
- And so this week I made biscuits, too, and Tasha made a plate for her breakfast—she broke open a biscuit and poured a great big ladle-full of gravy over the top of it—and she took a bite—and a big smile came across her face, and she said, “Oh-oohh, thank you Basil.”
- And I was a little bit chagrined, and I said, “Thank you, Basil? I made that gravy AND I made those biscuits.”
- And Tasha said, “Now, honey, you know I appreciate your involvement this wonderful breakfast, but you have to admit—while you certainly made a contribution to it—Basil, now, Basil made a commitment.”

- And that was a round-about way of saying how much we appreciate those of you who donate your time and your resources and your energy-- who make contributions to the work of the church, who are involved in the building of the Kingdom, and the proclamation of the gospel—but if you're haven't already, and I know that many of you have, but if you haven't already, this morning I want to invite you to make a commitment, whatever that looks like for you—whatever you feel God is calling you to—and I'm not talking about making a commitment to Largs Church of the Nazarene—I'm talking about making a commitment to God, a commitment to be a follower of Jesus and to follow wherever HE leads, every moment of every day
- but I don't want to get ahead of myself—I've got a sermon to preach here, and as always, I just believe this morning that God has something profound and life-changing to say to each and every one of us if we have ears to hear.
- I love bluegrass. For as long as I can remember, I have loved bluegrass music—the first record album I remember buying as a kid was called "A Bushel of 5 string Banjos"—and it was a record—vinyl—not a cassette or a CD—a 33rpm record album. Now, fortunately for me, Tasha doesn't mind my listening to bluegrass music when she's around—as long as I wear my earphones. But I love watching the old videos of the Martha White Flour Hour with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs and the Foggy Mountain Boys—you can find these videos on YouTube now—sometimes the incomparable HiLo Brown makes an appearance on the Show—I'm sure you're familiar with all these names--But one of my favourite, if not my favourite, bluegrass songs is a song by the inimitable Flatt

and Scruggs called “Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’.” In it, Lester sings about a gal  
“that’s sweet to me, she just ain’t what she used to be,” and he says to her

- Now looky here gal don't you high-head me  
I ain't forgot what you used to be.
- When you didn't have nothing  
That was plain to see  
Don't get above your raising  
Stay down on earth with me
- My reading those lyrics just doesn’t do them justice though—here they are in context (AUDIO)
- We all probably know what he’s singing about—this is a person who aspires to rise above their station, to disassociate with lowly beginnings, a person who is a little embarrassed by where she comes from—who tries to act like something she isn’t
- I think of that song when I watch the television show, *Keeping Up Appearances*—you’ve probably seen that show, or heard of it—in it, the main character, her name is Hyacinth Bucket,
- (AUDIO) Hyacinth: *It's Bou-KAY, Vicar*
- Oh I’m sorry, there, Hyacinth
- (Audio) Hyacinth: *B-U-C-K-E-T, Bou-KAY. The accent on the second syllable.*
- Well anyway, Hyacinth tries desperately to **get above her raisin’**—to rise above her background, to put on airs, she is uppity-- and this often puts her at odds with her family, particularly her brother in-law Onslow, who has no interest at all in getting above his raising
- These past four weeks as we’ve looked at chapter 6 of Luke’s gospel, I’ve been thinking about the way that we use elevation as a metaphor, really without even

thinking about it—as if it’s common sense that Up is good and down is bad, higher is better and lower is worse; it’s better to feel up than to feel down—the Penthouse is better than the basement—We speak of upper class and lower class—we talk about HIGHER education—but we don’t mean higher as in elevation, really, we mean more of it, more advanced—and when we die we bury the body, but the soul goes up to heaven, unless of course, it goes DOWN to Hell

- These assumptions, the way we use these metaphors, can seem almost like common sense, like we’re born thinking this way, they’re so obvious—and this way of thinking has been around for a LONG time
- And when Luke tells us about Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain, he didn’t have to give us the details about Jesus’ location—about the fact that he goes up on a mountain and then COMES DOWN to the level place with his disciples—Luke could have just told us that Jesus chose some disciples to be his apostles, and then he preached a sermon to a crowd that was gathered together—but he goes out of his way to give us the details about Jesus’ movement from high to low, from up to down, from elevated with his disciples, these insiders, to descending into the crowd of outsiders, the unclean and those from Gentile territory. And so this whole sermon, the entire scenario, all that Jesus says in Chapter 6 from verse 17 all the way to the end of the chapter, really ought to be considered in light of Jesus’ movement from a higher place to a lower place—we really unpacked this in the first sermon of the series, “The Silent Sermon”—and as we saw in our second sermon, “Poetic Prophecy,” it is in this lower place that Jesus prophesies of and participates in the arrival of the Kingdom of God—a Kingdom

in which lives will be changed, in which broken places and broken people will be transformed. We saw that Jesus announced forgiveness OR judgment, blessings OR woes to those who lived in one way or another—in accordance with the ways of the Kingdom or against them. And then in our 3<sup>rd</sup> sermon, “Good For Nothing Christians,” we saw how Jesus gives instructions to his followers, directions for living a life that is different from the way the world lives— he commands his followers to love our enemies, to do good without expecting anything in return—to give to those who have no interest in giving back to us—without seeking to GET EVEN—Jesus shows us a counter-cultural way of living that loves with the Godly love that Jesus exemplifies, that AGAPE love, that self-emptying, cross-embracing love that does not expect a return on investment FROM the world, but from GOD, who holds the abundance of the universe and gives generously and abundantly, and whose resources are unlimited

- And Jesus is very specific in saying that this way of living is not the way of living of sinners—it is radically different
- In our sermon today we’re going to look at the conclusion of Jesus’ sermon on the Plain, and we’ll see that he is again comparing two ways of living—those who **follow** Jesus and those who do **not**, using two metaphors---and today we’ll see that Jesus draws his imagery here, his ways of describing these two opposing ways of living, from the fields of agriculture and architecture, and so today’s sermon is called “Followers, Fruit and Foundations.”
- Let’s begin with verse 43, where Jesus begins by talking about fruit—using an agricultural metaphor

- Jesus tells the crowd there in the level place:
  - 43 “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; 44 for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. 45 The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”
- When they don’t have fruit on them, different trees can look alike, and unless you’re something of an expert, it can be hard to tell an apple tree from a peach tree, or a plum tree—but once there’s fruit on the tree, it’s obvious what kind of tree you’re looking at—if a tree is covered with apples, it’s pretty certain that it’s an apple tree
- The same is true for plants too, in a garden—many plants look very similar without their fruit
- There is a family of plants called “nightshades”—and in the family of nightshades, many of which look similar without their fruit—are things like potatoes and tomatoes, aubergines, chilli peppers, okra, gooseberries—things that are good to eat—but also in the nightshade family is a plant called belladonna—and the fruit of the belladonna plant is poisonous, even deadly—
- If you’ve ever been to the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow, you may have read on a sign there about a seven-year old boy who was visiting the Botanic Gardens in 1922, and there was a belladonna plant there with berries on it, and he ate some and died, and his father sued the managers of the Botanic Gardens for



negligence—now this boy lacked the discernment to be able to tell that these berries weren't edible—well, I guess you could say they were edible, but they were only edible ONCE—but anyone who knew the difference between a tomato or a chilli pepper and belladonna berries would know that when you see little grape-like berries on a nightshade, you need to leave it alone—

- without its fruit, one nightshade may look similar to another, but when the fruit appears, one with discernment has little doubt about the nature of that plant
- Because the fruit **reveals** the nature of that plant—whether it's good to eat or it's poison—and the fruit of a person's life reveals the nature of the person's heart—**good or evil**
- Now that might sound a little like “works righteousness”—like good works save us or make us righteous—but that is not the case, because Jesus is not saying that good works or good actions or good words—what we do and what we say and how we live—they do not **MAKE** a person righteous—but Jesus is saying that they REVEAL the nature, the identity, the character, of that person—the fruit reveals the nature of the tree
- And so as Jesus has pointed out in the previous verses, as we talked about last week in “Good For Nothin' Christians”---There's a fundamental difference between the way sinners live and the way followers of Jesus live—the fruit that they produce—and what is on the INSIDE is manifested on the OUTSIDE
- **Fruit reveals the nature of the tree, and followers of Jesus produce good fruit out of the abundance of their hearts.**

- Jesus explains this further in the next verses when He moves from agriculture to architecture—and gives us another metaphor contrasting true followers with those who aren't—Jesus says in verse 46
  - 46 “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? 47 I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. 48 That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”
- Now we can summarise what Jesus is saying here, I think, in this way
- **Followers of Jesus DO what He tells them to do. Their faith is “lived-out”**
- They “hear his words” **AND ACT** on them
- This sounds obvious, but it can be a great temptation to think of Christian faith merely as a ticket to heaven that we can purchase by simply claiming that “Jesus is Lord” with no further engagement—that somehow we can be followers of Jesus and that commitment will have no effect on the way we act, the way we speak, the way we love, the way we live—no, Jesus has just told us that the fruit, the way our lives are lived-out, **REVEALS** the nature of our hearts—what is **INSIDE** will be manifested on the **OUTSIDE**
- And so the contrast Jesus is drawing here is between a true follower who **HEARS AND ACTS**, and the one who hears what Jesus says but doesn't **DO ANYTHING**—

remember what we said last week about listening and hearing?--what Jesus is saying is that his words, this **sermon on the plain** that he's just preached, calls for ACTION, and that action is fundamental to the life of a follower of Jesus, it is the **foundation** upon which the life of a follower of Jesus is built

- So the difference between these two houses, between these two people, is the FOUNDATION--but what is that foundation, exactly?
- If we read closely, we see that The foundation is **NOT** belief or understanding or even simply faith—the foundation is the **actions** that reveal the character, the quality of that belief, of that faith—the **lived-out-ness** that answers the question—“what is in the heart? Is it real? Is it genuine?”
- Like Jesus' “Silent Sermon” that began this series, what is being described here is a **living** faith—a faith that is **lived out**
- Not mere lip service—not simply talking the talk but **walking the walk**
- It's in this context that the writer of the Epistle of James can say “Faith without works is dead”—because faith without works is evidence of the **absence** of the **foundation upon which a life of faith is built**—because the **fruit** reveals the **nature** of the tree
- The foundation Jesus is talking about is made up of the simple, fundamental actions that form the underpinning, the groundwork, upon which a life of faith is built—it's the things that followers of Jesus DO—the WAY that they LIVE—that makes them DIFFERENT from the world around them
- John Wooden was an American basketball coach

- But he wasn't just ANY basketball coach—if you ask most anyone who knows anything about basketball, they'll tell you he was the greatest college basketball coach of all time
- He was called the “Wizard of Westwood,”--he coached at UCLA, the University of California in Los Angeles from 1948-1975, during which time the teams he coached won 10 National championships, 7 of them in a row-- he was responsible for four perfect 30–0 seasons, an 88-game winning streak, and his coaching produced some of the greatest players in the game
- Now each year when the school year started, Coach Wooden would meet the new varsity players
- These were the elite, from the upper echelon of athletes-- they wouldn't be at UCLA on the varsity team if they hadn't proven themselves in High School and on the Freshman team—so
- **they were often cocky and full of themselves—and understandably so—they had reason to be**
- And so in their first meeting together, Coach Wooden, who was 5ft 10 by the way, would tell his new players—players like Lewis Alcindor, who stood well over 7 feet tall-- Coach Wooden would tell these players to sit in a circle on the court, criss-cross applesauce—you know, with their legs crossed like schoolchildren
- And these players would sit down in that circle, and of course they'd be thinking, and maybe saying out loud: **What is this, nursery school? We're not children**

- And once they were sitting, Coach Wooden would tell them to take off their shoes and socks
- And he would proceed to **teach them how to put on their socks**
- He'd say: "You know, basketball is a game that's played on a hardwood floor," "And to be good, you have to ... change your direction, change your pace. That's hard on your feet. Your feet are very important. And you need to have every wrinkle out of your sock..."
- He'd tell them how to put the sock over their foot, and then he'd say "Now pull it up in the back, pull it up real good, real strong. Now run your hand around the little toe area ... make sure there are no wrinkles and then pull it back up. Check the heel area. We don't want any sign of a wrinkle about it ...
- And then, then he'd teach them to put on their shoes. "Stretch it out and now put your foot in it like this, now pull it up,--and don't grab your laces up here, go down, eyelet by eyelet, tightening them—not too tight ... each one, that's it. Now pull it in there, tuck that and smooth it ... Tie it like this..." he'd teach them to double-tie the shoelaces so they wouldn't come undone.
- **And of course, these players would grumble—they'd think “we should be practicing—we should be talking about complicated strategy and the finer points of the game—and we're talking about shoes and socks”--Now why on earth would Coach Wooden treat these players like this?**
- **And sometimes one of them would be brave enough to ask him.**
- And he'd say: Because a wrinkle in your sock will be sure to get you blisters, and those blisters are going to make you play poorly, and you can lose playing time---

and There's always a danger of your laces coming untied when you are playing,--  
and If they come untied, I may have to take you out of the game — or if you're at  
practice, I may have to take you out—you miss practice, you're going to miss  
playing time

- Coach Wooden understood that **Things can happen that could TAKE YOU OUT OF THE GAME if you are not prepared**--If you have not paid attention to the fundamental actions, to the simple deeds that provide a foundation that you can build upon
- And Coach Wooden's players would come to understand that-- particularly that one I mentioned, Lewis Alcindor, he went on to become Kareem Abdul Jabar, one of the greatest players of all time, who played for the Lakers and whose name you may recognize from his Hollywood movies or his TV appearances —he would later say **in the books he wrote** that Coach Wooden prepared them not just to play basketball, not just to build a career in sports, but he taught them **how to live their lives—by focusing on the fundamentals, the simple actions that form the foundation that prepare you for whatever lies ahead—simple fundamentals, simple foundational actions**
- What Jesus commands is not a complicated system of legalistic regulations— look at the commands here in the Sermon on the Plain—they are Simple fundamental actions—Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, turn the other cheek, give the one who takes your cloak your shirt, too—
- And I think it's no coincidence that the very first word of the very first command here in the Sermon on the Plain is love, **agape**. That's back in verse 27: 'But I say

to you that listen, Love your enemies--That sacrificial, self-emptying love is the fundamental command—the foundation

- You'll remember that elsewhere Jesus describes the greatest commandment with two simple instructions—and both of them are about love—**agape**—love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, strength, and love your neighbour as yourself—
- and if you think about it, those two commandments encapsulate what Jesus is saying here in the Sermon on the Plain, that first there is a condition of the heart—LOVE THE LORD—but it doesn't stop there—that love is LIVED-OUT in love for your neighbour—that love for your neighbour is the **fruit** that reveals the nature of your love for God, it is the **foundation** upon which the life of a follower of Jesus is built
- The love of Jesus, that agape love-- is not just a feeling INSIDE, it is love that is lived out, emptied out—it bears fruit on the OUTSIDE—**agape** is the fundamental action, the basic way of being, **the foundation that bears fruit**, and so
- **Followers of Jesus who do what he says build a life on a solid foundation, one that stands strong when the floods come**
- We talked a lot about flood when we were studying the Psalms
- When the floods come—we all know what that means—when you feel like you're in danger of drowning—when it's hard to keep your head above water—have you ever seen floods?

- Floods of stress and anxiety and accusation and disappointment and doubt and guilt and insecurity and weariness and worry—when sorrows like sea billows roll,
- Floods are all the things that can happen that can **threaten to take you—to take us-- out of the game**
- But we can build our lives upon Jesus' love—it is a firm foundation
- And when the floods come, we will not be shaken
- Together we can be a church whose life is built on the foundation of Jesus' love—nothing less—one that can say with the hymnwriter: In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil. On Christ the Solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand
- I want to end this sermon with a song that we can sing together—I hope you'll sing it with us-- you may know it, it may be new to you, but let's make it our testimony today, our proclamation—I invite you to make it your commitment today—I will build my life upon your love, it is a firm foundation—I will put my trust in you alone, and I will not be shaken. . . let's sing together