

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 29 August 2021
Title: HHH 1 (Choices)

- Good morning church, and let me welcome you once again to LargsNaz online—we are so blessed to have you with us this morning, whether you're joining us at our Sunday Brunch at our church building on Aitken Street right here in beautiful downtown Largs, or you're worshipping with us online, we are thankful that you have made the choice to be with us. Wherever you are, we're glad you're here.
- Now you may be aware that during this past week Pastor Tasha and I took some time away—we took a little break and went into Glasgow for a few days—and I know some of you wonder what we were thinking, leaving a beautiful place like Largs to go into Glasgow for some time away—but that's what we did from Sunday afternoon to Wednesday evening, we went on a sort of retreat—a time to be restored and revived and to think about LargsNaz and to plan and pray and listen to the leading of the Spirit—because as the COVID restrictions that we have been under and these past many months are lifting, we have choices to make about what we should do and how we should do it--and then on Thursday we had a very productive meeting with the church board—we let them know what we felt that God was saying to us, and we listened to their feedback and their direction and their suggestions, and let me just tell you that there are exciting days ahead for Largs Church of the Nazarene and for the community

that we serve—you've already heard about some of the new things that will be happening very soon—our pre-brunch worship next week—we certainly look forward to having church again with our brothers and sisters, and I know you're looking forward to that too—as well as celebrating communion together on the first Sunday of each month during our Sunday Brunch—and did you know that our Sunday Brunch has been taking place for 13 weeks today? This is our 13th Sunday that we have met and fellowshiped and shared a meal together, and we feel sure that God will continue to bless this very unique opportunity that He has given to us.

- On October 3rd—October marks the beginning of a new church year—and so on October 3rd we will be sharing with you a full report of where we have been as a church this last year and a half and more importantly, where we, your pastors and your church leadership, see the church heading in the future, and how you can be a part of the building of the Kingdom right here in Largs and in our online community.
- But before we get there, before that first Sunday in October when we give some more detail about our plans, about WHAT we will be doing as a church, we are going to spend some time—5 Sundays in fact-- reacquainting ourselves with the LargsNaz Vision Statement—the WHY and the HOW behind what we do as a church.
- Now if you have a very good memory, you may remember way back a long time ago, way back in 2020 BC—BC, that's Before COVID—back in the first week of January 2020, the LargsNaz church board at the time met for almost 6 hours—

we prayed, and we brainstormed, and we planned—we discussed, and we disagreed, and we compromised—it was a beautiful and productive day that was clearly directed by the Holy Spirit.

- And throughout the day we considered what the role of the church is, and what the role of Largs Church of the Nazarene is, we asked God to show us who the people are who make up the community around us, what their needs are, and how we can best use our resources to meet those needs—we looked at the things we do well, and dreamed of things we could do, and things we should do, in the coming year
- And one of the most important things we did was to construct a Vision Statement for 2020—a statement that says “this is our focus” for the 12 months that were ahead of us. After we had we looked at those around us, then we saw their needs, and then we looked at our resources, we made choices; we made decisions—we were intentional—we said that this is how the church will act in 2020—and this is the vision statement that we came up with:
- In 2020, Largs Church of the Nazarene will fulfil our mission to make Christlike disciples, to incorporate believers into fellowship and membership, and to equip for ministry all who respond in faith, by focusing on hospitality, health, and holiness. Hospitality entails providing a welcoming safe space and fellowship at the Lord’s table, while health includes promoting good stewardship of ourselves and our environment, and holiness is perfect love and heart cleansing that transforms the way we think and act. Following the example of the early church

in Acts 2, we believe that God will bless our efforts and empower us with the Holy Spirit to bring wholeness and healing to our community.

- Oh, we were excited about all that we were going to do, and we thought we knew what 2020 would look like—we thought we had a pretty good idea of the things we had chosen to do in the coming year, the things we would choose to do in the coming year—but man, we didn't have any idea what 2020 was going to be like
- We had listed as one of our church's strong points our ability to be flexible and adapt to change—that flexibility and adaptability was about to be tested--- by a pandemic and restrictions that severely limited the choices that we could make as the church and also as individuals—2020 would prove to be a time when things that we had never considered not being able to choose to do would be forbidden—2020 would see months when most everything was difficult and some things were impossible
- But even though our choices were limited, they were not nonexistent—and we would learn over the next few months the way that God is not hindered in the least by the things we may think are obstacles—the way the Kingdom will be built not in spite of hardships but because of them
- We have come through a time when our choices have been limited, and we are entering a time when we are finding that as individuals and as the church we have more choices available to us—we are more able to choose what we will do and how we will do it—and we have choices to make—and because we have choices to make, it is good to be reminded of our vision statement and its three

areas of focus—and we're going to once again consider these 3 areas in a sermon series over the next 5 weeks

- And so this morning in this first of 5 sermons that look back at those 3 elements of our church's vision statement—Hospitality, Health, and Holiness--
- I'd like us to look together at the 14th chapter of Luke's gospel, and in this chapter I want to look at 4 specific instances in which choices, decisions--are made or recommended—or commanded really—
- And so today we're going to look at four examples of decisions—of choices—and in your listening guide, and as you heard Pastor Tasha share with us, you'll see there are 4 sections of scripture
- Let's begin by looking at the section that starts with verse 1—that top section
- And what's happening here is that Jesus is going to the house of a LEADER of the Pharisees—a man of some political and religious importance—and it's the Sabbath—and the Pharisees and lawyers—the professional religious people and the experts in the law—are watching him closely. Now Jesus knows he'll be watched—the Greek there indicates that he is watched **scrupulously**—now we know what the Pharisees are watching for—they're waiting for Jesus to make a mistake, to do something illegal, unlawful—but Jesus goes anyway, knowing that it is the critical eye of the Pharisees and the political and religious leaders that will eventually lead him to the cross— but he chooses to fellowship with these people—this is a pretty dramatic choice, but we won't dwell on that one—I want to look at what happens next

- So Jesus and these Pharisees and lawyers—we can assume they’ve all been invited to dinner at this Pharisee leader’s house—they’re on the way to the house to eat together—and as they are going there—we might imagine they’re on a street near the house—suddenly, just then, there is in front of Jesus a man with dropsy. A man who is ill, who is sick. We might say today that he has generalized edema—he is swollen—he is retaining fluid—now depending on how severe his dropsy is, he might have trouble breathing, trouble getting around, trouble sleeping—but we know from the account of Luke the physician that this man who appears is, as we might say in South Carolina, he is ALL SWOLE UP.
- Now notice what doesn’t happen here. We are not told who this man is, or any other details about him, nor are we told that he SAYS anything.
- **All we know is that he is in the PRESENCE of Jesus.**
- **All we know is that he is in the PRESENCE of Jesus.**
- Has he searched Jesus out? Did Jesus search him out? Is it coincidence that they are in the same place? We don’t know—but what we know is that this man is in the presence of Jesus, and Jesus sees him, and sees that he is in need. Anyone could see that he is in need, that he is ill, that he is unhealthy—it’s obvious.
- And what does Jesus do here? He doesn’t wait for the man to ask to be healed—maybe he did, but we don’t know—what Jesus does is ask a question of the Pharisees and the Lawyers—is it LEGAL to heal on the Sabbath? Is it LAWFUL to CURE on the Sabbath?
- But the experts in the Law, these religious leaders are silent.

- Now I believe that had he WANTED to, Jesus could have made a convincing case, and these experts would have agreed, that it was in fact UNLAWFUL to cure on the Sabbath—you know, when you're looking for an excuse not to do something, you can usually find one—even when it's an excuse NOT to DO GOOD, if you ask the right people, and if you think about it in the right way, you can find an excuse, even a RELIGIOUS excuse, even a LEGAL excuse, why you shouldn't do something good.
- But Jesus isn't looking for an excuse. Jesus knows what choice he is going to make. He is going to choose to meet this man's needs OVER some rule about honoring the Sabbath. He knows that meeting the needs of OTHERS, bringing healing and wholeness, NEVER dishonours God, the Lord of the Sabbath—and so Jesus doesn't wait for an answer—he gives us an example to follow—he demonstrates how we are to respond--**he chooses healing over tradition—he chooses the needs of others over legalism**
- And what does Jesus do next? The NRSV translation tells us that he “took him” and then healed him and then “sent him away.”
- But I'm going to tell you that this is another one of those times when if you compare what the original text says in Greek, and what the translated text in English says--it kinda loses something
- In English, “Took him and healed him and sent him away sounds like he quietly said, “sir could you come over here with me, I'm going to give you some therapy, and then you can be on your way.” But that is NOT what the original Greek communicates—

- Luke's original language tells us that Jesus seizes him, lays hold of him, aggressively takes him—grabs him, and after he heals him, he lets go, he sets him free, he releases him—Does this sound familiar to any of you? **Do you know what it is to be in the presence of Jesus and to have him grab hold of you and heal you, transform you, and then set you free? That is what is happening here.**
- But what is this man healed OF, exactly? We're told that he has dropsy.
- Now I remember when I was a young child, my Granny would say every now and then that she had the dropsy. And I remember just assuming that that meant what it sounded like—I thought she had some weakness or pain in her hands and she was dropping things—dropsy—made sense to me. I don't think it was until I was in Medical School that I discovered that most often what was called dropsy was caused by congestive heart failure—when the heart muscle is weak for one reason or another and can't pump blood efficiently—so fluid pools in places like the legs and abdomen—science didn't really begin to understand how that works until the 1600s—and over the years, “doctors” of one sort or another have tried all sorts of things to treat the dropsy--bloodletting, putting tubes in the legs or wherever the swelling is, diuretics like beer, or mercury, or dandelion leaves that make you, well. Lose water, flowers like foxglove—you'll see that growing all over Largs (that's where we get the drug “digitalis” from)—the Greek God of medicine, Asklepios, was said to have treated dropsy by cutting a person's head off, pouring out the excess liquid, and reattaching the head—but there are

no documented case studies of such a procedure—and I have my doubts about its effectiveness—and its survival rate

- But now modern medicine knows that dropsy is most often a cardiac condition—**and so when I read how Jesus grabs this man, and heals him, and sets him free, I can't help but think that what happens is that his heart is changed— his heart is changed, made new** -- y'all with me here?
- And so Jesus demonstrates how we are to love others—he sees the need of another— and he chooses to bring healing, wholeness, health
- What does Jesus get out of all this? Nothing. He is an example here of pure agape love that expects nothing in return.
- We're going to return to the story of this man with dropsy in a couple of weeks, but now let's look at the middle section of Chapter 14. Starting with verse 7.
- **Now** Jesus is at the Sabbath meal at the leader of the Pharisees' home, and as the guests are taking their places at the table, Jesus notices that they are choosing places of honour for themselves.
- And because of this, Jesus tells them a **parable**. And if Luke had not told us that this was a parable, we might think that Jesus is giving them advice about how they should live their lives—about what they should do when they are invited by some real person to have dinner with them. Don't take a seat of honour, because the host might tell you to move, and you'll have to move to the lowest place, and that would be embarrassing. It's a better idea to take a lower seat, and then when the host asks you to move and you have to switch seats in front of

everybody, you be moving UP and not down—and that won't be embarrassing, it'll be an honour.

- And that would be good advice for real-life, mundane daily living, for everyday dinner parties if that's all it were.
- But Luke tells us that this is a PARABLE—so in addition to its value as simply advice about human wedding banquets and human hosts and guests, Jesus is telling us something about what the Kingdom of God is like, and what that Wedding Feast that is yet to come will be like. And so the host who invites guests to that Wedding Feast that is yet to come is none other than God himself, and the host says to those who have put others before themselves, who have chosen to humble themselves, come be exalted.
- And so this is a second choice that Jesus commands—he says to the **guests**, choose the lowest seat and not the place of honour--
- **Over honour, choose humility. Over honour, choose humility.**
- And then Jesus turns to the host, the leader of the Pharisees who had invited Jesus and these other guests, and he has a command for him—in verse 12 we read:
- 12 He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”

- What's Jesus saying to the host here? When you put on a dinner or a luncheon, you have a choice about who to invite. You can invite those folks who will feel a sense of obligation to return the favour to you—like when you receive a gift and you feel that you owe a gift to the person that gave it to you—you can invite those who'll even things up—so you won't **lose** anything— you might even gain something
- OR you can invite those who cannot possibly repay you.
- And Jesus says, when you have that choice, Choose people over profit, choose sacrifice over return on investment; choose the have-nots over the—open your home, open your table, open your church---share your resources with those who cannot possibly repay you
- And so just as Jesus gives **health** freely without expectation to the man with dropsy, who cannot possibly repay him, Jesus speaks to both the guests AND then the host—and gives an example to both—about putting others' needs ahead of our own, about self-sacrificing love—agape love—about humility and expenditure without return—**this is hospitality that will be repaid in abundance at the resurrection of the righteous, at the Wedding banquet of the Lord**
- So we've seen three choices so far—now this last section presents a choice that may sound unreasonable, and we find it beginning at verse 25, when Jesus has left the house of the Pharisee and is travelling with the large crowds who follow him. And he presents them with a choice. Luke writes that Jesus says to these crowds:

- 26 “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. . . . (Skipping down to verse 33) 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”
- Luke uses that same “give up all your possessions” language in the Book of Acts, and somebody really should have told him that if he wanted to help build the church, he needed to tone that down—people don’t want to hear that—that’s radical—maybe something like “none of you can become my disciple if you don’t pay your fair share, or pull your weight—or pay 10%--something like that—and that “carrying the cross” language there in verse 27—that’s pretty extreme—maybe we ought to tone that down, too
- But neither of those are as eyebrow raising and jaw-dropping as that first sentence Jesus speaks: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”
- Now many of you, maybe all of us, read that and think—that can’t be what Jesus is saying—you can’t be my disciple unless you hate your parents? Your family? Your children? Your life?
- There must be something that’s getting lost in translation.
- And if you think there must be something getting lost in translation, you’d be right.

- The word that Luke uses that is translated “hate” is *miseo*—and *miseo* does mean to hate or detest, or to love less or esteem less—but those last two really do a better job of translating *miseo* because *miseo* is a COMPARATIVE verb—it implies a **choosing of one thing over another**—
- for instance—in English, I can say I hate cottage cheese, or I hate taking out the trash—the rubbish—the recycling-- without comparing them to anything—but it makes no sense to say “I hate cottage cheese more than”—because you’d ask “more than what?”
- *miseo* is like that—it is used to compare something to something else—and in this case, all these things, mother, father, children, family, your life—these are being compared to Jesus—so while in English you can “hate” your mother without comparing her to anything else, what Jesus is saying here is that no one can be his disciple unless everything else comes in second place to him—nothing is esteemed more, nothing is more precious, more important—not your parents, not your children, not even your life. Jesus means more than all that stuff—and so a follower of Jesus is called to take up their cross because they have sacrificed themselves, given themselves completely to God, they are called unto holiness-- they are called to give up their possessions because they have no possessions— all that they have belongs to God and is available for the building of the Kingdom—the follower of Jesus says “all that I am, all that I have and all that I will ever be is laid at the foot of the cross”
- And it’s only when we say that that we can be filled with that perfect agape love that Jesus exemplifies, that empties itself out for others, that sees the needs of

others and uses its resources to meet them, expecting nothing in return—it is that perfect love that humbles itself—it is that perfect love that Jesus is offering when he tells the crowds: choose to follow me over everything

- Choose holiness over hanging on to your stuff—choose holiness--This is perfect love
- Finally, I want to suggest that out of these four choices that are illustrated in this Chapter of Luke's gospel, there are 3 messages specifically for our church today. Three choices that **we** are called to make right now in 2021. I'm going to begin in the middle of Chapter 14.
- First, when we consider Jesus' words to the guests at the dinner and to the one who invited them-- **Jesus calls us to choose to show hospitality-- Jesus calls us to choose to show hospitality.** Jesus calls us to humble ourselves when we take a seat at the table, to consider the needs of others more than our own, and when we open our table we are called to invite not just those from whom we have something to gain—but those from whom we will receive nothing—we are called to practice radical hospitality, assured that we will be exalted at the Wedding Banquet to come, repaid from God's own abundant resources at the resurrection. **Jesus calls us to choose to show hospitality.**
- Secondly when we consider Jesus' healing the man with dropsy—Jesus calls us to choose to bring health—to follow Jesus' example and see the needs of those around us, and not only to see them but to bring them into Jesus' presence, and to bring Jesus' presence to them, to embrace them and bring healing and wholeness by the power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave---without

finding excuses, even good excuses, not to, encouraging spiritual and mental and physical health among those we come into contact with every day-- Jesus calls us to choose to bring health

- And finally, if we take seriously Jesus' words to the crowds: Jesus calls us to choose a life of holiness, a life in which Jesus is Lord of all, Jesus is exalted above everything in our lives, all the people, all our possessions,—even above our lives themselves—lives that are to be sacrificed at the cross with Jesus and raised in perfect love, with clean hearts, in holiness.
- Choose hospitality, health, and holiness.
- You'll see the LargsNaz Vision Statement in your listening guide today, but it doesn't say "in 2020" at the beginning anymore. It says "in the year ahead"—because times have changed—in many ways it is a different world from the one we lived in in 2020—but the gospel has not changed—and God's steadfast love has not changed—and so the vision for Largs Church of the Nazarene remains—to share the good news and to build the Kingdom in this place and at this time through Hospitality, Health and Holiness—and I believe we're going to see revival as we move forward together.