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Sermon 26 September 2021

Title: HHH 5 (Moving God-ward)

- Holiness unto the Lord is our watchword and song—Holiness unto the Lord as we're marching along! If you've been associated with the Church of the Nazarene for a while, you have probably heard those words sung by a local church or at a district gathering, or maybe you've had the privilege to hear that anthem of the church sung by a great crowd of Nazarenes from all over the world who were gathered at our General Assembly—those words stir us up and give us a sense of purpose and identity, because the Church of the Nazarene is a holiness denomination.
- And so when our church leadership, the leadership of Largs Church of the Nazarene, put together our vision statement with its 3 area of focus, we included not just hospitality, and not just health, the health of individuals and of our environment, but underpinning those other two and influencing everything that we do as a church, is our 3rd area of focus, and that is holiness—you'll see there in your listening guide that we describe holiness in our vision statement this way—holiness is “perfect love and heart cleansing that transforms the way we think and act.”
- Today is the final sermon in our five-part series on Hospitality, Health, and Holiness, and today's sermon is on Holiness--perfect love and heart cleansing that transforms the way we THINK and the way we ACT, and we are so glad

that you have joined us today and we hope that you have made aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit right there where you are this morning.

- Now the Church of the Nazarene describes itself as a holiness denomination, and we are.
- We are a church that preaches holiness.
- And what that means from a historical perspective is that the Church of the Nazarene grew out of certain movements within 19th century Methodism and others, and is associated with Wesleyan-Arminian theology, like some other denominations-- the Wesleyan church, and the Pilgrim Holiness church, and the Salvation Army—the Church of God is another “holiness” denomination
- But theologically, what being a holiness denomination means for the Church of the Nazarene is that, after John Wesley, the Nazarene church emphasizes a “second work of grace” called “sanctification” after justification—so you’ll hear Nazarenes saying that they are “saved AND sanctified”—that is, they have repented and been forgiven of their sins, and also, subsequently, have been filled with the Holy Spirit and experienced a kind of heart cleansing that saves us from the power of sin and in which we are restored to the image of God—that relationship that was broken at the Fall is reconciled
- And so Nazarenes will talk about what John Wesley called “Christian Perfection”
- And when we talk about “perfection” and “holiness,” sometimes folks from other denominations don’t quite understand what we’re talking about—and

- that makes sense because I've heard some Nazarenes talk about perfection and holiness, and even THEY didn't understand what they were talking about
- And part of the reason that sometimes some confusion arises is that when we talk about Perfection and being "perfectED"—we can sometimes be tempted to think of ourselves as PERFECT—as if sanctification is a moment in time after which we are completely holy, completely perfect—and after which there is no room, and no need, for growth in grace—as if we reach some level of infallibility—let me be crystal clear here--this is not the case in Nazarene theology nor in the writings of John Wesley.
 - Part of the problem is that when we Nazarenes talk about "perfection," folks may tend to think that we mean that we are, in this life, PERFECT, and when we talk about being holy, what some folks hear is that we think we are "holier than thou"
 - And so today I want us to think about what holiness means for us, and how we ought to understand what it means to be "called unto holiness"—
 - **And what it means to be a CHURCH that preaches holiness.**
 - **Because we are a church that preaches holiness.**
 - Now this will not be by any means a complete treatment of what holiness means—I have entire books on holiness on my bookshelf, like this one right here—it says "holiness" right there on the cover—that's how you know that what it's about—but what I hope we can do this morning is to begin to get a clearer understanding of holiness by looking at three metaphors—three ways of describing what it means for a follower of Jesus to BE HOLY, to

exemplify HOLINESS—**And so in your listening guide you'll see there--**

Holiness is: 1, 2, 3—and we'll fill in those blanks in as we go along

- First of all, I want to spend some time looking at just a couple of verses from Romans 12 that we looked at in our first sermon on Health—Stewardship of Ourselves—and there we pointed out that these verses illustrate the way that the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of ourselves are intertwined—but today I want to look at these verses from another perspective
- Now in verse 1, Paul uses an Oxymoron to illustrate what the holy life looks like—what holy living IS
- Now you may know what an oxymoron is, or you may not, so I'm just going to tell you—an oxymoron is a figure of speech, usually made up of two words that would seem to contradict each other—you may be accustomed to hearing them together, but when you stop and think about what each of the two words MEAN individually, they OPPOSE each other—and sometimes that opposition, that juxtaposition makes the phrase more effective, more memorable—it kind of jogs our minds a bit--you may be familiar with some oxymorons, like CIVIL WAR (if it's a war, how could it be civil?) or in America we have these big prawns we call JUMBO SHRIMP (a shrimp is something tiny—how could there be JUMBO shrimp?)
- But we hear oxymorons used in conversation and in other places in our daily lives—if someone's business has lost money during the pandemic, they might say they had experienced a period of **negative growth**—and if they tell you that and you already knew about it, you might say that's OLD NEWS—

sometimes on the news you'll hear a reporter ask an expert for their UNBIASED OPINION—if someone has to go to the hospital, we might say that they are in ILL HEALTH—and of course there's one oxymoron that none of us had ever heard until about 18 months ago, but we're all very familiar with now, and that is of course, SOCIAL DISTANCING

- Now the Apostle Paul knew the power of the oxymoron, he knew how to use that figure of speech, and he does so when he writes to the church at Rome and says to them
- 12 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds
- And so our first point is this—Holiness is BEING a LIVING SACRIFICE
- And that is an oxymoron—because we know that when an animal is offered as a sacrifice—or when we talk about human sacrifices even—we're talking about killing something—cutting its throat and letting it bleed out or burning it up—this is why the story of Abraham and Isaac is so dramatic, right? HE heads up that mountain intending to KILL his son
- But Paul talks here about presenting our bodies—the flesh and blood that is us—as a LIVING sacrifice—he's talking about a way of LIVING—so why does he use a metaphor that's all about death—about killing?
- To understand what Paul is saying about SACRIFICE to the church at Rome, we really need to back up a few chapters to Chapter 6—and there we find a

very clear picture of what HOLINESS is—beginning with verse 6—this is in your listening guide—Paul writes 6 We know that our **old self** was crucified with (Jesus) so that the **body of sin might be destroyed**, and we might **no longer be enslaved to sin**. 7 **For whoever has died is freed from sin**. . . .(moving to verse 11) 11 **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus**.

- Whoever has died is free from sin—we are then Dead to sin—the old self (**that tendency toward sin represented by the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden—when we were tempted by equality with God and reached out and grasped it**) the old self has been sacrificed at the cross so that we no longer live, but Christ lives in US—this is radical language-- we are no longer enslaved to sin—and what does that sacrifice make possible?
- Paul tells us in v 12—listen to the language of sacrifice and offering here—we are either presenting ourselves to sin or to God, Paul writes
- 12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 **No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness**. 14 **For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace**.
- This is what it means to be a LIVING SACRIFICE—and Paul goes further—this is what it means to be a living sacrifice that is HOLY and acceptable to God—so Paul makes it clear that it is HOLINESS that he is talking about here

- And a living sacrifice is not only holy, but also acceptable—
- Acceptable—that means that this is the sacrifice that God is pleased with, that he ACCEPTS, that He desires—now **hold onto that thought until we get to our third point**
- For a moment I want to look at the Greek here
- The Greek ROOT word that is translated as Holy there in verse 1 of Chapter 12 is— ἅγιος *hagios*—you may be familiar with the English term “hagiography”—which literally means “holy writing”—*hagios* means holy—and William Barclay tells us that the fundamental core meaning of *hagios* is “DIFFERENT” –so a temple is holy because it is different from other buildings, and the same goes for people too—to be HOLY is to be called to be DIFFERENT, to be set apart— and so Paul admonishes us in v 2, saying do not be conformed to the world—be different—do not do the things that the world does, because you have died to sin, you are a living sacrifice--Holiness, as our vision statement says, holiness transforms the way we ACT—but it also transforms the way we THINK
- So Paul says do not be CONFORMED to this world, but be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your minds—and this is our second point about holiness—you can fill in the blank in your listening guide there, point number 2
- Holiness is having a new mind
- Now we mentioned in our sermon a couple of weeks ago that Paul is saying that a new mind enables us to discern God’s will—what is good and acceptable and perfect—there’s that word again—perfect—

- But what would it look like to have such a mind? To have a mind that is holy, that is able to discern God's perfect will so that we might follow it? I believe Paul describes such a mind in his letter to the Philippians, where in chapter 2 he writes, beginning with verse 5:

- 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

- 6 who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as a thing to be grasped,

7 but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

- What does a renewed mind look like? It looks Like the mind of Jesus—who did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself out even to death on a cross—this is what we refer to as *kenosis*, that emptying out —and so Paul tells us in Romans that we are called to die to our old self—that self that DOES regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, that fallen nature that reaches out for that forbidden fruit-- we are called to be emptied out, to die and be resurrected, renewed, transformed through the cross of Jesus, the one who hangs emptied out, wide open on the cross, the

one who hangs agape on the cross—agape, agape—Hanging agape on the cross, Jesus is the one in whom agape love is manifested completely—Jesus is the one who calls us to exemplify that same agape (a-gah-pay) love, that same agape (ah-gayp) love, to others, to the world, to present ourselves as living sacrifices to die and be resurrected with him—holy and acceptable to God

- To have the same mind as Jesus is to exemplify the same agape love that he does
- **Agape love is that love through which we can love God with ALL of ourselves—our heart and soul, strength and MIND--Agape love is that emptying-out love that is shown through radical hospitality, that love that we are called to show not only to our brothers and sisters, but to strangers, and even our enemies—agape love is demonstrated through good stewardship of ourselves and our resources, loving others as ourselves (hospitality, health and holiness)**
- What is agape? Agape is perfect love-- And what is perfect love? Perfect love is holiness. Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
- Holiness is having a new mind. Holiness is perfect love that transforms the way we THINK and the way we ACT.
- But in our vision statement, holiness is not just **perfect love** that transforms the way we think and act—Holiness is perfect love **and heart cleansing** that transforms the way we think and act. And this is our third point—Holiness is Having a clean heart

- In Psalm 51 David writes, he's repenting for that whole situation with Bathsheba, after the prophet Nathan came to see him, David writes— Ps 51: 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. —then in verse 15—O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- Now I want us to notice what David doesn't say here—he doesn't say, Lord, I'm going to clean up my heart, I'm going to change my attitude, my spirit, He doesn't say, I'M going to rejoice, I'M going to open my lips and praise you—
- No, everything David mentions here is the work, the activity of GOD—every request is for GOD to do something—**create** IN ME a clean heart, **PUT** a new spirit within me—do not cast me away, do not take your holy spirit from me—open my lips—restore the joy of your salvation and sustain my Spirit
- And the point I want to make here is that David's psalm reminds us that heart cleansing and all that comes with it, is not something WE DO—it's something GOD DOES.
- In fact, this is a good time to be reminded that the entire *ordo salutis*—the order of salvation—the process of repentance and forgiveness and sanctification is entirely the work of God—and NOT any work that we do, but a GIFT that we accept—from God's prevenient grace that draws us toward him, to the convicting grace that leads us to repentance, to the saving and sanctifying grace that justify and perfect us—it is God's grace that makes us

holy and not we ourselves

- Our part of the process is described by David beginning with verse 16--For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. (Now get this part—listen closely) 17 The sacrifice **acceptable** to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- What is David saying here? We hear his words echo in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans—he is saying Lord I present myself as a living sacrifice, holy and **ACCEPTABLE** to you
- And we find ourselves where we began—holiness is being a living sacrifice—holiness is having a clean heart
- holiness is perfect love and heart cleansing that transforms the way we think and act.
- And if holiness, if perfection, if sanctification is not something that we **DO**, but something that God does, then none of us have any reason to boast or to feel self-righteous, or to ever give the impression that holiness is something we have achieved, some destination at which we have arrived that makes us “better” or more valuable to God than other people—
- no, in the Wesleyan tradition we affirm that sanctification, that perfection, that holiness, is the **work of God’s grace**—that’s why we refer to it as a **SECOND WORK OF GRACE**
- And while we affirm that sanctification, like salvation, is an event that happens, we also affirm that the process of sanctification, the process of perfection, of

holiness, is continuous throughout our lives, that as long as we are alive, as long as we are moving toward that final glorification—we continue to GROW in GRACE, we continue to be to be perfected, to be made holy

- But there is always the temptation, especially in the holiness tradition, to think that “we have arrived,” that we have reached our final destination and are no longer being perfected, being made holy, but that we are perfect, that we are complete, that there is no room for improvement
- And I think it might be helpful to think of holiness, to think of Christian perfection, not in terms of a BOUNDED SET, but in terms of a CENTRED SET
- Now I know what you may be thinking--Bounded set, centred set? Pastor what are you talking about?
- Let me use a very simple illustration to explain what a bounded set and a centred set are.
- Here’s a map of our local area. You see Cumbrae and Bute, and there with that red circle around it is Largs.
- Let’s zoom in a little. And let’s put some people on this map. Here’s a woman on Cumbrae, Here’s another down near the Kelburn Castle, this guy’s out in the middle of nowhere, but here are a couple of people within the red circle that is the boundary of Largs’ city limits. Now, they are inside the boundary, while these other people are outside of the boundary. That is how a bounded set works—there are two sets here: people who have arrived at Largs and are located inside the boundary, and people who are outside of the boundary.
- But we can think of these people in another way. We can describe them in

“centred-set” terms. So if we consider these people not in terms of whether they’re in a boundary or not, but in terms of their orientation around the place at the center, that’s Largs, then we can add some arrows to describe the way that they are moving—their direction, their trajectory—and we see that this woman on Cumbrae is moving AWAY from Largs, and so is this man who is near the City Centre, but these other three have set a course directly toward Largs.

- So whereas before we talked about who was in and who was out of the boundary, here we can talk about who’s moving toward the centre and who’s moving AWAY from it. That’s two centred sets that are different from the “bounded sets.” So it makes a difference whether we use “bounded set” thinking or “centred set” thinking. Because a person can be inside the boundary but headed away from Largs, and a person can be outside of the boundary but headed straight toward Largs.
- Now imagine that Largs is a place that you can’t get to in this life—that you are always either moving toward or away from, but in this life you can’t arrive there—so it’s like Heaven (which it is, pretty much, so that’s not too difficult to imagine)
- Now these people who are moving directly toward Largs were not always moving in that direction. At some point, their trajectory was fixed, and they began to move on a clear and straight course. And these folks who are moving away from Largs could be turned-around and set on a path toward Largs.

- And so I want to suggest this. When we in the Nazarene church, in the Wesleyan tradition, talk about the EVENT of sanctification, when we talk about the time and the place we were sanctified—we are not talking about arriving at our final destination of complete perfection, we are not talking about achieving full Christ-likeness (that's the cross in the center here) without any need to grow in grace—when we talk about getting sanctified, we are talking about the time when the arrow of our lives was pointed straight toward glory, straight toward Christlikeness, straight toward holiness and perfection. When we presented ourselves as living sacrifices, when our mind was renewed, when our heart was cleansed, when we were empowered to exemplify perfect love, when the way we think and act was changed
- And so Christian perfection, sanctification, holiness, is moving God-ward—not a destination but a trajectory—an orientation—like a boat on the water, we are guided by the Light of the World, our sails filled with the wind of the Holy Spirit —
- and if we stay the course we can proclaim with the Apostle Paul who writes in Philippians 3:13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Amen?
- Holiness is perfect love and heart cleansing that transforms the way we think and act—and we are a church that preaches holiness.