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Sermon 5 September 2021

Title: HHH 2 (A Tale of Two Phils)

- Good morning church, and welcome to LargsNaz online—we are delighted that you have joined us today, whether this is your first time visiting with us or if you're a regular worshipper, whether you're at the LargsNaz Sunday Brunch or you're joining us from your home, near or far, wherever you are, we're glad you're here
- This has been a busy week here in Largs—if you're part of the local community, I'm sure you've noticed—and by “busy” I guess what I really mean is crowded—there have been a lot of people out walking along the prom and driving on the roads—the Viking festival has been going on and so there are all sorts of rides and stalls and things to see and do—the festival, they said, had been scaled-back this year, but it has still been a pretty big deal, and I know it's good for the economy for things to get back to something like normal again—you know, from our window we can see all the folks walking along the prom and getting on the ferry going over to Millport—we can also see the gigantic ferris wheel that they've been constructing the last few days—I don't know exactly how tall it is, but I've read that it holds 200 people, and I am looking forward to taking a spin on it with Pastor Tasha—maybe in a couple of days or so, once we're sure it's in good working order and we're not going to get stuck at the top or roll down into the water or anything like that—but it's been nice to be out and about with so

many visitors and neighbours, and have you noticed that we are almost getting to the point where every once in a while, even if just for a moment or two, you can find yourself forgetting about the pandemic—and I don't mean forgetting about it in an irresponsible way, I mean forgetting about insofar as it's not at the top of your mind all the time, it's not in your face—or ON your face like a face mask—we are moving toward a day when we will say to each other, “you remember when we were in lockdown?—when we had to wear facemasks all the time? when we couldn't travel? when all the shops and restaurants were closed? when we couldn't meet together at the church or even in each other's homes?” Oh, I hope we never take all those things for granted, because it is a blessing to be around other people and not be preoccupied with keeping up barriers between us and them—it has been necessary and prudent, but let's be honest, it hasn't been much fun at all.

- But as we move out of the kind of restricted situation that we have been in over the past year and a half, as we said last week, we are more and more able to make choices, as individuals and as a church—and so this morning for the first time in over 500 days, we met together and worshipped in our church building—and even though that was different, we did have to wear facemasks while we sang, and I'm sure the Lord's presence was still felt in a very real way and we experienced the sense of belonging and fellowship that is unique to the Family of God—our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- And so as we enter this kind of transition period, as we move from having had no choice but to close our doors and to be the church exclusively on the outside of

the church building, into a new situation, we are reconsidering the Vision Statement that our church leadership, under the Spirit's direction, formulated way back in the early days of 2020---before things got "locked down."

- For 5 Sundays we are doing this reconsideration, this re-visiting, of our vision statement and its 3 areas of focus—you'll remember that these are hospitality, health and holiness.
- And last week we got an introduction to these three—we saw how in Luke 14, Jesus shows us what it means to be hospitable, and to give health, and to live a life of holiness
- Now that we've had an introduction to all three of these areas, today we are going to start with the first of them—hospitality.
- Now we talk about "hospitality" in our vision statement, and we define it a little by saying this—this is from our Vision statement that's there in your listening guide-- Hospitality entails providing a welcoming safe space and fellowship at the Lord's table—and we include that definition because the word "hospitality" is a word that's used in general conversation, and it can mean different things to different people depending on the situation in which its used—a person who's known for their hospitality might just be a person who throws really nice dinner parties, or who is a good host when visitors stay at their house—maybe they feed them well, and have a nice place for them to stay, and show them around.
- "Hospitality" is also an industry in our culture—the "hospitality industry" includes hotels and lodging, and restaurants and bars, catering and cruise lines, even theme parks—and the hospitality industry is built on the principle of

“exchange.” Hosts of one kind or another, take care of their customers in exchange for money, and in exchange for repeat business, and in turn, customers have a nice meal, or a fun holiday, or a restful stay, and they’re glad to give their host a return on their investment. And the system depends on that back and forth exchange.

- Over the last few months, we here at LargsNaz have become intimately familiar with the COVID guidelines that apply to hospitality venues—that’s what you call a restaurant or a pub or some other kind of business, because the guidelines for that kind of business are what applies to us when we have our Sunday Brunch—when we are a “hospitality venue”—and those guidelines were, and still are, different from the guidelines that apply to a “place of worship.” And so we’ve had to draw a clear line between what we’re doing when folks are in our building for worship, as we were this morning, or for prayer or Bible Study—when it is a place of worship—and when it is a café, a hospitality venue—a certain type of business where the guidelines for that industry apply, even if all the money that’s raised goes to charitable causes like our “hospitality ministry”
- SO that’s what we might think of when we think of “hospitality” in an economic sense, in a cultural sense, but when we think of **Christian** hospitality, we’re talking about something different—in the same way that when we say our Sunday Brunch takes place in a “hospitality venue” we’re talking about a place of business, but when we talk about our “hospitality ministry” we’re talking about something else

- And just briefly today I'd like to talk about what Christian Hospitality IS, and HOW we, not just the church, but each one of us as individuals, too, how we do it.
- First let's talk about WHAT Christian hospitality is.
- In our Vision Statement, we say that we are Following the example of the early church in Acts 2, where as Pastor Tasha shared with us, we read 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
- Now where do we find Christian hospitality in these verses?
- It's obvious that breaking bread together with other Christians in each other's homes is Christian Hospitality, and so is eating with glad and generous hearts, -- and that's good because in my experience, Nazarenes are very good at breaking bread in each other's homes and eating with glad and generous hearts—maybe a little TOO good sometimes—we see that every Sunday our brunch, for sure--and spending time together in the temple, in worship at the church, is Christian Hospitality, but perhaps the most important aspect of Christian Hospitality that we find in these verses is the fact that the members of the early church were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

- This is radical hospitality—this is not the hospitality of the industry, of the economic exchange system—this is a hospitality that says “my resources are not my own” but are gifts from God, and I am a steward of them, and when there is a need, my resources are ready to meet that need. This is what it means to follow that second part of the greatest commandment, to love one’s neighbour as oneself—this is Christian Hospitality and it is RISKY—it is an act of FAITH that God will provide for us when we provide for others. It is a kind of thinking that isn’t concerned with return on investment from those to whom we give, because we know that our provision comes not from the world but from God, who gives abundantly to His children
- But there’s one more example here of Christian Hospitality: it’s in that last verse—and day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. What does this tell us? It tells us that these believers were interacting with those who were not saved yet, AND it tells us that they were welcoming enough to add to their number folks who had just become Christians—baby Christians, who had been unsaved, who had been sinners, perhaps even pagans the day before—who were added to their number for no other reason than their confession of faith in Jesus. That’s Christian Hospitality.
- We’ve hinted around at two distinct aspects of WHAT Christian Hospitality IS so far, but I want to make them clear and explicit.
- And to do so, I need to explain to you that I preached the original version of this sermon way back in 2020 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February—that’s Groundhog Day. GroundHog Day is not, as my Dad likes to joke, a day when we celebrate Pork

Sausage—Ground Hog—it's the day when northern Americans wait anxiously to find out whether Punxatawney Phil, a groundhog up in Pennsylvania, sees his shadow when he comes out of his burrow—Americans down South get their forecast from General Beauregard Lee, another groundhog who lives near Atlanta, Georgia in a stately Antebellum groundhog-sized mansion. Now the reason we want to know if these groundhogs see their shadow is because if they do, it frightens them and they run back into their house—and that means 6 more weeks of winter—but if they don't see their shadows, then an early Spring is on the way.

- And Groundhog Day is not just a holiday—it's also a movie, starring Bill Murray. And it's one of my favourite movies—a movie I've watched many times, and a movie I've used when I've taught in small groups in churches, and in college classes.
- Now Groundhog Day, the movie, takes place on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, and it's about a weatherman who has been sent to Punxatawney Pennsylvania with his newsteam to cover the Groundhog Day celebrations.
- Now this weatherman, Phil Connors, is, to be blunt, a jerk. He is egotistical, self-centered, he has no friends and he doesn't want them—he hates everything and everybody.
- Now I don't want to give away too much of the plot, but what happens to Phil Connors is that he goes to bed on the night of Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, and when he wakes up the next Day, it's Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> again. And this happens the next day, and the next, and the next and the next and on and on—for years. And some people I know who have

watched this movie say that it's a movie about a man who lives the same day over and over again, but it's not—because everyone else is living the same day over and over again, too. The difference is that Phil KNOWS it—for some reason he has been given the gift of knowledge that he's living the same day over and over again—and this privilege, this gift he has been given is totally unmerited, because he certainly doesn't deserve it—it's a lot like GRACE.

- And what happens to Phil over the years is that he realizes what an awful person he's been, what a terrible friend, and he begins to spend his days meeting the needs of others, even total strangers. He is transformed.
- Now Phil's name is ironic, because in the Greek, *Philos* means beloved, or friend, and *philia* means love, that love that exists between friends. Another LONGER word for brotherly love is *Philadelphia*—the love among brothers—those who feel like family—that's also another city in Pennsylvania—and that's also one of the things that Phil Connors comes to understand the importance of. Philadelphia. Brotherly love. So **Phil** the weatherman grows to fit his name.
- But there's another Phil in Groundhog Day. Punxatawney Phil, the Groundhog.
- And there's another Greek Phil- word that Phil Connors learns about in addition to "**Philadelphia**," and that's "philoxenia," the "love of strangers," because Phil learns to meet the needs not just of those close to him, but of complete strangers, too, even when he knows he'll get **nothing** in return from them.
- So there are 2 PHILS in Groundhog Day, and there are two "phils" that Phil Connors learns about—and those two aspects of Christian Hospitality that I



wanted to make explicit? They are those two Greek Phils. Philadelphia and Philoxenia. “Brotherly love” and the “love of strangers”

- Let’s take a look at two related passages in two different Epistles that we heard Pastor Tasha read—two letters to followers of Jesus containing instructions on how they are to live—Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Listen to these two short passages and see if you can spot the similarities. They’re in your listening guide
- First, Romans 12 –Paul writes:
- **10 love one another with mutual affection;** outdo one another in showing honor. . . .(skipping to verse 13) **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
- Now, in Hebrews 13 the writer of Hebrews adds a bit to what’s in Romans—we read
- **1 Let mutual love** continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.
- Now let’s compare the two—let’s start with verse 10 from Romans and verse 1 from Hebrews—**love one another with mutual affection;** and let **mutual love** continue—the noun in both of those statements, the **LOVE** that Christians are to love each other with is—guess what?—**philadelphia**—that love between brothers and sisters—so Paul is saying “have Philadelphia” (not the soft cheese, the Greek noun)—Paul is saying “BE LIKE FAMILY” --and check out the challenge

that Paul gives to the church—outdo one another in showing honour—consider your brothers and sisters above yourself, giving them so much honour and exalting them so much that we are all trying to outdo each other in honouring our brothers and sisters—and if we all do that, everyone’s needs are met--and Paul goes further—contribute to the needs of the saints—we heard that in Acts 2—don’t consider your resources your own, but consider them as available to meet the needs of your brothers and sisters—this is what Philadelphia means.

- Now look at what Paul says in verse 13 in that Romans passage—extend hospitality to strangers—the noun there for hospitality is *philoxenia*—the love of strangers—that’s love that treats the alien, the other, the stranger, even the enemy as a friend, as family—that kind of hospitality that lives out what it means to love another as yourself—and the writer of Hebrews makes this even clearer—he writes: Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured—the Greek there means as if you had the same body as them.
- Today we might say remember those in New York and New Jersey whose homes have been flooded as if your home had been flooded, remember those in the path of a hurricane in Louisiana, or in the aftermath of an earthquake in Haiti, or fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, as if you were enduring those things—as if your body were in the same place they are in--
- That is loving others AS YOURSELF. That is radical hospitality, that is Christian hospitality. Philadelphia and philoxenia.

- And so these two passages tell us that Christian Hospitality is shown by loving only two types of people—just two—two kinds of people we are called to love—those who are our brothers and sisters and those who are not—or to put it another way, those who are strangers, and those who are not.
- I mentioned earlier that the Viking festival has been going on this week—and one day while I was out walking along the prom, as we do every single day, I took a seat on one of the benches down toward the Lifeboat station—Pastor Tasha was looking for seaglass down by the water—and I struck up a conversation with an older gentleman who was also sitting there—I’d never met him before but we introduced ourselves and he told me that he’d lived here in Largs for some time, and I made some comment about how many people there were out and about—just walking and enjoying the Festival—and he said something like “Oh, I know, there are so many visitors in town this time of year—it seems like every person you meet is either from Largs or they’re visiting from somewhere else.”
- And I just sort of nodded in agreement, but I was kind of thinking to myself—“isn’t that true all year long? And isn’t that true anywhere in the world—every person you meet is either going to be from Largs or from somewhere else—so you could say that there are two kinds of people in the world—those who are from Largs and those who are from somewhere else
- And you can also say that there are only two kinds of people that we as Christians are called to love—two kinds of people that we are called to show Christian hospitality to—those who are our friends, and those who are not—

those who are family, and those who are not—those who are strangers, and those who are not—and that’s everybody, so that simplifies things considerably

- And this past year, even when our church’s doors were closed, our church’s hearts were open, and God showed us new ways to reach out to folks—friends and strangers--by providing meals to those who needed them—and our hospitality ministry continues to serve the community—to share the love of Jesus—to show Christian hospitality—and everyone who cooks and bakes and donates produce and ingredients and provides financial support, and prays and encourages and tells people about what the church is doing—all of you are a part of that.
- But it’s not only our church’s hospitality ministry that demonstrates Christian hospitality—hospitality permeates everything that we do as a church together and all that we do as individual members of the Body of Christ.
- Individually we do that when we try to outdo our brothers and sisters in showing each other honour, when we humble ourselves and exalt others, when we truly love others as ourselves, -- when we invite folks to church, to coffee, to a meal, when we sit and chat on a park bench expecting nothing in return—without ulterior motive—when we simply follow the example of Jesus who was a friend to sinners and to those in need. There are a million ways that we as individuals can show Christian Hospitality, and there are opportunities every single day, and God will show them to us if we are open to the Spirit’s leading.
- In the church as a whole, we see Christian hospitality in our Sunday worship, and our brunch, and our Bible studies-- when we welcome anyone and everyone—in

our prayer meetings, where we say “I’ll pray for your needs as I would pray for my own,”—whenever we say, whoever you are, come have a seat at the table. What are your needs? Are you hungry? Are you lonely? Do you just need some friendship—a smile and a laugh? Do you have a spiritual need—we’ll pray with you. And what do we get in return? We don’t have to get **ANYTHING from those we serve**. Because we’re following Jesus, who said in Luke 14 as we heard last week, “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”— God will provide, and His resources are unimaginably abundant.

- Perhaps no other activity that the church engages in exhibits Christian Hospitality as well or as completely as the invitation to partake of the Eucharist, to have a seat at the Lord’s table in Holy Communion.
- Pastor Tasha is going to lead us in just a moment, but first we’re going to take a few moments to prepare our hearts and to prepare the elements. Take the next couple of minutes to gather the wine and the bread and then we’ll partake together. Use this time to still your mind and get ready to reverently join us as we receive this sacrament.