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*Nazarene Essentials* Sermon #1

Chapters: “Our Wesleyan-Holiness Heritage”, “Our Global Church”, “Our Core Values”, “Our Mission”

**Our Heritage**

**Introduction**

We live in a throw away world. Consider whatever gadget you use, and chances are, there is a brand new version being released this year with a few minor upgrades designed to solve all of last year’s problems. Each advertisement and store room display tells you the same story…last year’s version cannot compare to the genius of this year’s innovation. It matters not that you researched your purchase online for days, reading review after review about how long the item would last. This year, none of that research matters, because there is a brand new product beckoning you to toss last year’s longevity for the sake of today’s great ingenuity. Newer is always better, right?

This newer is better mentality doesn’t just start and stop with gadgets. No, it finds its way into other areas as well: The new car. The new restaurant. The new store. The new relationship. The new theology. The new church. We even hear ourselves saying, “Out with the old, and in with the new”. The problem with things that are new, is that they always become old. In our fast paced society we are accustomed to believe that new is more valuable than old. We are conditioned to think that the value and effort put into things long ago are no match for the current thinking of our day. The problem is, that thinking does not align itself with Scripture.

Throughout Scripture we are told to remember what God has done: to recall the faith of those before us, to honor the working of God in their lives and in their situations, to believe that through our obedience God can move and work today, in the same manner he has worked generationally in theirs. New is not always better because our history is distinct and important. Psalm 61:5 states, *“For you, God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.”* Our *heritage* today isn’t new. It is the same as it was for those who historically trusted in the name of Christ before us.

In fact the definition of *heritage* is: “Evidence of the past, considered collectively as the inheritance of present-day society.” The mercies of God are new every morning, and His working in our lives is never stale and old. So in our churches, we cannot throw away our history; we must embrace it because God has used it to tell the unfolding plan of God in our context. As Nazarene’s we have a rich *heritage*!

Our *heritage* is found in the body of Christ, for we are a part of His “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” church. We take our place as the Church of the Nazarene with the people of God in the Old and New Testaments. We find strength in the 16th century English Reformation. We find our encouragement as we identify ourselves with the 18th century Wesleyan revival through the preaching of John and Charles Wesley. Our legacy is rooted with Phineas Bresee and Joseph Widney and 100 others as they organized the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles in 1895. We celebrate their call to be sanctified by the power of the Spirit and preach the gospel to the poor. We remember the move of God at Pilot Point Texas in 1908, as the steps were taken to fully unite us as a church and to ensure that the message of holiness was preached around the world. In fact, by 1915 the Church of the Nazarene was already in 14 world areas, and by 1998, half of all Nazarenes in the world no longer lived in the United States and Canada.

(Insert your own local church’s historical story here)

Our past is evidenced in how God has blessed us, and that *heritage* is our inheritance today. Remembering our *heritage* ensures the fresh expression of the move of God today in our church because we are thankful for what He has already done, and are trusting Him for what He will do in the future.

The Church of the Nazarene is a global community of believers uniting themselves to be a people who are Christian, Holiness, and Missional. This is our *Heritage*! As we begin this study over the next 7 weeks, it will be important for our local church to recognize the local expression of our church’s identity, and to understand how Scripture has provided the basis for our personality.

**I. We Are a Christian People**At first glance, it might seem counterproductive to refer to ourselves as Christian people. After all, isn’t the church supposed to be filled with Christian people? In the relative world that we live in though, this declaration cannot be understated. We are the church of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is found in Him alone. To water down the message of Christ is to leave the church without its reason for existence and its power. Our local church and the global Church of the Nazarene join with believers everywhere in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is that declaration that makes us a Christian People.

*Scripture:
Ephesians 2:17-22*
*17He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
 18For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

*19Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,
20built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.
21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.
 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

A. We were all once extremely far away from God. Remember for a moment who you were or what you did before you came to Jesus Christ. Through Christ we have been brought near to God. We were once foreigners and strangers, but now we are children of God and members of His household. We were at one time separated from God because of sin, but now through His sacrificial act on the cross and our believing in Him we have been adopted into His family. We now have access to the power, strength, help, grace, love, and resources of our Father through Jesus Christ.

B. Everything in the church is built on Jesus Christ. Our church is part of the Kingdom that God is building around the world with Jesus as the cornerstone. Without Him, our church will not stand. If He is not leading our church, we have no authority. If He is not guiding our church we have no wisdom. Through Him we have help for today. Through Him we have hope that will not disappoint us. Through Him, we have victory over Sin. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Everything is built on Christ!

Our local church is being built together with Christians everywhere to become a dwelling that His Spirit lives in.

**II. We Are a Holiness People**As a part of the family of God, we are instructed by our Father to act like one of His children. Our behavior should emulate the behavior of Jesus. As a church, specifically, we are called to be holy like Christ is. Our distinct expression, as the Church of the Nazarene, is the understanding that God has called us to more than ‘just’ forgiveness of past sins. God has called us to live a life of holiness: a life that is defined by work of the Spirit in our lives, a life that seeks to honor God with all that we are, a life that surrenders to the Lordship of Christ, a life that imitates the life of Jesus Christ.
*Scripture:
Ephesians 5:1*-2
*1* Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children

*2* and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

A. What does it mean to imitate God? Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus is the perfect image of God. So to imitate God means that we must pattern our lives after Jesus. It means that we must appear to be like Christ in all that we do. There is an important work that happens here, because unless the Spirit has control of our lives, we will never be able to appear like Christ. This is not something we can counterfeit. In fact imitating Jesus is not possible apart from the Spirit. Imitating Jesus allows His Spirit to direct what we think about, to direct what we do, and to enable us to live above sin. It is important for us to understand additionally that there will be no desire to imitate Christ without first loving God. The decision that allows the Spirit to begin this imitating work in our lives is the decision to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is the desire to bring ourselves into a state of entire devotement to Him. To love Him enough that we don’t want to injure His good name or let Him down, because we are grateful for what He has done in our lives.

B. How do we know when we are imitating Jesus? When we make the decision to live a life of love for others. When we see ourselves being willing to sacrifice so that someone else can know God. When we place a higher value on another’s needs than our own wants. When we decide that just like Jesus we love others enough to give of ourselves for their betterment. When we find ourselves becoming more like Christ, and less like the world. When we see our values start to align themselves with the value and worth of every individual on the face of the earth.

**III. We Are a Missional People**We are a people that understand that the power of gospel cannot be kept to ourselves. Acts 1:8 states, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We receive the indwelling power of Christ when He fills and empowers us. When the Holy Spirit lives in us, and perfects His Holy work inside of us, we become compelled to share the transformative message of salvation with the whole world. A missional people does not ask, “Should we go?” A missional people realizes they can’t go fast enough. As a part of the Church of the Nazarene, **we are the workers who need to be sent out to fields because it is our holy task to share the message of salvation with others.** The mission of our church is to make Christlike disciples in the nations, and it comes from the words of Jesus to the disciples. *Scripture:
Matthew 28:18-20*

***18***  *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.****19***  *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,****20***  *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*A. It is the authority of Jesus that empowers us to go. The power that is in the name of Jesus endows us with the ability to go to dark places with the light of Christ. Jesus sends us into places around the world to show His love and teach others the things we have learned from Him. It is not enough for our church to simply exist at our physical address in our community. It is our mandate from Christ for this location to be the springboard for His saving work in our community and our world. We are not necessarily called to invite everyone to church so they can hear about Jesus; instead through the love of Christ living in us we are compelled to go and tell! Nazarenes are people who go into homes, work places, stores, parks, little league games, street corners, prisons, hospitals and more with the transformative message that Christ loves the world!

B. Our churches love others enough that we desire to assist them, and teach them what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We instruct, correct, guide, and educate with the understanding that Jesus is with us, and that He is helping us lead others to Him. It is not enough for us to win them to Christ, we must disciple them so that as we imitate Christ, they begin to imitate Christ. When was the last time you helped someone else begin their journey of imitating Christ? When was the last time you taught someone to be a disciple of Christ? You don’t have to share things you don’t know; you just have to be faithful in teaching what you do know, and allow Christ to use your hands and feet to take the message to them.

**Conclusion**

In a world that throws everything away in favor for what is new, there is great value in understanding our *heritage*. You are a part of a church with a rich legacy. Our past is evidenced in how God has blessed us, and that *heritage* is our inheritance today. Remembering our *heritage* ensures the fresh expression of the move of God today in our church. God is calling us to be a Christian People, a Holiness People, and Missional People. God is calling us to be all of three of them. Maybe today you have been someone who believes in Christ, but hasn’t taken the next steps to let the Spirit work in your life. Maybe today you are someone who has asked God to cleanse you from sin, but you aren’t experiencing the working of His love in your heart for others. Maybe you are someone who loves going and telling others about Christ, but you yourself have not been imitating Him.

There is time today for us to pray, and to ensure that we are a Christian, Holiness, and Missional Church. There is time today to live up to our *heritage,* and to see God do a fresh and new work in us. Would you like to pray today?