



St John Lutheran Church

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Text: Philippians 2:5-11

Theme: "A Matter of Attitude"

In true humility the King of Kings rides the back of a beast of burden as He makes His way through the streets of Jerusalem. **The people shout** their acclamation, their praise, their "Hosannas," waving palm leaves, the signs of victory as the King processes, **but He** remains steadfast in His task keeping His eyes on the cross, the symbol of torture and shame that lay ahead of Him.

As Jesus processes into the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and as we celebrate that procession today we view it through the words of God as recorded in Philippians chapter 2. **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."**

The pastor stepped into the pulpit and he preached in fiery words about the sexual revolution and the rampant promiscuity in the land and the people all shouted "amen." **He preached about** the plight of the inner city and the decay and the corruption therein and the people all shouted, "amen, preach it pastor." **He preached about** the rampant disregard for authority in public schools and even in the home and everyone shouted again **"amen, testify pastor."** **And then finally,** he preached about self-righteousness and the hardness of the heart that looks down upon others and the people's ears perked up and they said, **"hold on pastor, now you've gone from preaching to meddling."**

When the Word of God hits its mark that's the sort of reaction that it stirs up. **It perks the ears** and pierces the heart of the one accused. **That is usually** our reaction when God's word begins to speak about attitudes. **I mean Scripture** can condemn many things... **it can** expose the wickedness of the world... **it can** call sinners to repentance and a person can think it is all **out there, with other people... but** when it comes to attitudes then it begins to hit home. **It gets a** little closer to all of us. **After all, we all** have attitudes and the attitudes that we have we consider to be our very own ...**our** private possessions. **In recent years** we have even thought highly of and exalted those who have **"attitude."** **It is attitude** that makes people seem independent and carefree. **It is almost** as if our attitude is the one thing that is ours for us to do with as we please.

But attitudes, like everything else, can be good or they can be bad. **The problem is** we sometimes adopt a bad attitude and we try to justify it. **For instance, a** person who is given to a quick temper

is said to have a **"short fuse,"** or they have that **"old Irish blood in them"** or even worse **"he's got his German up."** A person who never gets serious about anything, the person who just lets life pass them by, **never** getting involved in anything that is right or important is said to be **"happy go lucky"** or **"care free."** **One who confident in** himself in various situations is said to be **"assertive,"** or he is said to have a **"healthy self-esteem."** You see, we sometimes take a bad attitude and we try to justify it, to make it O.K. **We look for** reasons as to why we are the way we are.

But then, right when you begin to feel justified in your attitude, Scripture confronts you with the attitude or the mind of Christ. **That He who** was rich became poor, that you through His poverty might be made rich. **You are confronted** with Christ and you picture in your minds eye the King of Glory riding into Jerusalem atop a common donkey as He makes His way to the cross where He will be crucified. **You picture Him, the One in whom** is all power, as He is beaten and ridiculed by His captors.

You picture the grimace on His Holy face as He falls to the ground beneath the weight of His own cross. **You see the** agony in His eyes as the nails are driven through His flesh. **You hear the** humility in His voice as He calls out **"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."** **And yes, you** hear the word of St. Paul that, **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing - made Himself nothing...And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!"**

The attitude of Christ. You read of it in Scripture... **it is preached** to you from inside these hallowed walls... **you picture** it all in your minds eye and then you wonder how could I? **How could I** harbor such bad attitudes in myself? **How could I** exalt myself even above my Lord, when it was He who took on the form of a servant, my form, becoming obedient unto death ...

even death on a cross, for me? **How can I** now exalt myself to the place that He abandoned in order to come to me, to save me?

Yes, when the word hits home, you wonder all these things... **and you** resolve by way of a guilty to conscience to do better... **to** have a better attitude... **only** to find that you... **in and** of yourself, you just do not have the resolve or the strength to change who you are.

But then, in the Grace of the One who became obedient unto death you plea to Him for deliverance... **to set** you free from who you are... **to deliver** you the body of death that entombs you. **Indeed you** cry out with St. Paul, **"O wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?"**

And then this King, this humble King, this King who takes on your very form in order to deliver you from yourself showers you with His Love Forgiveness. **He takes your** guilt upon Himself and He clothes you with His innocence. **Guilt, you see,** is not a motivator for a new attitude... **but forgiveness is!! Forgiveness is what** softens the heart... **it is** what buries sin that the new man...

the man born of Christ might come forth. **Forgiveness is the** substance that makes for a new attitude, the attitude of Christ.

Leonardo da Vinci had begun to paint his masterpiece "**The Last Supper.**" **He had put** a number of figures on canvas, each representing one of the disciples. Then it happened that the master artist had a quarrel with one of his companions, and in revenge for the wrong he believed was done to him... **he painted** his companions portrait as Judas in the great picture.

Da Vinci's work was all completed except for the face of our blessed Lord. **It was his** ambition to paint the noblest and most perfect portrait of Christ that had been put on canvas... **but try** as he would, he could not succeed. **In the** mean time his conscience had been working, and at last he took his brush and painted out his companions portrait and forgave him his wrong.

It is said that night in his dreams Da Vinci saw a wonderful vision of Christ. **The next day** he took his brushes and painted such a wonderful picture of Christ that thousands have gazed at it in wonder ever since.

Forgiveness is the great motivator of the human soul. **It is always** the Gospel that moves us, the Good News of our forgiveness that motivates us to follow the urgings of the Holy Spirit to live our lives in accordance with our Lord's Will. **And so, Jesus** Christ takes on humanity and in that servant's form He humbles Himself, by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. **And from the** cross flows a river, a life giving river of forgiveness.

The river of forgiveness and compassion flows, but says Luther, "**Sin is forgiven not for the purpose that we continue therein, but that we break loose from sin; else it would be called a permission and not a remission of sin. God has placed forgiveness of sins into Holy Baptism, into the Lord's Supper, and into the Word. Yea, He has given it into the mouth of every Christian; if He consoles you and promises you God's grace through the merit of Christ Jesus, you shall receive and believe it, in no other way than as though Christ with His own mouth had given to you the promise as to the paralytic who was lowered into Jesus presence in Mark 2.**" The words are simple and yet they are so divine, "**I forgive you all of your sins.**"

And in that forgiveness a whole new attitude is born in you. **The old man** is put to death, and the new man comes forth. "**Have this mind, this attitude in you (St. Paul says).**" **You hear those** words and you realize that they both condemn and they lift up. **As you recognize** your own effort to exalt yourself above Christ and above His creation, you repent and call for mercy and forgiveness and in that mercy and forgiveness St. Paul's words, God's Word, lifts you up. **In Word and** in Sacrament Jesus Christ offers Himself to you as the One who humbled Himself that you might be exalted. **He gives you** Himself, the One who took on human form that you might share again in the likeness, in the image of God. **He rides humbly** into Jerusalem and amidst all the praise and the shouting of Hosanna's He remains steadfast with His eyes on the cross, all for you. **And so your** knee bends and you bow as you proclaim the name that is above every name, the name of Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. **It is a** matter of attitude, it is a response to the Gospel given you by Christ Himself, the humble servant. **In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Palm Sunday, 2008

Rev. Eric M. Christiansen

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