

PALM SUNDAY/SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

April 4 & 5, 2009

“How’s Your Attitude?”

Philippians 2:5-11

In an episode of the old TV sitcom “Wings”, Helen – the owner of a lunch counter in a small airport in Nantucket – decides she wants to learn how to fly and so she convinces Joe – the owner of a one-plane airline in that same airport to teach her. But the course was long and boring and so she asks Brian – Joe’s brother and a pilot himself – to take her up without the training. And that’s what he does. But while they are flying, Brian hits his head and knocks himself unconscious. And so Helen radios Joe back on the ground to help her. The first thing he asks her is about the relationship of the plane with the horizon called “the attitude.” “How’s your attitude?” he says. But having never covered that subject in class, Helen replies, “How’s my attitude? How’s my attitude? How do you think my attitude is? I’m going to crash, Joe. My attitude stinks, Joe, my attitude stinks.”

So let me ask you today, “How’s your attitude?” And I don’t mean in relationship to the horizon. I mean in relationship to God and to others. In today’s epistle lesson, Paul encourages us who belong to God in Christ to have the same attitude as Christ. And so, we ask, what kind of attitude did Christ have?

Well, first, Paul says, he had the attitude of humility. For even though he was and is God he didn’t seek to make himself equal to God according to his human nature but instead made himself nothing and took on flesh and blood and became a human being like one of us. Humility. When Martin Luther was asked what the first step in being a genuine Christian was he said, “humility.” “What’s the second?” he was asked. “Humility.” “And the third?” “Humility.” “It’s humility from beginning to end.” Indeed, as it’s been said, “they that know God will be humble. And they that know themselves can’t be proud.” Jesus was humble. Or to put it another way, he wasn’t too proud to become one of us and to get involved with our needs – especially our deepest needs for forgiveness, life and salvation. So, how about you? Do you have a humble attitude – a humble attitude toward God and a humble attitude toward others? Are you willing to get down on your knees before God or do you expect God to get down on His knees before you? Are you willing to minister to those who are in need and to get involved with them or do you think people ought to minister to your needs first? I remember a member of a former parish who told me that there were things she would do and things she just wouldn’t do. “After all,” she said, “I have my pride.” May God save us from such a prideful attitude.

Second, Paul says, Jesus had an attitude of obedience. He not only humbled himself, he became obedient to death even death on a cross. You see, humility toward God always leads to obedience to God. For when one doesn’t seek equality with God but rather when

one humbles oneself then that one is open and responsive to the leading of God no matter what the cost may be – even if it costs one his life. Obedience seeks not only to know God's will but to do it. It's like Jesus himself said in the garden of Gethsemane as he faced his imminent arrest, trial, suffering and death, "not my will but thine be done." How about you? Do you have an obedient attitude? Are you will to subjugate your own will to the will of God or do you want what you want when you want it? If God says, "Go!" do you go or do you ask "why?" If God says "Come!" do you come or do you ask "When?" Do you respond in faith to God's Word or do you have excuses and arguments? I remember discussing the Great Commission with a man who said, "Well, pastor, that may be Jesus' Great Commission but it's not mine. I've got other things to do." Honest, certainly, but not obedient. May God save us from such a disobedient attitude.

Third, Paul says, Jesus had an attitude of servanthood. He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. Elsewhere, Jesus said, "I have come not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many." Out of humility and obedience comes service – service to God and service to ones fellowman. And there is no greater service than to lay down ones life for another. And that's exactly what Jesus did when he willingly laid down his life on the cross so that all who believe and trust in him as their personal Lord and Savior might be ransomed from sin and death and released from the power of the devil. How about you? Do you have a servant attitude? Are you willing to lay down your life, that is, to give your time and talents and treasures, in service to God and to others or do you keep it for yourself? Do you seek to be served rather than to serve? You know, it's interesting. According to the Search Institute in Minneapolis, most people admire the willingness to serve without acclaim in others but they found that they didn't have that trait. Jesus had that trait. How about you? May God save us from a self-serving attitude.

In the end, Jesus' attitude is best seen in how he lived his life and in how he died his death. The events of this week in particular, this Holy Week, will show us again one who comes with a humble, obedient, servant attitude. He comes not with pomp and ceremony but lowly, riding on a donkey, and not to the applause of the high and mighty but to the "hallelujahs" of the poor and the young and the needy. He seeks not to have his feet washed but rather to wash the feet of others. He doesn't resist when arrested. He doesn't struggle when beaten and he doesn't complain when crucified. He willingly goes the way of the cross because, in that, he knows he goes that way so that we won't have to go that way ourselves. He pays for our sins so that we won't have to. He dies our death so that we need not die but live eternally. Indeed, Jesus' attitude was best reflected in his actions – actions that he took on our behalf.

And whether we like it or not, our attitude is reflected in our actions as well. It's not just a matter of what we think or what we say. It's a matter of what we do and how we do it. So how's your attitude? May God help us all to have the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, for his name's sake. Amen.