

Sermon for April 9, 2017– Palm Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: **Look at Jesus' Attitude**

- 1) The attitude that saved you.
- 2) The attitude that exalted him.

⁵Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. ⁶Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, ⁷but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I used to love watching professional wrestling as a kid, but now I can't stand it. I know: some of you may still like the WWE. I won't judge you for that. They do put on quite a show. Before a match the lights get low, music starts to play and the announcer announces the name of the bad guy that only a few people like. He usually has some evil sounding name and talks smack about how he's going to pile drive his opponent into the grave. Then the music and lighting gets exciting. The guy everyone likes comes out to the roar of the crowd - cheering his name. He flexes and shows off his steroid built body. He talks smack - how he's a wrestling god on this earth - and then the fight begins.

Why am I talking about wrestling on Palm Sunday? First of all, because the purpose of the events that happened on Palm Sunday are sort of like the purpose of all the pre-fight pageantry of a wrestling match. A battle was about to begin between Christ and our sins, death and the power of the devil, and the LORD got the crowds ready to welcome mankind's hero. They cried out: "Hosanna" – which literally means, "Save [us] I pray." But Palm Sunday is also very different from wrestling pageantry. Palm Sunday marked more than the beginning of some meaningless fight – it marked the fight of all time: the fight for our eternal salvation.

And there is yet another reason why I mention professional wrestling. Can you guess the main reason I don't like it? I can't stand the arrogant attitude of the wrestlers - how they degrade their opponents. I know: it's all just a show. Truth be told, their arrogance "act" is part of the reason many people love watching them. Human nature is proud and selfish. In some way or another people fantasize about being as brash as a wrestler! What a difference there is between Jesus on Palm Sunday and a WWE wrestler before a match: the wrestler pretends he is a god when he is really nothing, and Jesus made himself nothing, when he really is God.

Today we want to meditate on Jesus' attitude. Why? Because it is so different from the attitude the world promotes. The world tells you to be brash and always look out for yourself. Jesus teaches you to be humble and always look out for others. Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Look at Jesus' Attitude.** 1) *The attitude that saved you.* 2) *The attitude that exalted him.*

Part One: The attitude that saved you.

In this portion of his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul encourages his readers to live in harmony and humility with one another. Right before our text he writes, “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*”.ⁱ We don’t know whether pride and selfishness were a particular problem for the congregation at Philippi; but such attitudes are certainly a part of the sinful human nature we all possess.

What kind of attitude pleases God? That of a professional wrestler: all macho and arrogant? Certainly not. Paul writes:

⁵Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. ⁶Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, ⁷but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant.

Take a moment to let Paul’s words sink in. Being in very nature God, Jesus is what all humans, according to their sinful nature, strive to be! That’s right, our sinful hearts all desire to be god – masters of our own fate. By promising Adam and Eve that they would be like God, the devil got our first parents to fall into sin. And with that same basic temptation the devil still gets us to fall. We desire as much influence, power, wealth and ease as we can get. And once achieved, we don’t easily give it up. When is the last time you heard of a billionaire giving away – not some, but all - his money so that he could become poor? When did you ever hear of a dictator gladly handing over his power to the people he governed? No, that is not the attitude of man; but this was the attitude of Jesus, who was in very nature God – who had it all – and *did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed*. Jesus didn’t find his greatest glory in saying, “Look at me, and how great I am.” Jesus knew that this was not true glory. Rather, where did Jesus find glory? In emptying himself of everything we humans prize in order to save a race that lived in constant rebellion against him.

Jesus emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When was the last time you heard of any earthly ruler giving up all power and privilege to become a slave? I know, people might point to times a governor or president served in a soup kitchen around the holidays, but that is not the same thing. They still possess their positions of authority and are honored as such. Jesus emptied himself of all privilege and power. He did this, not merely to serve a meal for the sake of good PR, but to actually be like us in every way. Jesus was not worshipped as God as he walked this earth; he was despised as a man. True, the people honored him as the Messiah when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; but look at how he entered: not riding on a stately steed, but on a borrowed donkey colt. And some of the very voices that hailed him, would call for his crucifixion only days later; for *He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*ⁱⁱⁱ

When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Could you ever imagine a President willingly laying down his life to save the very people who hated him? Could you see yourself doing it? But this is what Jesus did for us. Why? In order to save us from the hell we deserved! Love was Jesus' attitude, and it moved him to resolutely enter Jerusalem as our Savior -knowing that, in less than a week, he would face a most horrible suffering and death. He allowed himself to suffer the full fury of God's wrath over our sins, so we wouldn't have to. Self-sacrificing love is the attitude our Savior had toward us and it is the attitude that Paul encourages us to have.

Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. In other words, in response to the self-sacrificing love Jesus showed us, we should be willing to empty ourselves for others just as Jesus did for us. Now some of you might think: "That's easy. I would willingly help anyone in this congregation, if they had need." I don't doubt any of you would be willing to do this; but that's not the point. Would you also be willing to empty yourself for minor things? Are you willing to put the welfare of another member ahead of yours? Are you willing to listen to their ideas? Are you willing to put the best construction on everything they say, and not blow up at them (even if it is just in your mind) because you think that they insulted you? Are you willing to put this congregation's success ahead of your own personal success? Are you willing to not always get your way? Are you willing, even in the most mundane or seemingly lowly ways, to serve those people who really don't seem to deserve your service because they are so thankless in how they act towards you? This kind of service, a service of love, is the attitude Christ has toward us. It is only because of His selfless, self-sacrificing love that we are saved. God wants us to reflect this attitude towards others – all in gratitude for what he has done for us.

Unfortunately, we all must confess that we don't have this attitude. We struggle with selfishness all the time. In God's righteous eye, we are as bad as professional wrestlers. He sees our hearts and how unwilling we are to yield our perceived "rights" to others. On account of this we pray, "Lord, when I see your service for me, I stand in shame. Forgive me for my selfish attitude. Remind me of your unselfish love that willingly went to the cross to save me. Through faith in your Son, I am your dear child. Help me reflect this truth in my life. Let Christ's service for me be my power and motivation to serve others. Let me not be blinded by the world, but see the true glory in service that your Son exemplified."

And God hears our prayer. Jesus was humbly riding to Jerusalem to win our forgiveness on Palm Sunday, and win it he did! All our sins died with Jesus on the cross. Through faith, God counts Jesus' righteousness as our very own. In the peace of this forgiveness, let us now see how a Christ-like attitude is a glorious one.

Part Two: The attitude that exalted him.

Our text continues: *⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

What did God the Father do in response to his Son's humble, self-sacrificing love for mankind? He exalted Him to the highest place. Now it is true that Jesus occupied that place even before He

saved us, but what higher honor could God the Father give him now also according to His human nature other than that of His throne, upon which He already sat? God the Father was so happy with His Son's humility and self-sacrificing love that He made sure that every person who ever has or will exist, regardless of whether or not they are believers, will have to praise Jesus when He comes again on the last day. Everyone will have to acknowledge that Jesus Christ, the humble servant whom many despised, truly is our LORD and Savior.

Christ's greatest glory is his loving service for us. This is also the attitude that God considers our greatest glory. Out of love for God, let us love each other. Pray that our attitude might be the same as Christ Jesus', and then act on that prayer. It won't be easy. A twentieth century philosopher once defined "hell" as being "other people", and it certainly can seem that way. But always remember that you are serving God and glorifying him when you serve others in genuine love. When you are tempted to be selfish or conceited in your attitude towards others, remember Christ's service for you. Let his forgiveness be your comfort and motivation to humble yourself for others as he humbled himself for you.

On this Palm Sunday, as we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem in humility, let us shout: Hosanna! God, save us by your humility, and save others through us, as we reflect your humble service in our lives. Amen.

ⁱ Philippians 2:3,4 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱ Matthew 28:20 (NIV84)