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Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, March 21, 2010

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Having the Same Attitude as Jesus

Philippians 2:1-11

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If you travel up I-395 through Washington, D.C., and cross over the Potomac, you will likely cross the Arland D. Williams, Jr., Memorial Bridge. Who was Arland D. Williams, Jr.? On January 13, 1982, he gave hope to five individuals at the cost of his own life. On that cold January day, Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the icy Potomac. Ice on the wings prevented the plane from a successful take-off. Almost all of the passengers perished. Five different times, a helicopter dropped a rope to save Williams. Five times, Williams passed the rope to other passengers in worse shape than he was. When the rope was extended to Williams the sixth time, he could not take hold, and succumbed to the frigid waters. His heroism was not rash. Aware that his own strength was fading, he deliberately handed hope to someone else over the space of several minutes.¹

Palm Sunday is about hope. As Faure so aptly wrote in our preparatory/processional music *The Palms*, “Join all and sing His name declare, let every voice resound with acclamation: Hosanna! Praise to the Lord! Bless Him who cometh to bring salvation!”² These lyrics from *The Palms* echo the truth contained in Luke 19:38, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” This is Palm Sunday. This is the day that Christians around the world celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. This is the day that Christians begin to celebrate the passion narrative that is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. This is the day that you and I must once again come to terms with Jesus, particularly the attitude of Jesus; yes, his attitude.

We aren't wired to have Jesus' attitude. By definition, attitude is a settled way of thinking or

¹“A Hero-Passenger Aids Others, Then Dies,” *Washington Post* (14 January 1982).

²*The Palms* (G. Schirmer, Inc., 1956).

feeling.³ What is Jesus' attitude? An attitude like Jesus' is one that does nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. An attitude like Jesus' is one that considers the other better than you. An attitude like Jesus' is one that looks to the interests of others and not only to your own.

None of us are free from selfish ambition or conceit. We often struggle with counting others better than ourselves. It is no easy task to place others' interests above our own. We are naturally resistant to Jesus' attitude. Our resistance is sin. Jesus' attitude ends up in his exaltation. His attitude is proven to be the superior way. Notice Isaiah 52:13. It reads, "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted."

Jesus was tempted not to have such a non-selfish and altruistic attitude. Let me cite six times. First, when Jesus was a young boy in the Temple, but he read the text in Isaiah anyway and stated that that scripture was fulfilled in him. Second, when Jesus was asked to baptize John the Baptist, but reversed the pattern and had John baptize him. Third, when Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan to cross over to "the dark side," but completely rebuffed Satan with the correct use of Holy Scripture. Fourth, when Peter asked to have his whole body washed, instead of his feet only, but Jesus lovingly rebuked him. Fifth, when the disciples and religious leaders expected Jesus to be a king that would overthrow Rome, but instead became the dying king on the cross. And sixth, when Jesus almost gave up in the Garden of Gethsemane, but instead faced his pending death on the cross.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are mandated to be like Jesus and have his attitude. Take note of three passages, one of which is our text for the sermon.

First, Romans 12:2 reads, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Second, 1 Peter 1:14-16 reads, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

³*Concise Oxford Dictionary* Tenth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86.

And third, Philippians 2:1-11. In particular, Philippians 2:5-11 is an independent, hymnic composition in praise of the cosmic dominion of the Kyrios, Jesus Christ. In this hymn, the humbled Christ is set forth as an example of the Christian's humility. The obedient Son is described as an incentive to the Christian's obedience to God and Jesus' vindication is a spur to ethical endeavor. Although the ethical dimensions of this hymn are clear, the objective truth of how one is redeemed and engrafted into Christ is also apparent. Christians are called to live such a life and in Christ such is the case.

I propose to show that having the same attitude of Jesus will demonstrate hope. I will show this to the end that you, the hearers will be: convinced of your need to have the same attitude as Jesus; aware that having the attitude of Jesus manifests itself in a certain behavior; and assured that such behavior produces certain outcomes.

Open your Bibles and look with me at Jesus' attitude, the resulting behavior and specifically produced outcomes as revealed in Philippians 2:1-11.

First, let us be clear about the nature of Jesus' attitude. Paul states that the attitude of the believer should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. What is that attitude? Look at verses 3-4. An attitude like Jesus' is one that does nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. An attitude like Jesus' is one that considers others better than you. An attitude like Jesus' is one that looks to the interests of others and not only to your own. By definition, attitude is a settled way of thinking or feeling.⁴ The Greek word for attitude is *Φρονητε*, which means "to think the thoughts of." Christians are to think the thoughts of Jesus. Jesus' attitude was to view his life as nothing in order to be everything.

Second, an attitude like Jesus' has a specific behavior. What was Jesus' behavior? Look at verses 6-8. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, did not consider his equal status with the Father something to be grasped or seized. Instead, Jesus Christ became a servant. Jesus Christ was obedient to the Father's will and endured death on a cross although undeserved. Jesus' behavior was emptying, serving, and dying for our benefit. As Christians, we are to empty ourselves of status and give of ourselves even if it costs

⁴*Concise Oxford Dictionary* Tenth Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86.

something; even our life. We are to be servants.

Third, behavior like Jesus' has certain outcomes. Jesus Christ did nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. He counted others as better than himself. Jesus Christ looked to the interests of others not only his own. He did not count equality with the Father something to be seized. Instead, Jesus Christ emptied himself of that status and became a servant. He was obedient to the Father's will and endured death on a cross, although undeserved. Jesus' behavior had certain outcomes. Look at verses 9-11. The Father exalted Jesus Christ to the highest place and gave him the name which is above every name. All people will bow down to Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord. Christians are to have those outcomes as well. We are exalted in Jesus Christ so that others will come to know Jesus and worship him. Others will see Jesus Christ in our lives.

But now I ask, "So what?" Anne Lamott is one of my favorite authors. She is honest, authentic and seeking to be more like Jesus. No guile or pretense. Anne has no façade or illusion about herself that she works hard to maintain. Why is Anne Lamott free not to pretend about how messed up she really is? She understands God's unconditional love for her. God's unconditional love for her gives her hope. When you know you are loved unconditionally there is no fear of rejection. When you know you are loved unconditionally there is no fear in taking risks. When you know you are loved unconditionally there is no fear in being known for who you really are. Anne Lamott writes, "Most of what we do in worldly life is geared for staying dry, looking good, and not going under."⁵ There is no need to pretend when you know you are loved without condition.

Why fake it? God wants authenticity. Faking it is no fun. Faking it is the paralysis for many of us. We pretend that repentance works, but we do not repent. We pretend that God forgives, but we do not ask for it. We pretend that going to church is important, but we resent the time it takes away from what we really want to do. Anne was paralyzed when she faked it. When Anne Lamott said, "...I quit,"⁶ she stopped faking it. She recognized her life for what it really was; a sham. Anne quit faking it by accepting

⁵Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 231.

Jesus Christ into her life. Anne stopped being conceited. Anne humbled herself. She began to look to the interests of others not her own addictions. By saying no to faking it, Anne discovered hope. You can do the same.

Having Jesus' attitude demonstrates hope. Let me be specific in describing how you can have the same attitude as Jesus. There are five questions you should answer. First, in what aspect of your life are you faking it? Second, from what circumstance has the commitment to faking it been generated? Third, are you willing to make changes in order to be liberated from the circumstance that has caused you to be faking it? Fourth, if you are willing to make the necessary changes, will you commit to personal bible study and joining a small group? Finally, are you willing to hear Jesus Christ say, "Have my attitude; be humble; and you will be lifted up." Faking it is not God's intention for you.

Faking it demonstrates that we have cast aside hope that life can really be different. Stop faking it. Jesus Christ promises to exalt you. He promises to give you a new name. Renounce the ways you pretend and accept God's unconditional love for you in Jesus Christ, whose name is above all names. Quoting Billy Sunday a great evangelist in the twentieth century, "There are two hundred and fifty-six names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express."⁷

Arland D. Williams, Jr. learned how to demonstrate hope from Jesus Christ. Jesus gave his life in order for each of us to have life. We need only take the lifeline handed to us by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Anne Lamott realized that pretending (faking it) was a dead end. She quit pretending and received the hope that Jesus gave to her through unconditional love.

Have the same attitude as Jesus. Take on Jesus' attitude and see your behavior and the outcomes of such behavior imitate his. Jesus' attitude was one of humility, which resulted in being a servant and had the outcomes of exaltation and humanity's salvation. Put succinctly, Jesus' attitude was to view his

⁶Ibid., 50.

⁷Billy Sunday in a sermon, "Wonderful," quoted in *The Real Billy Sunday in Christianity Today*, volume 33, number 2.

life as nothing in order for it to be everything. We are to do the same; have an attitude of humility, which will result in the behavior of being a servant and the outcomes of exaltation and someone's salvation. We are to view our lives as nothing in order for them to be everything. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You! Let us pray!

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