

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Third Sunday After Trinity, November 3, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 16, 321:1, 363, 341, 644.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Ephesians 4:1-10, Matthew 11:25-29.

Sermon Text: Philippians 2:5-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Apostle Paul has just told us ***“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.”*** (Philippians 2:3-4, NIV84)

Then he gives us an example of humility – the best possible example:

THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

- 1. The attitude of Christ Jesus.**
- 2. The humiliation of Christ Jesus.**
- 3. The exaltation of Christ Jesus.**

We read from Scripture ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”***

Attitude.

Our attitude is something that can guide our whole day, in fact, our whole life! Attitude is something that comes from within. It can be influenced by what is outside of us, but it really comes from within. I think we can all recognize the results of a bad attitude. And people come up with all sorts of reasons or excuses for a bad attitude. What happens to us and around us can influence our attitude for good or bad. Words that we hear can influence our attitude. Even a tone of voice can influence our attitude. And the chief reason for bad attitudes? Sin.

And how is it that we can have a good attitude? It has to be the work of God. And the Christian relies on his faith and on the words of God to form and maintain a good attitude.

In this picture of our Savior, the Apostle Paul lists first the name, Christ, which means Messiah, the Anointed One of God, and then his personal name, Jesus, which means ‘the Lord saves’. Although both names identify our Redeemer, the name Christ refers to the promised Redeemer, mankind’s Savior from sin. Even this sequence of names shows his humility, that the supreme Savior, the one anointed or designated by God came down to earth to live as a human in order to save us.

What is the attitude of Christ Jesus? It is certainly a good, positive attitude. After all, he was the very sinless Son of God.

Verses 6-11 of our text have the form of a poem or a hymn as you can see in a printed version of some English translations.

We read that our Savior ***“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.”*** This is the very Son of God. He was truly God, as we confess in the Nicene Creed “God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God,” that is, truly God, he is really God, “Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father.” It is passages of Scripture such as these which make it clear that Jesus Christ, our Savior, is truly God. He was and is forever the essence of God, the image of God. He existed as God forever, from eternity. He is really and actually and absolutely true God.

He didn't have to seek or try or pretend to be true God. He didn't have to grasp for it. He was God, but he took the form of a human so that he might serve all mankind as well as serve his heavenly Father.

How far did that humility and humiliation go? ***“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”*** I think you know about the beginning of Jesus' humility as a human from the Christmas Gospel.

He came down to earth and humbled himself in that way. Couldn't we even say he was “born in a barn”? Can you imagine the manger and its surroundings compared to where babies are born today? Compare a clean, sterile, antiseptic hospital with the fact that he was born in a stable and had to be laid in a manger, not even a bed. At Christmas we see a baby in a manger, usually pictured by artists in idealized, perfect surroundings and beauty. But exactly what did the stable look like? We don't really know, but it is probably safe to say it wasn't what we would consider a clean, pleasant environment. Chances are that if you have been in a stable or a barn even recently, you probably wouldn't want to sit down on the floor and eat your lunch there. I don't think that we would have wanted to stay in that stable any longer than necessary, to say nothing of having our baby be born there.

Throughout his life, even though he was often praised by people for his healing and miracles, the people and their religious leaders – Pharisees, teachers of the law, Sadducees, rabbis – turned against him and rejected him. At the end of his life on earth there was a large mob shouting “Crucify him!” It wasn't only the leaders of the Jews who were shouting for his death. How many of “the people”, commoners like us, also shouted for his crucifixion?

This is the supreme God who humbled himself – humiliated himself. Philippi was a Roman city built up on a Greek city, and so we can imagine the kinds of pagan gods that pagan Philippians believed in and worshipped. The Romans by and large adopted the Greek gods and gave them Latin names. We can think of the mythology of the chief pagan Greek gods who lived up on Mount Olympus and usually didn't want to come down and have much to do with lowly humans.

But Christ Jesus is the true God, who ***“made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”*** When Scripture speaks of ***“human likeness”*** we don't know what he looked like physically, but Isaiah tells us ***“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”*** (Isaiah 53:2, NIV84)

As a true human he became hungry, he was thirsty, he slept, he wept and he died.

He, the true God, came to be a servant. A servant is not the one who gives orders, who issues commands, but the one who obeys. Scripture makes it very clear that Jesus obeyed all the commands of God's laws. He obeyed and kept the Law of God, all of it, perfectly.

He totally humiliated himself. Compare the life of Christ Jesus to the appearance of God on Mount Sinai. There, when he gave the Law, God was unapproachable. There he showed himself as the God of power and fire!

But Jesus, ***“being found in appearance as a man, ... humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”*** Even though he appeared on earth as a man, he humbled himself even more. He was mocked and scorned. He was cruelly, terribly scourged and beaten like the worst of criminals. He suffered.

Even at the moment of his death he was humiliated. He didn't die in a palace. He didn't die in a hospital or in hospice with people to care for him. He didn't even die in his own bed. Well, he didn't even have a bed to sleep in. When a man said that he would follow Jesus wherever he went, ***“Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’”*** (Matthew 8:20, NIV84)

In this way he ***“became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”*** He didn't fight. Most of us would want to fight if we were punished unfairly, unjustly, for something we didn't do. Christ was totally innocent of all the accusations and charges and mockery they threw at him.

He didn't fight the injustice of it all like we would want to. How often don't people protest and fight against injustice – real or perceived injustice – when they feel they have been unjustly wronged or their “rights” have been denied or taken away or they haven't received the “justice” they think they should have! But Jesus suffered even unto death for a cause he believed in – the salvation of all mankind!

Justice! If we were to receive the justice from God that we deserve, that we have earned, we would be sent to hell forever – all of us!

Christ even had to carry his own cross to the place of execution.

But much greater was the suffering of his soul, for he felt the heavy burden of all our sins resting upon him and he experienced the full measure of God's anger against sin. All this suffering was laid upon our Savior by God himself, who, making use of the wickedness of Judas, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate, the soldiers and others, heaped on him the sins, the iniquity of us all. With our sins and wickedness, we too, have mocked, scourged, and crucified the Lord.

And then Christ died on the tree of the cross. He really died. Because the work of our redemption was finished, Christ now did the last thing yet to be done, he died. To die on the cross was a shameful and a cruel death. Men treated the Son of God like a criminal. He ***“was despised and rejected by men”***. (Isaiah 53:3, NIV84), He suffered death on a cross, like a common criminal, no, like the worst of criminals!

And, as the last step of his humiliation, Christ's body was laid in the grave and remained there to the third day, but without seeing corruption, or decay.

Because Jesus Christ humbled himself, God exalted him. Because he suffered and died, Scripture tells us: ***“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***

Starting with his descent into hell to proclaim his victory over Satan, we confess his exaltation in the creed. “He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

He has reassumed the unlimited use of his divine qualities and attributes. He makes use of all power in heaven and earth. He is King in the kingdoms of power and grace and glory. It is the glorified man Christ Jesus who reigns over everything, heavenly things and earthly things and things beneath the earth. His human nature has entered into full, perfect, unlimited unity with the divine essence. All this is included in the fact that God has given him this name, has given him this exaltation, as the Lord Jehovah.

It is because of this exaltation ***“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”***

Although here on earth many will reject Christ Jesus, on the day he comes to judge the living and the dead all mankind will be forced to recognize who and what he is and bow before him, even though they rejected him in their lifetimes. Angels, men, and devils must give to Christ Jesus, the exalted Son of God, complete obedience. No name is more highly honored than his. All must bow before Him; all must give Him divine honor.

Believers do this willingly and gladly, even here on earth. Unbelievers do not. But they also, like the devils, whether they want to or not, on judgement day will have to acknowledge and admit that Jesus is the Lord, truly God.

In the end every tongue must and will confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord. They will have no choice. By this confession all creatures also give all glory to the Father, to God, the ultimate object of all adoration. He that honoreth the Son honoreth the Father.

What a positive attitude, that Christ Jesus willingly humbled himself in order to save you! What a marvelous example of humility! May the God who humbled himself and then was completely glorified give you that attitude to serve God and one another! In Jesus name, we ask all this. Amen.