

Attitude

Based on Exodus 17:1-7, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 21:28-32

How many times have you been told, or said to someone else, that there was a need for an “attitude adjustment” in a given situation or conversation? I have been on the giving and receiving end of such comments during my life. Truth-be-told, most times when I have been called on the carpet due to too much attitude and not enough understanding or grace on my part, it has been justified. We all can get to a point in our relationships where we get fed up with someone’s mindset and/or behaviors and we let them have all our built-up frustrations and anger. However, this kind of reactionary mindset and communication style is rarely effective in resolving an issue or getting someone to change their rhetoric or behavior. We all have to learn to check our attitudes and pre-conceived notions or judgments at the door sometimes, in order to move forward with a relationship. Having a “bad attitude” also points out to us a place where we need to spend some time evaluating where our mindset needs to change in order to come to a more fruitful and peaceful way of communicating and being in relationship.

Les and Leslie Parrot, in their book entitled, “Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts”, share some wisdom about attitude that they learned while flying in a small airplane. They wrote, “...We crossed over the islands of Puget Sound and approached the lights of a local airport. ‘The most important thing about landing is the attitude of the plane,’ said the pilot. ‘You mean altitude, don’t you?’ I asked. ‘No,’ the pilot explained. ‘The attitude has to do with the nose of the plane. If the attitude is too high,

the plane will come down with a severe bounce. And if the attitude is too low, the plane may go out of control because of excessive landing speed.’ Then the pilot said something that got our attention: *‘The trick is to get the right attitude in spite of atmospheric conditions....’*”

Achieving the right mindset or attitude is what our scriptures are all about this week. In Exodus, the Israelites continue to wander through the wilderness and grow anxious because they are thirsty and can’t see any water. They give a ton of attitude to Moses and God in their complaints saying, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” Moses cries out to God for help because he fears that the mindset of the people will lead to his death. God intervenes and allows Moses to bring enough water from a rock at the foot of Mount Horeb to relieve the thirst of God’s people.

The Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Philippi about the mindset or attitude they must have to truly follow the Christ. He uses a portion of a hymn from the early church to make his point about the mindset of Jesus the Christ in all his relationships, and how we are not just to imitate but to incarnate (i.e., to live out) that same attitude. Paul asks them to make his “...joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being in one spirit and of one mind. Do nothing of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others....”

Jesus tells a parable to the chief priests and elders about the mindset of two sons of a vineyard owner. The father asks the eldest son to go and work in the vineyard. He tells his father no, but then changes his mind and goes and works. The

younger son is asked to go work the vines and he says yes, but never goes. Jesus makes the point that until the religious leaders change their attitude about how to do what God is asking of them, they will continue to be like the second son, giving only lip service to their Father.

Pastor and spiritual writer, Roger Lovette, reflects on the importance of Jesus' parable for our lives writing, "...Who among us, however, has not been like that second son? We all know how hard it is to keep the promises we have made. As Elisabeth Elliot has observed, 'The problem with living sacrifices is that they keep creeping off the altar.' We know about 'the creeping'. We would rather direct this parable to others. Lord knows we can point fingers. There are the right-wing Christians, the TV evangelists with the prosperity [success] gospels, the megachurches with their thousands. But this parable is addressed to us.

The world turns away from our wordy gospel. What stops those outside of the church in their tracks are those who have learned to move beyond the words. It isn't only the Gandhis and the Rosa Parkses and the Mother Teresas who remind us all over again what faith and commitment are all about. It's those medical practitioners in Doctors Without Borders who travel on their own time and expense to work in forgotten [out-of-the-way] places [like Niger]. They're told that the people they treat are too far gone, that they will soon die from malnutrition. This doesn't stop them - they do what they can do.

In every church I have served I still remember a few particular names and faces. Sometimes these are people who could not pray in public and were not comfortable teaching Sunday school. Some would not even serve on committees. Some had little

formal education. But they were the ones with a casserole, the ones writing me a note when I needed it the most, the ones taking folks who didn't own cars to the grocery store, and the ones whispering as they took my hand at the back door, 'I pray for you every day.' Some living sacrifices do not slip off the altar.

My son sent me a bulletin from the Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. One Sunday he stood in a long line of visitors to listen to Jimmy Carter teach Sunday school. He stayed for the worship service and sent me the program for the day. My eye stopped at this notice in the bulletin: *Rosalynn Carter will clean the church next Saturday. Jimmy Carter will cut the grass and trim the shrubbery.* It's not always the one who talks or preaches or teaches who reflects the will of the Father. Sometimes it is the one who shows up on a hot Saturday afternoon to dust the pews, take out the trash, cut the grass - making the world a little better for Christ's sake...."

Indeed...adopting a humble attitude and emptying ourselves of our need to be noticed or recognized for the things we do in the name of Jesus, is what a life of discipleship is all about. Having an attitude that pays attention to the needs of the church and of those around us – those who are often invisible, is the mindset of the Christ. On this World Communion Sunday, let us find the right attitude for our conditions – saying yes to God and each other and then living our “yesses”. May God's love help us live this attitude...amen!