

### **“Need an Attitude Adjustment?”**

Date: October 8, 2011

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Philippians 4:1-9

Theme: Attitude;

Occasion: Pentecost 17, Year A

David Russell, a pastor in Union City, Tennessee, tells about Nathan, a precocious three year old in his church. Nathan’s parents were trying to introduce to him to what it means to be in church. One Sunday they gave Nathan a one-dollar bill, that he was to place in the offering plate. When the plate moved down Nathan’s pew, his parents held it in front of him and told him to put the dollar in the offering plate.

Nathan balked, holding tightly to the dollar bill. Finally his mother gently took the dollar bill from him. She placed it in the plate and it was passed on down the pew. Suddenly the stillness of the offertory was shattered by a voice demanding, “I want my dollar back! I want my dollar back!” Nathan had been robbed and he wanted everyone to know it.

His parents tried in vain to quiet their son, but he was insistent. “I want my dollar back!” Everyone in the congregation was fighting a losing battle against laughter. Throughout the remaining strains of the organist’s meditative tune, the only thing most worshipers heard was “I want my dollar back!” Eventually his parents gave Nathan another dollar to hold and he was content enough so that the congregation could make it through the Doxology.

Pastor Russell says that as he stepped into the pulpit to move the service on from this point, he knew that he would have to address what had happened. Looking out at the smiling faces he said, “We shouldn’t laugh. It may be that Nathan is only voicing the feelings that some of us have after we have given to God.

Too often we give, not joyously, but out of a sense of obligation. We do so unwillingly. We may not say it, but some of us think it. "I want my dollar back!"

Contrast our attitude with that of St. Paul. Paul's attitude was one of continual thanksgiving. "Rejoice in the Lord, always!" he says in our text, "again, I say, rejoice!" Paul had an attitude that nothing could destroy. Even though he experienced ship-wrecks, beatings, imprisonment, unfair criticism and a host of other trials, but he never let it affect his attitude.

What was Paul's secret? How did the apostle Paul develop such a great attitude on life? I don't know about you, but there are many times when I need an attitude adjustment. If I'm not in the right frame of mind, little things can get under my skin and I can become irritable, and not all that nice to be around.

How about you? Do you ever need an attitude adjustment? Let's look at this passage from Philippians again, and see if we can learn from Paul how to have a better attitude on things.

First of all, Paul sincerely believed in prayer. He writes, "Have no anxiety in anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Vs. 6)

Many of us simply go through the motions of praying. Dick Van Dyke once told of a little boy who was dining with his parents at the home of an elderly man. After watching the old man bow his head and speak in a soft voice, the boy asked his mother, "What did Mr. Bryan say to his plate?"

For many people, prayer has no more real meaning than talking to their plate. It is a ritual, a mindless act, a conditioned response. They've missed the whole point of communication with God. Authentic prayer is born out of a deep relationship with the Creator. It is a dynamic two-way communication between our heart and

God's.

It is not merely a ritual we go through. It is a means of grace by which we make known our requests to God. But also, God makes known His requests of us. St. Paul understood, and lived that kind of prayer. He was connected to the source of all power, all love, all hope. Paul had a better attitude, first of all, because he believed in prayer.

The second thing that I learned from reading this section of Philippians, is that Paul stayed focused on the positive in life. Listen to these memorable words from our text: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Vs. 8)

David McClellan, a psychologist at Harvard University, once did a study that has some interesting implications. He had a group of students watch a film about Mother Teresa while he monitored the body's production of antibodies. Antibodies, of course, help us to fight off infection.

He discovered that as the students watched this uplifting film, their antibody level rose significantly, even for those who did not like Mother Teresa, indeed, some of them thought she was a fraud. He then showed them a film on Attila the Hun, and their antibody levels dropped. The implication is clear. The things that we focus on can affect the way we feel. If we want a good attitude on life, we need to focus on what's good in life.

I plan to make a change in my life-style, and I'm telling you about it, because I want you to hold me accountable. I've had a practice of getting up in the morning and reading the newspaper. I think its important to know what's going on in the world. But you know, its filled with stories about negative things that are

happening.

I want to change that habit, and instead spend those 45 minutes I would have spent reading the newspaper by reading some of the books that I've been wanting to read. Books that will help me to stay connected to my true love in life, my relationship with God. I'll probably get around to looking at the paper later in the day. But I want to see if time spent in prayer, reading good books, listening to quiet music and perhaps meditating for a few minutes, will help to adjust my daily attitude. Feel free to ask me about it.

How about you? How will you try to stay focused on the positive? Maybe you'll change the type of movies you watch, or the TV shows that you watch. Maybe you'll spend time listening to uplifting music, or reading an inspirational book. Maybe you'll catch yourself in mid-sentence, and stop those negative thoughts that you're always telling yourself.

Keep your mind focused on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, things that are worthy of praise. It'll help your attitude. Promise!

Third and finally, Paul had a great attitude on life because he trusted that whatever happened to him, God was with him. He writes, "I know how to be abased and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Vs. 12-13)

Paul knew that whatever life sent him he would be able to cope. Why? Because he was not alone. It was not just head knowledge. It was not something that he had to keep reminding himself, over and over again. Paul had a deep and abiding sense of Christ's presence with him, always. No matter what happened.

Too many people have *the idea* that Jesus is with them. But when bad things

happen they feel like Jesus, or God, has abandoned them. Or they question if they ever existed in the first place. But not Paul. Paul had an ongoing relationship with God, through His Savior, Jesus Christ. Not head knowledge, but heart knowledge. He felt that presence with him, no matter what was going on in his life.

How did he get that presence? He nurtured the relationship. It's not a secret how to have a relationship with the Lord. It's just that many of us put it off, thinking that other things are more pressing. Or thinking that only super-religious people do those things - like daily time set aside for prayer. Reading the Bible, looking for the places that specifically talk to you, personally. Getting together with other believers for fellowship. Singing songs of praise and worship. Its no secret. We just put it off.

So let me ask you again - Do you need an attitude adjustment? Do you find yourself whining about little things? Do you notice that you're grumpy and irritable? Do you have resentments and grudges that you carry around? Do you find life to be a little empty, and you're wondering, "Is this all there is?"

Paul tells us how to have a better attitude:

1. Practice a regular prayer life.
2. Stay focused on things that are positive.
3. Trust that God is with you always, through a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

That's a pretty good formula for a good attitude. Why not try it, and see if it makes a difference? I dare you. Amen!