

## *“Have This Attitude”*

**A sermon for the confirmation of young people into the church on Palm Sunday and based on Exodus 20:5-6: “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.”**

The epistle lesson for Palm Sunday begins this way in the NIV translation: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” **Everyone has an attitude.** Sometimes it’s bad, as in, “Man, that guy has an attitude.” Other times it’s good. A friend of mine is struggling with cancer and says the glass is half-full. Good attitude, positive attitude.

This is confirmation weekend here at Good Shepherd. The families of the confirmands will be gathering. Family has a lot to do with attitude. A young man named Jamel got **a bad attitude from his family.** It wasn’t that Jamel’s mother Elaine wanted things to turn out badly, but she didn’t have her act together and, as we all know, children learn what they live. Elaine was a young, single mother. She wanted to buy some furniture and put on a nice Thanksgiving dinner for the family, a commendable goal. Unfortunately, to pay for it she decided to carry a package of cocaine from New York to Albany. She got busted and was sent to jail for 16 years. Elaine was simply following in the footsteps of her mother Yvonne who had also been busted for drugs. Reading from a review of the book that tells Elaine’s story: “The most heartbreaking scenes in “Life on the Outside” depict Bartlett huddled with her four young children in prison visiting rooms. The family gathered every weekend and posed for pictures taken by the visiting-room photographer. The (16) years wear on and the children grow up before our eyes, suffering all of the problems that might be expected in young people traumatized by the absence of a beloved parent.... With each generation, the families grow steadily more accustomed to living their lives in captivity. By the time Elaine is pardoned, her mother (that was Yvonne, who had done time for heroin), who has cared for the children, is dead, and the wreckage of her extended family is too much to bear.... Her worst nightmare comes true when her teenage son, Jamel, who grew up in the visiting room, follows in his mother’s footsteps and goes to jail himself. Jamel is visited inside by a 15-year-old girlfriend who is too young even to enter the gates but gets in with a fake ID. The girl becomes pregnant by Jamel, who has left jail briefly only to return, and the cycle begins anew.” (Brent Staples on Life on the Outside by Jennifer Gonnerman in “The New York Times Book Review,” March 21, 2004; p. 7). That’s a real life demonstration of what God tells us in Exodus 20: “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers (and, in this case, mothers) to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.”

God gave this passage when He gave the Ten Commandments. He told the children of Israel, “I’ve broken you out of the cycle of generations of slavery

because I love you. Keep My commandments. If you don't, I'll punish you to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me." But then **God promised, sweetly promised, "but showing love to thousands who love Me and keep My commandments.** Families have a lot to do with attitude and in the church, the family of God, we want our children and adults to have an attitude of loving God and keeping His commandments. Having this attitude of loving God and keeping His commandments is one of the best ways to inoculate ourselves from so many of the temptations that are around us. I once interviewed a former member of the Medellin drug cartel, Jorge Valdez. Jorge got caught, did time, but came to know the forgiveness of Christ and the power of His resurrection. When he got out, Jorge got an excellent Christian education and began working with gangs. He told me that rehab programs have small rates of success, (Jamel going back to jail is an example), but, said Jorge, the greatest change of life comes when a young person is touched by the forgiveness of Christ and the power of His resurrection. Jesus Christ breaks the inheritance of captivity to sin. The exodus of Israel from Egypt foreshadowed what Jesus Christ did for all of us, especially what He did for us this Holy Week. Jesus Christ can interrupt the cycle of slavery to sin, not just drugs, but the inheritance of any sin that keeps family members in bondage. He frees people and sets families on a new course.

**The difference between a bad attitude, like Jemal inherited, and the good attitude that the family of the church promotes is this: Do you love Jesus?** I want you to think about that for the rest of the service and when you go home. That difference will show itself on Monday when you're in the thick of it at work. Do you love Jesus at work? The difference will show when peer pressure is influencing you to do something that the commandments say you ought not do... The peer pressure that we can define God in a way to suit us... The peer pressure that we don't have to be true to our word... Society's taken-for-granted disrespect of elders and authorities... The casual, throw-away disregard we have for personal property, our own and that of others... Homosexuality... Cohabitation... Do we blush anymore when we watch so much that's on TV? If you know your Bible you know those are all temptations to sin. When you face these temptations, do you see Jesus in your mind's eye? Do you think, as Joseph did, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). Yes, there is a difference between having a bad attitude and having this good, positive attitude of loving God and keeping His commandments. It's like lovers in springtime who sit contently with each other, whiling away the hours. Do you sit contently with your Jesus in prayer and devotion? Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the poet put it this way:

"Jesus! And shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of Thee? Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise, whose glories shine through endless days?

Ashamed of Jesus, that dear Friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend?  
No; when I blush, be this my shame, that I no more revere His name.

Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may, when I've no guilt to wash away, No tear to wipe, no good to crave, no fear to quell, no soul to save.

Families have a lot to do with attitude and the church, the family of God, is all about this attitude: Love God and your Savior...and keep His commandments. Jesus says, **"If anyone loves Me, he will obey my teaching"** (John 14:15, 23). In the musical "Fiddler on the Roof," Tevye and Golde have been married 25 years. Tevye asks Golde, "Do you love me?" "Do I what?" "Do you love me?" "Do I love you? ...for 25 years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house, given you children, milked the cow. After 25 years, why talk about love right now?" "...Golde, the first time I met you was on our wedding day. I was scared..." "I was shy." "I was nervous." "So was I." "But my father and my mother said we'd learn to love each other. And now I'm asking, Golde, do you love me?" "Do I love him? For 25 years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him, 25 years my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?" "Then you love me?" "I suppose I do." "And I suppose I love you too."

Are you growing in your love for the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it show in commandment keeping? Golde showed her love for Tevye by washing his clothes, cooking his meals, milking the cow... If that's not love, what is? St. John writes, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). What a sweet, sweet promise that God has made to show love to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments. We thank God that our children have been baptized and freed from the cycle of sin that Jemal and his family is sadly still in. This weekend of the children's confirmation is a good time for all of us to confirm a positive attitude, loving God and keeping His commandments. Have this attitude. It's a good attitude, a positive attitude, but it is not a glass half-full attitude. **The attitude in the family of God grows out of emptiness, out of the empty tomb of the One who loves us and gives us the power of His resurrection.** Amen.