

Living Outside of Ourselves

1. Warm-up: Which of the villains mentioned at the outset of Pastor Robert's sermon is your favorite one to hate? Joan Crawford in *Mommy Dearest*, Penny Wise in *IT*, Scar in *The Lion King*, the hunter in *Bambi*, the Wicked Witch of the West, the Joker, or Roger 'Verbal' Kint in *The Usual Suspects*?
2. We tend to divide people in to two distinct camps – heroes and villains. Let's think about that for a bit.
 - a. Who has played the role of hero in your life? Who has played the role of villain?
 - b. Which camp do you usually put yourself in? Do you tend to see yourself primarily as hero or villain?
 - c. Have you ever known a couple who were at odds with each other and blamed each other? Why is it so easy to see the villain in someone else? Why is it so hard to see the villain in ourselves?
 - d. For some people it works the opposite. They readily see the bad in themselves, but struggle to see the good. If you're like that, where do you think that tendency comes from?
3. When someone is a villain, we naturally and intuitively find ourselves wanting vengeance against them. But in Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." In other words, above all else, God wants us to love. But then the question becomes how can I love the way God wants me to? And why should I? All of which brings us to our primary Scripture for this week. Read together Matthew 25:31-40, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Robert pointed out that the difference between the righteous sheep and the unrighteous goats in Jesus' story is not only what they did or did not do. The difference is not merely in their outward behavior. Sheep and goats have different DNA. So the difference is cellular; they are a different species. Robert said, "Shepherds would have separated sheep and goats for many reasons. Goats are aggressive compared to sheep, goats leave a path of destruction in their trail and goats will eat just about anything. Sheep love to be with the flock. Sheep are grazers who only eat grass and are very attentive to their shepherd. Yes, there are external differences between sheep and goats. Yes, we are able to distinguish between the two based on these external differences. But we must be careful not to confuse fruit with root." Robert repeated that last refrain several times in his sermon. "We must not confuse fruit with root." What do you think he meant? What's the difference between fruit and root? And how are they related to each other?

- b. How we behave outwardly is always a dead giveaway for who we are inwardly. Our fruit is determined by our root. For the root to be right, Robert said, it has to be transformed by the grace and mercy of the Shepherd King, *i.e.*, Jesus. To illustrate, Robert shared the story of Johnny Lee Clay, an Imperial Wizard of the KKK who encountered the transformational love of Christ in a Black Pastor named Rev. Wade Watts. Watts returned love for hate. As a result, Clay became an antiracist activist and a pastor in a predominantly Black denomination. That's how powerful love can be! Rev. Watts' love was a transformative jolt in Clay's life. Tell us about a time love hit you hard, in a good way, and changed you in one way or another.
 - c. II Corinthians 5:16-17 says, "From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!" What do you think those verses mean?
4. When the love of God touches us personally through the grace and mercy Jesus shows us, it changes us from the inside out. We are transformed from goat to sheep. The transformation takes place, Robert suggested, in three steps. First, we surrender to the cross. In other words, we invite Jesus into our hearts to make us whole. Second, we begin seeking to follow the example of Jesus in our daily lives. And third, we love our fellow sheep.
- a. With regard to the second point, Robert said, "What Jesus is showing us is that when we receive the King's grace, that grace changes us. It rewires and transforms the motivational structure of our hearts. When we receive the grace of King Jesus our hearts are filled up with his love and that love overflows to God and everyone else around us in ways that are very simple, very ordinary, very everyday: a handshake, a smile, a thoughtful gesture, an act of random kindness." Do you feel you have reached the point on your spiritual journey where the love of God is changing the way you interact with people? Give us an example of a time recently when you consciously and deliberately tried to respond to someone the way you thought Jesus would. How did that go?
 - b. Sometimes we act as though love is a scarce resource that we might run out of. By contrast, someone once said that love always comes back to you – and is never wasted or lost. Why? How does that work? Have you ever regretted loving someone?
 - c. Is it possible to act like a goat, but really be a sheep? If someone claims to be a sheep, but acts like a goat, what's the problem?
 - d. What's your own personal testimony? How has Jesus changed you? What's the difference between who you are now and who you would have been without Jesus?

Matthew 25:31-40

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’