

Come Out, Come Out Wherever You Are

Quote: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.* ~Matthew 7:15 (NRSV)

Dorothy awakens into the dull browns of her colorless home. She sits up and walks to the front door. As the door opens, we see through her eyes the bright colors of a foreign land. “We are not in Kansas anymore,” she says to her dog. After she emerges and is greeted by Glinda, the Good Witch of the North and all the Munchkin dignitaries, her accomplishment is celebrated by all. Her accomplishment? Killing the Wicked Witch of the East. In L. Frank Baum’s story, she’ll have that witch’s sister to contend with, meet new friends (accepting them and their stories without question), and journey through haunted forests, poppy fields, and the colorful Land of Oz. The fraudulent wizard helps her learn that the answers leading her home come from within.

Then again, if anyone read the story *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire, one would see that things were not as they appeared. The “good witch” wasn’t all that good, and the wicked one had reasons for her actions. Dorothy’s new friends had histories, and the Wizard was even less accommodating than he was in Baum’s version.

So, which one is the truth? Was the truth told by the first with the story or the one responding to it. Are we dealing with alternative revisionists or those who are highlighting the injustices suffered and inflicted by those celebrated in the original? One thing true in both stories is Dorothy is the innocent victim of her house landing on the witch. When she stepped out her door, she had no idea what was happening behind the scenes and could only deal with the circumstances as they were presented to her by those she met.

This is where we are. Our doors are open, but we still have a witch to deal with. Is it safe to come out? I’m not so sure. If we’re wearing our ruby slippers (masks, gloves, or whatever), we still meet up with the witch, and we may again be locked up in her castle. During the times we kept to ourselves, we developed new ways to meet, greet, and socialize. We enjoyed games, social media, and that which was familiar to us. Some have ventured out; others still haven’t. Yet, here we are. We’ve been in a black and white film, have opened the door to all sorts of color, technology, and opportunities, yet we are limited to whatever we have chosen to read, follow, and do.

We greet celebrities, politicians, businessmen, and even pastors through social media. We find those who align themselves with the words, tweets, actions, and rhetoric that has ignited new passions, beliefs, and lines in the sand. In addition, as our country and the world reopen, the economic and social ramifications from the onset of the pandemic are now emerging. We are dealing with the predicted shortages, taxes, and inflation. Research is emerging that shows significant impact on our children’s education and social development. The pandemic lingers, yet life is continuing for those who have survived. All are scarred, scared, and mistrusting anything that comes from any source, except the ones they follow.

We know evil is lurking everywhere, and so is good. In L. Frank Baum’s story, those who were evil were ugly. In Maguire’s book, the beautiful was the one who could not be trusted. Jesus warned us of the prophets who are wolves in sheep’s clothing, yet how do we know we’re following a good shepherd, who leads us to Heaven or following a wolf, who leads us to – well,

What Now? #1

you know? How do we know we are not being complicit in the evils out there? How do we know if we think we're a sheep, but we're really a wolf in disguise?

In this day and age, it is more difficult than ever to discern good and evil. We may think "I know it when I see it," or "My gut always tells me," yet how is this working for us as a society? As a person? Sometimes, we can go by "intuition" or "gut feeling," but more often than that, there are objective ways to test our media, our actions, our words, and those we follow to discern what is the truth according to God's truth, God's way, God's life.

God has given us guidelines, and there are many lessons and examples in both the Old and New Testaments. Yet, if we stick to the basics, those that are consistent between the two, we have a pretty decent guide.

Love God. Love neighbor.

When we don't, we must Repent.

When our neighbor sins against us, we must Forgive.

When we love God, in addition to serving "the least" of our neighbors, we:

1. have have no other gods before God (includes anything or anyone that one gives more time, talent, and treasure to than God).
2. Shall not create or worship idols (includes worshipping, celebrating, or valuing anything or anyone above God and His Ways, putting people or things on pedestals and honoring them).
3. Shall not use the name of the Lord in vain (includes careless treatment of the Lord's name or his creation).
4. Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy (includes serving the Lord, helping, giving, praying, worship, reading, learning).

When we love our neighbor, in addition to forgiving them and loving our enemies, we:

5. Honor thy father and mother (includes spiritual "parents," leaders, etc.)
6. Shall not kill (includes negative feelings for any).
7. Shall not commit adultery (includes lust).
8. Shall not steal (includes possessing anything that was not rightfully given or earned, such as, too much change, over calculation or paycheck, unnoticed errors that provide additional experiences).
9. Shall not bear false witness (includes deceit).
10. Shall not covet (includes being content and sharing that which is provided).

Essentially, the Commandments serve as a gauge for us to recalculate where we are spending our time, talent, and treasure, and when we use them to discern truth, the truth shall set us free. When we look at ourselves the way Jesus would, we realize that we must acknowledge and address the sin within prior to dealing in the sin outside ourselves. According to Jesus, *"first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."* ~Matthew 7:5.

Weekly Activity: Create an objective list that guides you in discerning the wolf, the sheep, and the wolf in sheep's clothing. Test it throughout the week and record your insights on your note chart. Revise it as you learn more. Begin with love God, love neighbor, repent, forgive.

Love, Repent, Forgive

What Now? What does it really look like in our world today?

We are opening our door to a land of color, opportunities, and wolves in sheep's clothing. It is time to evaluate the present without beating ourselves up for falling into traps set by the wolves. To do this, we must identify the wolves around and inside of us and repent. Then, we return to God and His Will, His Walk, and His Way.

Read the following Bible readings and online articles. At times, it is easy to see these signs in others, but what happens when we may unknowingly follow a wolf, support a wolf, or even worse, be that wolf? Luckily, God is forgiving, and this is the perfect time for repentance through contrition, confession, and amendment.

The Bible.

- 2 Corinthians 11:14-15
- Isaiah 5:20
- Matthew 7:15-19

•McDaniel, Debbie. "5 Ways to Recognize a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing." May 2020. <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/5-ways-to-recognize-a-wolf-in-sheep-s-clothing.html>

•Dy, Glory. "What Are Modern Examples of 'a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.'" April 2021. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-are-modern-examples-of-a-wolf-in-sheeps-clothing.html>

•Rohr, Fr. Richard. "The Modern Disguise of Evil." Center for Action and Contemplation, "The Modern Disguise of Evil." May 2021. <https://cac.org/the-modern-disguise-of-evil-2021-05-17/>

•Google "Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" and/or "disguises of evil" for interesting more interesting articles.

Weekly Activity Continued: Add to your list of objective ways to identify wolves and evil.

Reflection: Using the list you created as your guide, identify the wolves in sheep's clothing that are in our world today. What evils do you see preying on the lives in our culture? These do not have to be people, but they can be. They are anything that overtly and covertly harm our bodies, minds, and spirits. They take us away from God's commandments and God's work. How do you respond to these wolves. Look inside. Are you allowing any of these to grow?

Response: On the back of your chart, make a list of the wolves in your life. Choose the most powerful, harmful five. In silence, apologize to God, yourself, and others if necessary. Commit to focusing on God as opposed to 24-hour bombardment of information. Limit your access to notifications; change settings in your phone if needed. Work to remove the wolves' power over you. Each day during this journey, confess your discoveries of sin, apologize to God (and others if necessary), and pray for amendment of life.

Prayer: In silence, with penitent hearts, confess our sins that we may obtain forgiveness through God's mercy and grace and pray the prayer of Confession from Rite 1 (BCP pages 41-42)

What Now? #1

Dearly beloved...so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship him, let us kneel in silence, and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins, that we may obtain forgiveness by his infinite goodness and mercy.

*Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against thy holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.
But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,
spare thou those who confess their faults,
restore thou those who are penitent,
according to thy promises declared unto mankind
in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.*

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant us absolution and remission of all our sins, true repentance, amendment of life, and the grace and consolation of his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lenten discipline: Remove a source of wolves from your life. Use the additional time for Lenten study. Pray the confession above as you close each day.

Sources:

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)

The Bible (New Revised Standard Version)

Book of Common Prayer

Center for Action and Contemplation. "The Modern Disguise of Evil." May 2021.

Dy, Glory. "What Are Modern Examples of 'a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.'" Christianity.com, April 2021.

Guss, Nancy. *Emerging Shorts* (2022)

Maguire, Gregory. *Wicked* (1995)

McDaniel, Debbie. "5 Ways to Recognize a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing." Crosswalk.com, May 2020.

The Wizard of Oz. a Feature Film produced by Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, (1939)