

Matthew 15:10-28

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles." Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us." Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.
And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.
Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

It's been an interesting two weeks here in the United States. An invitation to "Unite the Right" brought many out-of-town people to Charlottesville, Virginia. They were responding to an invitation. The invitation said that the rally had originally been intended to oppose removing a statue of Robert E. Lee, but that it was now bigger. It was a rally to, I quote, "Join Azzmador and *The Daily Stormer* to end Jewish influence in America."¹ As you might expect, this invitation brought a veritable smorgasbord of white nationalists, Ku Klux Klan members, and self-described Nazis from across the United States and Canada to this sleepy college town.²

There has been a lot of talk and a lot of conflict about the events of that day. If you want to know where I get my facts, this sermon, like every sermon I preach here, will go up on the congregation's website after this service, with links to my sources.³ The invitation has been preserved, as have eyewitness accounts to everything that happened.

I have friends and acquaintances who were there, among the non-violent clergy counter-protesters.⁴ They were physically attacked by these Nazi's, multiple times. Multiple times, they feared for their lives. The rally culminated in a car being driven into a crowd of innocent people, killing a woman named Heather Heyer and injuring nineteen other people. A young man from Maumee, Ohio, has been arrested and jailed for this crime.

I am certain that there were decent human beings who wandered into this rally and did not want the statue removed. However, they had the opportunity to realize that the people they were marching with were chanting Nazi slogans like, "Seig Heil" and "Blood and Soil," and "Jews will not replace us."⁵

¹ An archive of the web page of this invitation is at <http://archive.is/cebjw>.

² Interviews and video footage of some of the violence are at <https://www.facebook.com/vicenews/videos/854311091395509/>.

³ And here it is. If you have any questions about what I am saying, or my sources, I invite you to come speak with me about it.

⁴It should be noted that local clergy asked other clergy to come, to help bear witness to the God of peace.

⁵ Video at <https://www.facebook.com/vicenews/videos/854311091395509/>.

They had the opportunity to ask, “Why are we standing threateningly with guns outside the synagogue during Saturday services?⁶ What does this have to do with the statue?”

They had the opportunity to say, “This is a few steps beyond what I signed up for.”

They had the opportunity to quietly leave, and I am certain that most did.

Despite calls to burn the synagogue, the police did not provide extra security when asked. They said that, despite the threat, they did not have the resources. Temple President Alan Zimmerman sent the congregation in small groups out the back door, because it was not safe to exit alone or out the front.⁷

After that weekend, the same website that had issued the invitation to the rally published an editorial, explaining that the death of the late Heather Heyer was really a benefit to the world, because she was a 32-year-old woman who had no children and thus had less than no value.⁸

The events in Charlottesville were not about left and right, or Democrat and Republican. They were about good and evil.⁹

I know you all know this, but let me say something clearly, something that I had once believed no longer needed to be said in America.

Racism is sin.

Slavery is sin.

It always was.

Antisemitism is sin.

⁶ <http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/what-this-rabbi-found-when-he-went-to-charlottesville/>

⁷ <http://reformjudaism.org/blog/2017/08/14/charlottesville-local-jewish-community-presses>

⁸ Archive of this editorial at <http://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=heather+heyer&d=1885151391925&mkt=en-US&setlang=en-US&w=iGosWIFTGogUiz6cgdcL33v12UV6x-Q5>. Because I am only addressing part of it, my description makes the editorial sound much less vile than it really is.

⁹ <https://sojo.net/articles/white-supremacy-versus-gospel-charlottesville>

Misogyny is sin.

No exceptions.

These things are linked together. They are all about judging another person as less than human. That person was made in the image of God. Whenever you do that, you defile the image of God.

No exceptions.

No, “But it’s just *those people*.”

No exceptions.

No, “It’s not serious.”

No exceptions.

Jesus said that, “what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, [and] slander.”¹⁰

We have discussed the parable of the wheat and the tares.¹¹ You may remember that we discussed them as what scientists call a fractal pattern. This is a pattern that you see that repeats itself at different sizes. If you look at frost crystals on a window in the winter, for example, you see a pattern in the crystals. When you look at those same crystals with a magnifying glass, you see the same pattern, repeated smaller. If you break out a microscope, you see the same pattern, repeated even smaller. You can see this same phenomenon of fractals in grains of wheat and in broccoli, in snowflakes and the rings of Saturn.¹²

¹⁰ Matthew 15:18-19.

¹¹ Matthew 13: 24-30.

¹² Fractal information and images: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fractal>. Sermon: Douglas Browne, “All Sown Together,” sermon preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church July 5, 2015 (available upon request).

Good and evil are like that. The dividing line between the wheat and the tares does not go between Carolyn and me – it goes through my heart. And her heart. And your heart. Each and every one of us has good and evil in us. Each one of us does good things and bad things.

There is another fractal level smaller – every decision that each of us makes is a mixture, too. Each one of us does things for multiple reasons, some of them pure and blameless, others not so much. It is difficult, often, for us to sort out our own reasons for the things we do: which reasons are good and which are not; which are important reasons and which are excuses we tell ourselves.

There is another level, though, a level larger than the person, rather than smaller. The words and events in Charlottesville, like it or not, came out of the mouths of Americans. They reflect something in the soul of a society, in the soul of America.

People don't have to hit people with clubs or with cars to exhibit and spread these kinds of values. People don't have to march with torches or chant Nazi slogans to exhibit and spread these kinds of values. That is the big version of the fractal pattern. The pattern shows up smaller in our language, and in the language and behavior we tolerate.

I have a friend who is a talented artist, a metalsmith. His maker's mark is a Star of David. Recently, a customer at an art show looked at his wares with his maker's mark, and looked at the banner behind him with the Star of David. The man then made a purchase, and said to him, "Sorry, man, I don't mean to Jew you down, but I'm \$2.00 short."

That is a small version of a fractal pattern.

When we look at the kids skateboarding in the parking lot and the first thing we notice is their race, we are saying, even if only to ourselves, that their race is the most important thing about them. More important than their specific identity or their behavior. We put Mother Theresa and Charles Manson in the same category, as better than Martin Luther King or Saint Augustine.¹³ When we don't challenge others who do that, we say that it's okay to judge people solely on their skin color.

That is a small version of a fractal pattern.

When we assume that a surgeon, or a CEO, or another person holding a prestigious job, must necessarily be a man, we take a little bit of perceived legitimacy away from any woman who holds that position. We force her to prove herself, one more time. When we accept those kinds of assumptions from other people, we say that it's okay to take that.

That is a small version of a fractal pattern.

Look at the banner to your right. Members of this congregation made it to illustrate the Declaration of Barmen, a confession of the Christian church that was written in Germany in 1934.¹⁴ There are two symbols there. We can choose one. We can choose either the swastika, or the cross.

We don't get to choose just for ourselves.

We don't get to not choose.

¹³ Mother Theresa was and Charles Manson is white; Martin Luther King was African-American. Saint Augustine was North African, from modern-day Algeria. By today's standards, he would be considered Middle-Eastern or African.

¹⁴ Text: <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/boc.pdf#page=272>. Image: http://www.creeds.net/reformed/banners/barmen_banner_web.jpg

Not choosing is choosing.

Saying that you are “above politics” is choosing.

Saying that you won’t get involved is choosing. And it is not choosing the way of God.

Our choices are small fractal patterns. They add up. They build upon one another, and create the same pattern writ large in our world.

We can choose the swastika, which is racism, and antisemitism and misogyny, or we can choose the cross, which is the way of the God who says that, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁵

By what we say and do, and by what we accept others saying and doing around us, we make that choice. We will never get it perfect. We will never have a single day when we do everything perfectly. But we are called to do the best we can do.

We are called to note our knee-jerk reactions, and to try to do better. Pay attention to how we view people, and remember – every person we see was made by God, in the image of God. We can serve God and all the people whom God made in God’s own image, or we can spit on God’s image.

As the Israelite leader Joshua said. “choose this day whom you will serve,... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”¹⁶

AMEN

¹⁵ Galatians 3:28.

¹⁶ Joshua 24:15.