

Who Lives In You?

**Sterling UMC
February 28, 2010
Luke 13:31-35**

Who lives in you? That's the question that comes to mind as we read those words of Jesus this morning when he tells the Pharisees, "Go tell that fox (Herod) that I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow and on the third day reach my goal." I will do what I must. For God lives in me. I am a citizen of heaven. Let him do what he must!

Let your imagination run free for a moment and picture yourself, your personality, who you are really, as a house. Any kind of house will do -- just so it's yours. For some it may be a huge castle, with lofty turrets and banners waving in the breeze, a place that is safe and secure. For others it may be a rustic cabin, tucked away in the woods, a peaceful and quiet refuge. For others still, it might be a nice little

retirement home, with a rocking chair on the front porch, a shade tree in front and a nice warm breeze stirring flowers blooming in front.

Now, move in closer and imagine the front door of that house. Picture someone pushing the doorbell, clanking the knocker, or knocking on the door. If someone came to the door of your house, who would they find inside? Who lives in you?

I'm not sure about you, but I've met people who gave me the distinct impression that if I went inside the "houses" of their lives, I wouldn't find anyone home. Or if I went inside their houses, they would be so cluttered with junk that there wouldn't be any room for anyone. Or some whose houses are great and impressive on the outside, but once I entered everything would be artificial.

Who lives in you? That's the question for us to address this Second Sunday in Lent. Who lives in you? What guides your decisions? What sets the course of your life? What determines the way you think and treat others around you? Most of us would like to say that it is our Christian faith that determines who we are. But is that so? For there are two kinds of people who can be home -- citizens of the world and citizens of heaven.

Who lives in you? Think back over the decisions you've made this past week. Who made them -- a citizen of this world or a citizen of heaven? Recall the way you spoke to those around you and the way you treated others. Who was present then? What about the offering you bring this morning, what kind of relationship with God does it reflect? Is it a citizen of heaven, the child of God, who is present in us? Or is it a stranger of this world, one who cares little about others, who thinks first of him or herself, whose

actions fail to give witness to the allegiance we claim to have with God?

Who lives in you? What stirs you each day of your life? We'd like to answer that it is our Christian faith, but can we? For the Christian faith is more than just a set of doctrines, more than some creed that we recite, more than assertions we study. Our Christian faith is the lives we live -- the set of moral principles that guide our decisions and are reflected in the words we use. It is our response to the poor around us. It is our record of worship, our interest in Scripture reading, our attention to prayer.

For the reality of our Christian faith is our relationship with Christ, the same kind of response that Jesus gave those Pharisees. "Look and see how I act," he said. "See, I go about my business. I will continue to care for the sick and proclaim God's Word." Who lives in you? The answer must

always be "Christ lives in me." The same love, the same compassion that Jesus had is present in me. The same life, the same power of God that was present in Jesus is alive in me. I am a citizen of heaven. God is my Father. And it is up to me to live according to that citizenship. I cannot say I am a citizen of heaven, a child of God, and make myself a stranger to the house of God. I cannot say I am a citizen of heaven and live as an "undercover agent," afraid someone during the week will discover my true identity.

This Season of Lent calls us to look within ourselves and ask the question: "Who lives in me?" It calls us to be honest with ourselves and admit that even though we claim to be citizens of heaven, we often live as strangers before God.

Why do we do this? One reason I believe is that we think no one will notice the difference. After all, we are not as bad as others around us, are we? And we do come to worship on

Sunday morning, even though it may be the only hour a week we feed our souls. And we do bring an offering to church, even though it may be less than we spend weekly on entertainment. And we do plan on reading our Bibles and saying our prayers, sometime, even though we spend four times as much time watching TV. How often we live as strangers to God and try to claim we are citizens of heaven and hope no one notices the difference.

But the Season of Lent reminds us that God knows. That we may be able to fool ourselves (and even those around us) but we can never fool God, for God reads the human heart. God knows who lives in our house.

There is a story of a burly, old lineman from a professional football team who thought that he knew all the tricks so he could stay out late and party on road trips despite the team's curfew. Over the years he'd gotten it all down to a science.

He'd pile certain things up under the blankets of the bed to make it appear that he was asleep when the coach checked curfew. And it worked fairly well until one evening when he was in a hurry and couldn't find the right items to put under the covers, so he just decided to slip a floor lamp under the blankets instead. Imagine what happened when a suspicious coach peeked in at 1 a.m. and snapped on the poor guy's light.

The cross of Jesus is like that. It lays bare the thoughts of the human heart and reveals the inner person. Who lives in you? If you want to know the answer to that question, review your thoughts and actions in the light of the cross. How does your life reflect Jesus' love? How do your thoughts and attitudes mirror the mind of Christ? How do your actions make God's compassion more visible? Who lives in you?

Jesus tells us that two kinds of people cannot live in peace with each other. "No one can serve two masters," (Matthew 6:24a NIV) he says. Either we live as people whose lives are oriented to the world, who strive for happiness and fulfillment in the things of this world, who find our joy in the pleasures, pursuits, and possessions of this life, or we find our peace and joy in Christ. Both kinds of people cannot live under the same roof.

We cannot live with our hopes and dreams, our aspirations and goals for life tied to the material possessions of this world and yet claim to be citizens of heaven. We cannot live dividing our priorities between serving ourselves and serving God. We cannot live as citizens of heaven and be strangers to God. Jesus says, "Either you will hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24b NIV) No one can serve two masters. It is impossible to hold dual

citizenship.

To be a child of God is to allow God to be our Father. To live as a citizen of heaven is to allow Christ into our hearts. For when we have the love of Jesus in our hearts, we know a life of discipleship and devotion, of faith and faithfulness, of conscience and commitment will follow. But we must allow Christ in! We must allow the love of God to rule our lives, direct our thoughts, and guide our actions.

In his autobiography, Dr. A.J. Cronin tells of a neighboring family called the Adamses. Mr. Adams was an accountant in New York City, but he loved to spend all the hours he could working in his garden at their Connecticut home with his only son, Sammy. When WWII broke out, Mrs. Adams suggested they take a refugee child into their home. Mr. Adams wasn't much in favor of the idea, but he went along with it to please her. The child they received came from an

orphanage in Central Europe with the impossible name of Paul Piotrostansilis. Unfortunately, as Paul learned the language of his new family in Connecticut, he also learned to manipulate the truth. He found it easy to steal and do mischief and broke the Adams' hearts many times. He did, however, develop a close friendship with the Adams' little son, Sammy.

One day, Paul, against their specific warning, went swimming in a polluted stream near their home and came back with an infection that brought with it a raging fever. Because of the possibility it might be contagious, Paul was put in a separate room and Sammy was told to stay away from him. Paul eventually pulled through the crisis, but, while he was still sick, one morning the family found Sammy asleep in the same bed with Paul, the two of them breathing into each other's faces. And sure enough, Sammy caught the disease. The fever raged through him, and only four days later,

Sammy died.

Dr. Cronin remembered hearing about the tragedy while away on an extended study leave. He wrote his neighbors, expressing his sympathy for them, telling them that he, for one, would understand should they feel the need to send Paul back, after all the heartache he had caused them. A few months later, upon returning from his leave, Dr. Cronin went next door to visit the Adamses and was surprised to see the same familiar sight of a man and a boy working side by side in the garden. Only this time the boy was Paul.

"You still have him then?" Cronin inquired. "Yes," Henry Adams replied, "and he is doing much better now." "All I can say to you, Paul," Cronin muttered, "is that you're a pretty lucky boy." "Dr. Cronin," Henry interrupted, "you don't need to bother trying to pronounce his name anymore, either. He is now Paul Adams. We have adopted him. He is now the son

we lost."

That's the kind of love God has for us. A love that Jesus expresses in the face of threatened death, a love that goes about its business, in spite of the consequences. Love that adopts us as children. Love that makes us citizens of heaven. Love that puts us in our places and gives us our inheritances. Who lives in you? May we all be able to say, "Christ lives in me for I live in him."