

## Sheep or Goat?

by Andrea Rodgers

As Miranda Ellsworth listened to her tour guide explain the history and significance of a bronze statue of a young shepherd with several sheep at his feet, her mind wandered to Matthew 25: 31-45, the verses about sheep and goats. Miranda spent several hours per week volunteering in the church food pantry and visiting sick members of the church when they were admitted to the hospital. *I really hope that Jesus thinks of me as a sheep and not a goat.*

Miranda glanced at her friends and smiled. She, along with members of her church, had planned this trip many months ago, and now, here she was, in a foreign land, soaking in the culture and ambience. *I'm going to be soaking in more than just ambience if I don't find a restroom soon.* She glanced across the street from the park and saw a sign for a public restroom. The tour guide was still discussing the statue, so Miranda decided that if she moved quickly, she could race to the bathroom and return before anyone even knew she was gone.

However, when Miranda returned to the park statue a few moments later, her church group was nowhere in sight. She tried to squelch the rising tide of anxiety that bubbled up from deep within her. *Why did I run off like that without telling anyone? I don't speak a word of the language here. Who can I ask for help? What am I going to do?* Biting her lip, she began jogging along a path that cut through the large public park. *Maybe this is a short cut and I can catch up with them.* The cobblestones were uneven, and she found herself wishing that she had worn a better pair of walking shoes.

The sun began setting, but Miranda was too panicked to enjoy the beauty of the majestic view. Blindly, she pushed onwards along the path, praying that she would be quickly reunited with her group. She turned right, and then the path suddenly became dark and narrow. A middle-aged woman with tattered clothing and only a few crooked teeth motioned towards Miranda and muttered something indistinguishable. *Is she going to try to mug me? I've got to get out of here!* Trying to escape from the frightening woman, Miranda turned around and began rushing back the way she came. As her feet pounded along the path, her foot suddenly caught on a tree root and she pitched forward. Her head struck the cobblestones hard, and she was thrown into a world of shadows.

\*\*\*\*\*

When Miranda awoke, she was surrounded by darkness. She tried to stifle her rising fear. *Where am I? What happened to me?* Then, slowly it all came back to her. *I don't even have my wallet with me; I left it on the bus, and I'm not even sure where the bus is now. What am I going to do?* By now, she prayed that her friends had realized that she was missing and that they had notified the local police.

Miranda sat up and gradually became more aware of her surroundings. She touched her fingers to her forehead, and realized that she must have some sort of bandage around her head. She blinked several times, and her eyes began to adjust to the dim light. Suddenly, Miranda became aware of heavy breathing close by. On her lap, she discovered a musty, worn woolen blanket, on top of which was a half slice of stale bread. Miranda peered more closely into the darkness, and realized that there was indeed a person sitting on the ground next to her. It was the frightening woman she had seen right before she fell! The woman must have bandaged her wound, covered her with the blanket, and shared her meager slice of bread with her. Once again, Miranda's mind flashed to the bible story of the sheep and the goat. "Thank you," she whispered to the woman, seeing the inner beauty of the sheep who sat next to her. The woman smiled a crooked smile in return, and gently patted Miranda on the arm.

Suddenly, Miranda heard people calling her name. It was her church friends, along with a local police officer! Miranda sprang to her feet, crying with joy as she embraced her friends. "This woman here helped me," Miranda said, turning to point out the woman who had been so kind to her, but alas, the kind woman had vanished, melting away into the shadows of the night.