

Sheep Amongst Wolves

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 June 2023

Preacher: Julian Dobbs

[0:00] That chapter, chapter 10. So much there, isn't there? After all the day, send your own sheep, says Jesus. And then later on, he says, have no fear, for not be discovered that will not be revealed.

And then later, in the passage, he says, whoever receives you, receives me. Whoever receives me, receives him. Who said so much in that passage, it was a very long gospel reading.

I'm just going to take one verse of it this morning. So just to help you stay on target as I preach, put into a book of Bibles with me, page 969, in your true Bible.

Bibles, of course, are not being able to do and they are closed, because they reveal to us the word of the Lord that we've just sung about. And look with me in chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel, verse 16.

In fact, why don't we read it together and they're with me? They say together, behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of walls.

[1:07] So we are, I would say, seven and innocent of us. What's the context here? We're going to read the Bible in its context.

Look back in those early verses, perhaps in verse 10. Jesus is sending out the disciples. We've got a lovely picture of that on the front of the bulletin this morning. Jesus is sending out the disciples. Their situation looks rather serene, I think, on the bulletin this morning. He's brought them to himself and he's saved them and he's equipped them.

He's commissioning them and he's sending them out. He's named apostles. He's sending them out to fulfill that apostolic ministry and he's telling them up front.

Jesus is very clear about this. He's sent out, where? Into the danger zone. Into a world which is treacherous and he will be like sheep amongst wolves.

[2:12] That's the context. So, we the Lord's people, all of us who are baptized, are living and operating in a very hostile world.

A world that is in complete rebellion. It's always been in complete rebellion against Christ and his reign and his authority last night at our missions conference and synod now in Pennsylvania I said these words, lines of demarcation have been drawn.

If you've got in trouble to say those words, I still believe them, that lines of demarcation have been drawn. And we're going to be drawn in our society. They've been drawn since the beginning of time. And the noise, I said, of this demarcation is formidable. It attempts to distract and divide the followers of Jesus from God's spiritual church.

So let's, let's think of it this morning. The naming of the apostles, the equipping of the apostles, the sending out of the apostles, and Jesus says, I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves to be wise and servant and innocent as does.

[3:28] Sheep in the midst of what is it? Gold. Tell me again. Gold. Did you find that fascinating about the good shepherd sending out sheep into the midst of wolves?

Wise as again? Wise as servants. I'd rather like to get the spade when I see a servant and do something unbondly to it.

Innocent as? That one's more manageable, isn't it? Innocent as done, the dove of the Holy Spirit.

We are in the midst of wolves. And we have to be wise and innocent.

In fact, in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus sends out workers, he uses that well-known phrase, the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are pure, pray, ever since the Lord of the harvest to send out his laborers into the harvest field.

He goes on to use the same phrase, send you out as sheep amongst wolves, the lambs amongst wolves, the harvest cross from. Literally, that word is to thrust out, to cast out, to throw out his

neighbors amongst wolves into the harvest field.

[4:49] Jesus tells us it's harvest time plentiful. How's the harvest in Syracuse, New York?

Plentiful? Would you describe it as that? How's the harvest for the kingdom and Holy Trinity? Well, I can see it's plentiful because there are significant numbers of you here this morning that I've not met before.

That's a good sign. Is the harvest our focus or a sacred disrupting us and putting our attention elsewhere to focus our thoughts and our efforts on things that distract the church from her mission to be thrust out into the harvest field?

Well, we can answer that for you. The work the Lord has called us to is a very urgent one. It's an urgent one. I like to think in the days of my New Zealand soldier or playing rugby or kill the man at the ball or whatever you like to call it.

If we had too many injuries in the game, the referee would give us injury time at the end of the game. So if we'd stop for four and a half minutes, we would get an extra four and a half minutes to injure ourselves more at the end of the game.

[6:12] And I rather like to think of this season between the cross and Christ's return as injury time. We've got some more time to be proclaiming the gospel before the last conflict shall sound and Christ shall come again.

It reminds us that the Lord's work sending us out into the harvest field is urgent. He wants the harvest brought in. Now maybe it's not particularly propitious in the old back of the woods, but at the very least we can all give ourselves to prayer.

I talked about this in history yesterday, praying that the Lord would thrust out laborers into the harvest field in Syracuse. Check everything else we do at the ministry.

We're in injury time. There will be one more trumpet. And at that moment it will be too late. So in these four and a half minutes or however you might feel it is on injury time, let's be about this gospel work that we sent out into the harvest field.

And notice from our text, look back at me in our Matthew chapter 10, Jesus sends out the apostles and he says, I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

[7:36] it's a dangerous work, this urgent task that the Lord has given us. And therefore we are to expect opposition.

And I think that's one of the reasons why all of us seem to have these blockages with regards to evangelism. Because it's a work that will have opposition from the enemy of souls.

It's a dangerous work. And we have to expect vigorous opposition. look, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Is that not rather extraordinary idea of the good shepherd?

To send out the sheep from the sheep fold, the sheep who he tells us in John's gospel, he knows their name, he's sending us men amongst wolves.

You go figure the good shepherd in that analogy. Wildlife biologists who study wolves report that it is during a hunt where cooperation between wolves within a pack is its most apparent.

[8:42] A wolf may say it's prey for days before making its move and during this time they are already hunting. They are assessing the flock and looking for the animal that displays any sign of weakness and that's just the beginning.

Wolves factor in other conditions such as weather and the terrain and a hunting strategy of the pack is in play. And Jesus says I'm sending you out into the midst of that sheep amongst wolves.

Now the Lord has absolutely no doubt of the world's picture of him and his message and he expects the disciples who have been commissioned. Remember no one else has been commissioned to take the to do what we're doing now getting together for open Christian worship and the proclamation of God's word is a life threatening activity.

Less than a day's life from where we are. I read just this week that dozens of school pupils were massacred by Islamists in Uganda and a pastor and a church member of state abduction in progist state of Nigeria.

Jesus sends us out into the chief of opposition and he brings a union between what many would consider contradictions and union of two things that many would consider opposite sides sheep in the midst of wolves state opposition.

[10:52] He should send out into the world to pray and praise the gospel. Let's look at the next image that Jesus uses in verse 16. It's another rather unusual one. I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves so be wise as serpents.

Wise as serpents. Remember again the context of these verses. We're in the very good zone. We're being sent out amongst the wolves and we're to be wise as serpents.

The Bible has a lot to say about wisdom. To be without wisdom would be like a ship without a rudder. Picture that. In the early verses of Proverbs are packed full with admonitions to know wisdom.

In fact, to give everything you have grasped, every penny you own to gain wisdom. Listen to Proverbs chapter 3. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than the gain of silver, and her profit better than gold.

She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. There's a damn mission to chase hard after wisdom.

[12:16] Listen there. Biblical wisdom, they're told, is of tremendous importance, and the world out there touts biblical wisdom. The world is very wise, but it's wise in its own mind, because its wisdom is counterfeit.

You may recall Paul writing, I love this message in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, where he writes, Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world.

He writes again in that same chapter, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, and God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being can boast in the presence of God, and because of him, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God.

That's where we find our wisdom. So, listen to the sound of Jesus. Why, then, listen to the sound of Jesus, because Jesus tells us to be as wise as serpents.

It's a good thing, isn't it? Take a picture of the imagery here. The good shepherd has already told us he's sending the sheep out among wolves. Now he's telling us to be wise as serpents.

[13:47] And he shows the serpent. The serpent was the symbol of shrewdness and intellectual cunning. In Genesis chapter 3, we read these words, the serpent was more crafty than any of the other beasts of the field that the Lord God has made.

And the serpent was more prudent, we could say. It's the same Hebrew word. We could say, showing that word, it's through a rule. The serpent was more sensible than any other of the beasts of the field that the Lord had made.

Is that how you would describe yourself? More prudent? Perhaps more sensible? Why there's a serpent in the midst of a world that offers counterfeit wisdom.

Don't be prudent. go and be sensible. And not only are in that counterfeit world are we to be as wise as serpents, or wise like serpents, we are to be as innocent as dubs.

Beautiful picture. The word means hummus, or unmixed, free from dial. and it's reinforced by the fact that the Holy Spirit himself appeared not as a dove descending on Jesus at his baptism.

[15:15] So I did some animal study this week. I studied about serpents, and I studied about wolves, and I read up about doves. What do you think of a dove?

It's not an aggressive bird, is it? It doesn't have tail arms like an eagle, it doesn't snatch large prey, it doesn't have a fierce beak, it's not a creature that swims down through his devouring the dead prey that is left from the road.

It's a picture of beauty. It's a picture of harmlessness. And doves are known for their powerful and precise light patterns and the whirling sound created by their wings, and some of them can reach up at speeds of 55 miles, an hour.

So Jesus is sending us out to do what? To proclaim the gospel, to make disciples as sheep in the midst of wars, wise, as serpents, innocent, as doves, the dove, the most calmest, gentle, precise, defenseless, blur, the serpent, the most coming, of all the creatures God had made, and to go out into the danger zone of Syracuse for a blind with the good news about Jesus Christ.

And many of you know that bread and I are traveling around the diocese, encouraging all the baptized in our congregations to take a copy of the gospel of John, and to share it with someone who doesn't know Jesus.

[17:05] It's not difficult to do that. I ride in a lot of movies, and I often give the driver gospel of John, one of my living goals, for our diocese, and for me personally, is to model the work of the evangelist, and to support the engagement of the evangelistic ministry in every congregation of the diocese, and to pray for an expectation that in Holy Trinity Syracuse, you would expect conversion growth in your pews.

At our missions conference in Sydney here, back in Kirtuala last month, I shared these three testimonies of people who have come to faith in Jesus, and notice, they all come from the state of New York.

The first was Pete Austin, from Church of the Resurrection in Hartwood, New York. I met Pete, in fact, just two weeks ago, when I was in the congregation.

And Pete read it, that's amazing, because you often think, I'll give someone the Bible, and they won't read it, and I'll just put me a copy one on it. But this man read it, and received Jesus as his Lord and Savior, and he was the very first person to be baptized in the new church building. That's in the Bible. Jesus. That's in this state. And they're angels. Well, one of our other congregations in New York, we have a number of them, has been having dinner conversation parties on weeknights to talk to people about Jesus who do not yet name Jesus as their Savior. And on each of Sunday morning, our young woman, who I also recently met, have been discussing the Bible for a whole year. You see, it takes time. She was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and one of her life, she said the light came on.

[20:10] You are. Thanks be to God. God. And then there's Helen Cole. I just love the story about Helen Cole. Those of you who have heard me share it, she's from your sister congregation, at St.

I don't know. Helen came to the same place of Jesus, age 79. You think those old people who know are too old?

But I am, she says, and I want to share it with the world. And I walked through the St. Andrews one Sunday after a very long absence, and I heard Pastor Jerry's sermon, and it changed my life.

Isn't that wonderful? It's beautiful. Heron Paul, aged 79, a woman in New York City, who came to faith and was baptized, and Pete Austin in half-moon, all transformed by Jesus with their names written in the land for the life, for all eternity, because Christians in the Anglican Diocese of the Living Word taught the list to be sent out as sheep among wolves, to be wise as servants, and innocent as dogs, to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Happened in half-moon, happened in New York City, happened in Hendicott, and there are spaces of abuse, and both of you serve these forums and have them here.

[illegible]

Downloaded from <https://vetanothersermon.host>

Just imagine it happening here, the Holy Trinity, so if you select Dr. Holy Graham, hold these words, he said, you never had the Christian church face so many challenges on so many fronts, political, social, democratic, economic, philosophical, in the eyes of many, he wrote, religion has lost its relevance, and is little more than a quaint read it from another time.

It's going to be a bachelor to say that, right? He said, in spite of all the difficulties, the 21st century could mark the greatest evangelistic advance in the history of the Christian church, in order for this to happen, the church must embrace the challenges of cases and mobilize every possible spiritual and physical resource to declare the gospel that has been committed to us.

I think he was right. The harvest is taken, the laborers of few, ask the of the hearts to send you out, to trust you out, like sheep amongst wolves, they was right as servants, innocent as servants, and do not listen to rest.

[24 : 57] The Lord our God in heaven, you are the Lord of glory, the Lord who is beautiful and holiness, a God who is complete and perfect and adorned with majesty and arrayed with might.

Lord, we give you the worship this morning that is due to your great name. Thank you that we can come to do so, and so many of our brothers and sisters cannot come through.

Lord, we pray that you would grant the ministry of your spirit in us to work that which is well-pleasing in your own sight, and that you will send us out wise and servants, innocent as servants, and care of the gospel that has been delivered to us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.