

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Sheep among wolves

- Pastor Hank French

“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Jesus’ advice to his disciples just before he sends them out to proclaim what he proclaims and to teach what he teaches is just the wisdom they needed to hear; it is wisdom that every generation of Christians needs to hear.

Jesus’ words are both realistic and grounded in his faith in God and his faith in his fallible followers. Yes—his fallible followers—for that is what we are, earnest in our faith, strong in our intentions to live our faith, but prone to make mistakes in how we live our faith.

And yet Jesus trusts our intentions to be faithful. That is what matters—our honest intentions. And he will use us, despite our fallibility, to proclaim and live the Good News of God’s love and justice.

So, Jesus sends his disciples—us—out to do just that—to proclaim and live the Good News. And he tells us, “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.” Here is the realism. There are many folks in the world who do not like the Good News of God’s love and justice and will work tirelessly against it. These “wolves,” who usually run in packs, are not to be taken lightly—hence Jesus’ warning.

But, with the warning comes a promise. These sheep who are being sent out among the wolves have a shepherd. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.... (John 10:11-14). When we go out like sheep in the midst of wolves to proclaim and live the Good News of God’s love and justice, the good shepherd is with us, and there is strength and courage in knowing that.

So, we are to be “wise as serpents....” Which is to say, know who the wolves are, know what they are up to, and do not let them co-opt you. As Pelagius, a 5th Century theologian put it: “The enemy has overcome you when he makes you like himself.”

So, we are to be “innocent as doves.” Which is to say, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). Proclaim love and be loving, even with wolves. Proclaim Justice and be just, even when dealing with wolves.

Prayer: Loving and just God, help us to trust the Good Shepherd and not fear the wolves as we do our best to proclaim and live the Good News of your love and justice. Amen.