

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 3, 2022

“Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.”

As we all know, Jesus often said tough things. Some of the things he said paint seemingly unreasonable expectations. “I can’t do that,” we might think to ourselves. Some of his sayings depict a world completely the opposite of how we think things should be. “The world doesn’t work that way,” we whisper under our breath. Some are just plain puzzling. “Turn the other cheek? For what?”

But other things Jesus said are of a different kind of category - a category of things we absolutely want no part of, situations that most of us have no desire to walk into, no desire to embrace. The verse above is just one of those phrases.

“Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.”

Who wants to do that? Who wants to be attacked? Who wants to walk into danger?

Not me. Probably not you either. Yet, it is Jesus who is asking this of us. Our Lord. Our Savior. Our God. And so, we can’t simply dismiss what he says, can’t simply treat it like any other request we get from our families and friends and bosses on a regular basis. This request is completely different.

Of course, we know what Jesus means by this statement. He doesn’t mean that we should go around looking for trouble. He doesn’t mean we should seek out confrontation. He doesn’t mean that faithfulness is simply measured by how much harm comes our way. No, I don’t think he means any of those things. Rather, his tough words are a warning of what is likely to happen when we pick a side - the side of love and kindness and mercy and generosity. He knows that not everyone will be open to our message, our vision and / or our mission. And so we can expect a certain amount of

indifference from others. We can expect a certain amount of pushback. We can expect a certain amount of ridicule. And we can expect a certain amount of hostility, a certain amount of anger that might come from those who see things differently.

And what does Jesus expect from you and me? Simply that we stay the course. Keep on the path. Remain as faithful as possible as we attempt to bring the Good News to a world in dire need of some. It's not about seeing results. It's not about knowing exactly how our lives and our message will make a difference. We do what we do, we say what we say, because we believe God wants us to. It's as simple as that.

And as difficult.

Clearly, Jesus sees his followers as the "lambs", and those working against his message as the "wolves". And I'm sure that was the case in that moment. In fact, it was probably that case for a while, as those first believers tried their best to share with others the importance of Jesus, what he did and said and how that was impacting their lives in a life-changing kind of way (by the power of the Spirit).

Yet, it couldn't remain that way forever. Well, it could if people were perfect, but of course, we're not. And so, this story makes me wonder if we no longer have to worry about being lambs thrown to the wolves. Maybe, for some of us, the tables have been turned. Maybe - just maybe - some of us (myself included) are no longer the lambs.

Maybe we are the wolves.

How could that be? How could we be the ones putting others in a kind of spiritual danger? How could we be the ones actually undermining the Christian message, undermining the Christian mission, undermining the Good News? Are WE the ones causing harm to the faith, harm to the message, harm to the Church?

Maybe.

My dear friends in Christ, the biggest complaint I hear from nonbelievers is that Christians really don't live any differently from anyone else (Mahatma Gandhi is my witness). They often don't see us give more. They certainly don't see us showing more compassion. They don't see us forgiving more. They don't see us comforting and drying tears and consoling any more than anyone else. And they don't see us love more. We may say that Jesus is Lord, but externally it often seems that we follow whatever or whomever everyone else follows, live pretty much as everyone else lives - believer and nonbeliever alike.

And all of that harms the work of the Church. All of that keeps people from truly taking us seriously. All of that makes people often so reluctant to embrace the things we say are so important. And so, we unknowingly do damage to the very thing we love so dearly, keeping others from wanting whatever it is we (and Jesus) are offering.

And so, each of us needs to look deep within and ask ourselves, "Am I building up the faith or tearing it down, am I working for it or inadvertently against it, am I a lamb or a wolf?" And let's not think that faithful discipleship can simply be reduced to being "right" on a couple of "hot" topics. It's so much more than that. So much, much more. And that's precisely what God wants from you and me.