

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 397, 11-01-2020 †† Reformation Sunday

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 10

¹⁶“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷Be on guard against people. They will hand you over to councils, and they will whip you in their synagogues. ¹⁸You will be brought into the presence of governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹Whenever they hand you over, do not be worried about how you will respond or what you will say, because what you say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰In fact you will not be the ones speaking, but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.

²¹“Brother will hand over his brother to death, and a father will do the same with his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. ²²You will be hated by all people because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. ²³And when they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. Amen I tell you: You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.



Today we celebrate the day when Luther rediscovered the good news of Jesus Christ. Luther challenged salvation by works with salvation by grace alone through faith. Luther pointed out the law says only to do; Jesus Christ says it is done. It is only right that we marvel at Luther’s endurance and appeal to Jesus Christ for our own endurance. Jesus says, “*Whoever endures to the end will be saved*” (v22). And Jesus brings up certain animals to explain that.

Job says to ask the animals, and they will teach you. This past week our family day was at the zoo Monday morning. The animals were very active. The giraffes came right up to us. The rhinos were very close. The ostriches were chasing each other as well as the wildebeests. The lion stared straight at us, licking his lips behind the glass. The monkeys and cheetahs walked past us. The

elephants were cuddling trunks. I came home to start studying this text and said, "Great, there are animals in these verses." But as for sheep, wolves, snakes, and doves ... we didn't see any at the zoo.

Then I realized we had to come to church to see the sheep, snakes, and doves. These are you. These are you when you persist in the true faith and endure.

God's Sheep, Snakes, And Doves Endure

1. Sheep among wolves (v17-18, 21-22)

Why sheep? Jesus Christ was sending out his apostles (for that is the Greek word for "send out"; i.e., "apostle") to proclaim His kingdom. But Jesus warns them up front that it's not what you think. This is the most important message ever presented to mankind, but people aren't going to take it that way. Jesus uses words used later about Him, words like "handed over," "trial," "flogged," and "councils." These were the persecutors, the wolves, who were against Jesus and Jesus' friends.

Essentially they would have to be treated like Jesus Christ in order to be messengers of Jesus Christ.

This is especially striking because of brother versus brother, children rising up against parents. The truth would separate families who care and close friendships. This is how Martin Luther felt about the Catholic church. It was his very own, and he did not wish to get into battles with brothers.

In fact, guess who Martin Luther considered a sheep among wolves? You will never guess it. Sometimes I check the Scripture index of an abridged volume of Luther's most important works, just to see if and how Luther used the passage. In an open letter to the pope in 1520, Martin Luther quoted Matthew 10:16, as he considered *Pope Leo*, his supposed enemy, a sheep among wolves.

Luther considered the pope a brother in Christ. He did not want to think that the pope intended to violate the gospel, by attaching strings to forgiveness. Luther wanted the pope to be an upright representative of Jesus Christ who would never strip away from the Church the free gift of God by the gracious work of Jesus Christ. So Luther concluded that the pope was merely surrounded by wolves in

his holy see, his special circle. To Luther, the men surrounding the pope were flattering him, telling him he was infallible, and influencing his hand to abuse the church. That's what Luther was writing about 500 years ago. He had to be ...

2. Shrewd as snakes (v17, 23)

This word for “shrewd” means “thoughtful” or “prudent.” This means to do the most sensible thing in the face of danger. The apostles were to learn a lesson from snakes and not to go after danger.

So Jesus says to be on guard against people, which means the unbelievers of the world. In the time of the apostles, that would mean mostly everyone, for they themselves had just started to believe in Him. Jesus says to flee to a different town when the persecution heats up. Go from a place of persecution to a place of welcome.

So while Jesus gives us joy in times of suffering, He does not mean for us to desire victimhood. We do not throw our lives to the flames without cause. It is only when there is no way out do we patiently bear suffering.

Martin Luther did not ask for trouble. He merely asked forgiveness without strings attached. If humans had to cooperate with God by making payment for forgiveness or years off of punishment in an eternal place, that meant adding to or subtracting from the work of Jesus. When Luther nailed the 95 theses on the church door on October 31 in 1517, his goal was not to stir up trouble and troll the powers that be. The church of his time was allowing the sale of indulgences – papers that guaranteed an amount of time off from the upper circles of hell, only for a price. Luther's goal was instead debate and discovery: Why were we still paying for sins with fancy paper and clinking coins when Jesus has done it all? Why were we not holding fast to the words of the Scriptures?

However as shrewd as Luther was, the truth of the Bible brings on its own persecutors. He was demanded to repent and recant and retract what he had written, in essence, what the Bible said.

We do not demand government protection for the slightest persecution, as if we did not see this coming. We do not need to vote for the safest candidate, or else somehow fear that we would lose our Christianity. We do not need to stir up trouble and troll the powers that be. If and when it is time for the shrewd and

thoughtful and prudent to be placed on trial, then the shrewd and thoughtful and prudent thing to do is to speak only truth. Then as with Luther, only the truth will be on trial, not us. For then we will be ...

3. Innocent as doves (v19-20)

This does not mean we have to “worry” about what to say. The Spirit would speak for the apostles in their time. God the Holy Spirit wrote the rest of the Bible through these inspired men. We may ask whether some of their inspired words were not written and recorded for us to read later. The Holy Spirit would be there to speak through these faithful messengers when they were attacked and arraigned for trial. Jesus did not want His apostles to worry about making up words on the spot.

Peter and John spoke freely in their own defense before the Sanhedrin. Steven unflinchingly confessed the truth before his enemies. Paul gave us masterpiece apologies before kings. This is exactly what Jesus was saying specifically. The apostles under persecution when it was necessary to give a defense against the enemies of the Church.

Church history shows us striking sayings when on defense: Martin Luther’s defense at Worms. We cannot know if Luther was given direct words from the Holy Spirit. We do know Luther based his defense on the inspired words of Scripture, and therefore based his whole teaching on the Holy Spirit. His conscience was “captive to the Word of God,” he confessed, and he could “not do otherwise.” Here he stood. So help him God.

Jesus does not want us to worry about making up words on the spot. You and I may not be inspired, but you have “*known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 3:16). Christianity is not a man-made doctrine, but comes from above.

We had to come to church to see the sheep, snakes, and doves. These are you, in persecution, shrewdness, and innocence. These are you when you persist in the true faith and endure. But when you need the forgiveness of sins, you look first to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You look to Jesus, who was raised like the bronze snake of healing. You look to Jesus as Luther did, who sends the dove-like Spirit into hearts of faith to make His innocence our own. All these things and more in Jesus’ name, Amen.