

Sermon on **Matthew 10:16-23** for Reformation Sunday
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf 10.25.26

Many a believer has been left surprised when they have been met with intolerance or hatred for simply believing and speaking about God's love in Christ. On this Reformation Sunday we think of Christian confessors like Martin Luther and the hatred and threats he received for proclaiming Scripture's message of salvation in Jesus Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, based on Scripture alone, to God's glory alone. We think of Daniel who did not post 95 theses anywhere but simply went up to his room to pray and was thrown into a lion's den for it. Daniel, Martin Luther, Paul, sure, but what about you and me? Jesus speaks to his 12 disciples and us to cure us of surprise and ready us for service.

**You are Sheep Among Wolves.
Jesus shows you what to expect.
The Holy Spirit gives you what to say.**

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

God works completely different from the way the world and our sinful nature want to operate. On the one hand our sinful nature would have us believe the lie that everything is under our control – even our salvation – we can or have to work our way to God or earn our way, or make up for sins if we really even have them to balance the scales. On the other hand - our sinful nature would have us believe it's all by chance, out of our control and there is no absolute meaning, purpose or identity so eat, drink and be merry till you die. It doesn't want the truth. It doesn't want him!

The truth is we were dead in our transgressions and sins, helpless. We can't do anything for our salvation. In fact, in trying to do it we are blinding ourselves to the only One who can save us. What we can't do, God did by sending his own Son to live for us as our perfect substitute, to die for our sins on the cross paying our debt, our punishment, so that God forgives us. Jesus rose from the dead with power and authority so we *will not die but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done (Ps. 118:17)*. This is the identity and eternity changing message! People should thank us for sharing it and living it! But the world hates it. Jesus sent the twelve *"like sheep among wolves."* He sends us to be his ambassadors and suffer spiritually, mentally, emotionally, even physically because of Jesus as we live and proclaim him.

You are sheep among wolves. Jesus shows you what to expect. You'll be persecuted. But go. Persecution is not something you have to invite upon yourself. No need for sandwich boards and megaphones. Jesus says, *"Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."* Snakes don't often get in people's faces, but when confronted they often wisely flee from trouble, or if required, stand their ground. Doves don't start fights. They are the picture of innocence. And you're not just to look out for the random wolf. We are innocent sheep *"among the wolves"* – surrounded. You might think of yourself as a sitting duck or easy prey, and if you had been the 13th disciple that day you might have been tempted to say, "Hard pass" on Jesus' command, but remember who it is that sends you. *"I am sending you."* **Jesus Christ** sent the 12 and you.

And they went. They stood before councils, the Sanhedrin – think of John and Peter being flogged, or Paul standing before Kings and Governors and even Caesar himself. Some were released to go out again. Some were put to death.

Jesus was not asking them to do anything he was unwilling to do. What Jesus did makes no sense to our reason. What God comes down and humbles himself to take on flesh and live as one of his own under all the laws and suffering of this life? It is really “ungodlike” to our sensibilities! What God is willing pay debts and die so that rebels might live – forgiven, freed, eternity earned? Only the true God. Only our Savior Jesus Christ. He suffered the unimaginable debt and terror and hell we deserved. He died and then rose to prove He wins and we too will win. He wants others to know his love and his gift. As you represent him the world will hate you and even members of your own family will turn against you because you have him.

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me...” This is hard. The people closest to you in your life may turn on you. The early church and today’s atheist countries give plenty of examples of this. Paul himself hunted Christians before he came to know Christ. We are tempted to sinfully act surprised and sometimes shy away from speaking the truth in love to our own family or friends. We fail to confront a family member when they have crossed the line into sin or are even living in sin because we don’t want to risk the relationship. Fear of friction causes us to be afraid and even silence the word they need to hear. Sometimes we don’t want to live according to God’s commands because we are worried of wolves around us taking a bite out of our popularity, our acceptance in the world. God help us and forgive us. Jesus still sends you. He chooses you. He did not let suffering or death stop him from loving you and winning your forgiveness. Don’t let fear of friction or worry of wolves stop you from living as a Christian and speaking the truth. **Jesus shows you what to expect.**

The Holy Spirit gives you what to say. God used Martin Luther to speak the truth of his Word at the right time in the right place to bring about what we call “the Reformation.” He saw the church of his day preaching a different gospel – one that depended on our work to get right with God. The straw that broke the camel’s back was that the church was sanctioning the selling of forgiveness – pay money for a piece of paper and get forgiveness. Luther wrote against it because Paul said it Romans 3:28 – *“For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”* They refused to listen, excommunicated Luther, and branded him an outlaw. However, Christendom as a whole got to hear the Gospel – that our salvation, forgiveness and life rests on Jesus Christ alone, not our works.

God has given us his Holy Spirit and His Word - the word that the Holy Spirit uses to bring from death to life, and transform us daily to be more like our Savior. Study it. *But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* The Holy Spirit gave the disciples the Word. He had it written down for you! You do not need to worry about what to say. God’s given it to you. Speak the truth of his Word in love. You can’t control others’ reactions. The Holy Spirit will take care of it and take care of you. The Word of God has power and the Holy Spirit will use it and you.

So go. If persecuted and given opportunity, speak. The Holy Spirit will be with you. It’s ok to move on to the next place, the next group, the next city as Jesus says. *When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.* You don’t have to ask for persecution or wait for it. This will be the way it goes until the day Jesus calls us home.

You are really sheep among wolves. Jesus shows you what to expect so that you are not surprised or afraid. The one who sends you knows how to take care of you in life and in death. He walked the path first and he promises, *“but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* **The Holy Spirit gives you what to say.** He will bless you as you live the Word, share the Word and stand firm in him. He sends you. So go as the 12 did, Martin Luther did, Daniel did. You have him. Happy Reformation. Amen.