

061823 Sermon "Being Wise and Innocent" Matthew 10:16

A man was parking his car on the street. Then a boy came up and looked at it. The boy was admiring his nice car. The boy said to the man who finished parking and got out of his car. "Wow, you bought this car at a pretty high price, right?" Then the man proudly answered. "No, actually this car was given to me by my older brother." Upon hearing this, the boy immediately said, "I wish...".

The man thought this boy would say, "I wish I could... have a brother like that and get a nice car as a gift!" Who wouldn't want a nice gift?

Surprisingly, however, the boy continued to say: "I wish I could be that kind of older brother too. I have a younger brother who has a disability at home, and he can't even go outside to play. I wish I could be a big brother who can give nice things like this for my younger brother!"

Dear beloved, would you like to have an older brother like that? Or would you like to be like the older brother? Please think twice before answering! I sincerely pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that we do not vaguely envy others or become the object of others' envy, but that each and every one of us can exert a good influence of faith even in small things.

Matthew 10 records what Jesus instructed as he sent the twelve disciples for short-term training. It tells us what Jesus' discipleship should be, what to watch out for, and what to do, especially when persecuted. However, these words are not only applicable to the 12 disciples of Jesus at the time. Of course, this is primarily what Jesus said to his disciples, but secondarily, it is also what he said to all Christians who confess Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Because we are all given the same mission. The mission of being a witness of the Lord until the end of the world.

In verse 16, "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves; therefore be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

This verse can be divided into two parts centered on the conjunction "therefore". Jesus said. 'Behold, I am sending you...' To send in a Greek word is [apostello] which means to send or appoint. Jesus said, 'I'm sending you. I'm appointing you.'

If you look at verses recorded in the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are many stories that God called people and sent people. For example, God called Abraham and sent him away from his hometown to a new land God had appointed. God also sent the Israelites, who had been suffering from slavery in Egypt for 400 years, to the Promised Land. God sent the Jews, who had been captive in Babylon for 70 years, back to the land of Israel.

Even in Matthew 10, Jesus sent the disciples to each village and city for a certain period of time to train them. You and I are not only Christians in the church, but also Christians outside the church, that is, we are witnesses and disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world. So, if you look at the contents of the benediction, which is the last part of worship, you are basically being sent to the world, living like a Christian in your family, workplace, or neighborhood. I mean, with God's help.

Think of the days of Jeremiah. The Babylonians took the Jews to Babylon in order to destroy their culture, to destroy their faith. They assumed that if they moved into the city, they would assimilate and their children and certainly their grandchildren would worship the Babylonian gods and just lose their identity as Israel as the people of God.

And there were people who said, 'okay we don't want that to happen. So, when we get to Babylon because we've been taken there by force, let's stay outside. Stay outside the city of Babylon so we can keep our identity.' However, do you know what the Lord said to them? Basically, God said, 'I want you to move into the city but I want you to keep your identity. I want you to increase the numbers and keep your faith but at the same time I want you to engage. I want you to seek its peace and prosperity. I want you to pray to the Lord for it.' Engage at the same time be different. God did not want them to turn their backs on the world, but to participate in it. God hoped to change the world with good influence and achieve peace and prosperity there.

The same goes for us living in the 21st century. God wants us to be witnesses of the Lord outside the church, not just within the church. During the last three years of the pandemic, our activities have been significantly limited. Now we participate in CROP Hunger Walk in Bridgeport to end hunger and poverty in our community, India orphanage

mission (Basically, the Bible tells us to take care of orphans and widows), Cambodia mission to support Christian college women, Parish Court ministry (Our church and leaders have been working hard for the welfare of the elderly in our community for a long time.), and UMC Cooperative Parish ministry together in the future, so that we do what we can do not only within the church but also for the local community and distant mission field. Jesus wanted his disciples to proclaim, "the kingdom of God is at hand."

According to Matthew 10 today, Jesus does not say that we are to "become" sheep, but that when we go into the world in his obedience, we are in fact going out "as" sheep. Sheep is [probaton] in a Greek word, which is derived from the verb [probaino]. Literally, it means 'to go far, to get ahead.' Think about it! This word explains some of the characteristics of sheep! "Going far," it is so common to go far alone from the shepherd! Also, "go ahead." We're supposed to walk with the Lord, the Good Shepherd. He leads us and we follow him, but often times, we keep trying to get ahead of our Lord!

If the first half of today's text shows the look of our reality, the second half is telling us how our Christians should live in this reality! That way is 'wise and innocent'. It is often misunderstood because Jesus says to be wise like a serpent, which is often used in a negative connotation. In fact, the word translated "wise" in English is not [Sophia] in a Greek word, which corresponds to "wisdom" as we commonly know it, but the Greek word [phronimos] was used here. It means, thoughtful, prudent, and well-thought-out.

He also said to be innocent like a dove, but here the Greek word for innocent [akeraios] is used in two senses. 1. unmixed, without evil, without cunning. 2. Harmless. Ahead, wolves play a role in harming or preying on other fragile animals. But the meaning of being innocent here is to do no harm! Today's word of Jesus is to say, "be wise in goodness." When wisdom loses simplicity, it is easy to become cunning. Conversely, if being innocent lacks wisdom, it is easy to become foolishness.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, there are many characteristics of snakes, but among them, Jesus said to be prudent and careful. It's

never cunning! There are many characteristics of doves, but among them, Jesus said to be innocent! No foolishness at all! Jesus didn't say to choose one of these two in moderation~ but he was saying to keep both, being wise and innocent. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, with your family, with your business, with your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.