

Second Sunday After Pentecost

Year A RCL

June 14, 2020

North Fork Ministries

Gospel:

**Matthew 9:35-10:8(9-23)**

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. [Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

"See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes."]

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 Upon first reading this passage from Matthew, it is easy to think of Jesus as some sort of 1<sup>st</sup> century tour guide, or perhaps a wilderness outfitter, equipping travelers with the knowledge and provisions they would require on the missionary journey ahead of them - telling them how to clothe themselves and how they might expect to be received by the inhabitants of unfamiliar territory. But what we have here in Matthew's gospel is far more than an advice column. We have the Wisdom Jesus – the Jesus who was influenced by the wisdom literature and folklore passed on to him by ancient Jewish and Greek cultures and instilled in the collective unconscious of humanity in a primordial stage of development.

We heard Jesus instruct his disciples, "Go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel" "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." Over and over again, in holy scripture, animals, visions of creatures of the land and sea, are used by the compilers of sacred text to bring to life lessons the readers can not only understand and relate to, but that touches them in the depths of their being. A few thousand years ago, the people for whom these texts were first told lived in an agrarian society and were never far from a wilderness containing all manner of birds and beasts. So they shared their daily existence with wolves and sheep and serpents and doves and had an intimate knowledge of animal behavior.

Jesus and his listeners would also have been familiar with the ancient myths and legends that led to a familiarity with the symbolism and archetypal images associated with the animal world surrounding them. So when Jesus tells his disciples that he is sending them out "like sheep into the midst of wolves". And that they must "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves", the disciples would have immediately grasped the essence of Jesus' instruction. We inhabitants of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to dig a little deeper to gain some insight into Jesus' cryptic message.

In his exploration of the nature of the human soul, the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, brought to light the significance of animal imagery and the symbols associated with the myths that had been told about birds and beasts around campfires since the dawn of man.

Let's focus on the snake and the dove. Jung describes the dove and the snake as two halves of the human soul. In his book, *Memories Dreams and Reflections* – the two combine to create a wholeness. The snake can be thought of as the masculine principle that makes it possible for the dove, the feminine principle, to bring her characteristics to the forefront. The snake, in addition to the characteristic of wisdom that Jesus mentions, offers protection and discrimination. While the dove brings not only innocence, but love, fruitfulness, nourishment, and the promise of a new spring.

The challenge for us is what Jungians calls, "holding the tension of the opposites". We can't be a whole person if we cling to either our natural inclination to be either a snake or a dove. Both sides must be realized and developed if we are to live into our true calling. The opposite is called the shadow, the unintegrated part of ourselves, and as long as we remain cut off from a part of

the self, either because we consider that part of the self undesirable or find it unattainable, we will be ruled by it.

During these uncertain times we need to bring to bear all the God given resources we have within us. We can't ignore the shadow side of ourselves. We have to bring to light that within us that resides in the shade. Are you feeling serpent-like? Does it seem that your natural inclination is to be paranoid, distrustful, striking out at perceived enemies? Perhaps you need to integrate the dove side of your nature – seeking after hopefulness, trust, love.

Or perhaps your outer personality tends more toward that of the dove and you find yourself feeling overly vulnerable and weak. Your innocence may not have served you well. Then perhaps the wisdom, the alertness, the self-protection of the snake are qualities you should embrace.

If there has ever been a time when a restoration of the balance in our lives is needed. It is now. Both individually and as a society. We tend to choose one or the other – the snake or the dove. And that choice limits our own evolution as human beings and divides our society. It is our quest as humans, to learn about both sides of ourselves and incorporate them into our being.

Jesus wasn't just offering the 12 apostles pithy advice. Jesus was providing the disciples with a plan for transformation. He was telling them, and maybe us, that we are something different from what we thought. He is opening the door for us to realize who we really are.

I can't let this gospel story of Jesus' equipping his disciples for ministry pass by without telling you a story told to me by my friend and fellow priest, David Benham. His church was very mission oriented, seeking to respond in all kinds of ways to needs in the community around them. Much as we are seeking to respond to the multiple crises surrounding us.

When someone has an idea for a project, the church goes through a process they refer to as "sounding a call". It's a kind of litmus test to determine whether or not a particular proposal has sufficient merit to engage the congregation.

Anyone wishing to sound a call is asked to answer the following questions affirmatively:  
 Is the call incredibly Good News to you?  
 Is the call almost impossible to accomplish?  
 Is there a good chance that you will fail?

Anyone who, after sounding a call, moves forward with such a project has automatically made himself or herself completely vulnerable. In revealing what you regard as incredibly Good News, you declare what you are passionate about. In recognizing that the call is almost impossible, you disclose your own weakness and your dependence on God. And in being honest about the chances for success you acknowledge what a fool you really are.

The whole armor of God does not protect us from bad outcomes. The breastplate of

righteousness won't shield us from pain and failure. We are instead cloaked in our vulnerability, standing naked before God and the world. Yet it is in that helplessness that we find strength, wholeheartedness, and the courage to live fully into the life we are called to live.

In Exodus this morning we heard the voice of God instruct Moses to tell the people of Israel, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Jesus, by word and example, equips his followers for ministry. And by waking us up to the realization that if we know who we really are, we too can be lifted up on the wings of an eagle.