



2. Dances with Wolves

Luke 10:1-20

The March 1988 "Rotarian" tells about a bounty of \$5,000 offered for each wolf captured alive. It turned Sam and Jed into fortune hunters. Day and night they scoured the mountains and forests looking for their valuable prey. Exhausted one night, they fell asleep dreaming of their potential fortune. Suddenly, Sam awoke to see that they were surrounded by about fifty wolves with flaming eyes and bared teeth. He nudged his friend and said, "Jed, wake up! We're rich!"

We looked last week at how Jesus opened His disciples' eyes to see the harvest in front of them and realise that we are all called to do the easiest job in our Christian lives – to reap those the Holy Spirit is bringing to Christ. And we were encouraged to pray that the Lord would send workers – others as well as ourselves into the harvest field. The command was there – Go - I'm sending you.

And that has been the message for believers down the centuries – to go. For some it has meant mission overseas. For some it has been mission in a new community, but for most of us it just means that we harvest in the field God had put us in. And for us it means Walton, Felixstowe here and now. Some of us, like me have come because of a call. Some of us were born here. Others may wonder why they are here. And Jesus says – look around the harvest field and expect the harvest. That's my first point this morning:

◆ Be expectant

2 He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest. 3 Go! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. 4 Don't take a purse or a beggar's bag or shoes; don't stop to greet anyone on the road.

There isn't a harvest when no-one sees the crops are ready and the harvest is not brought in. The reason why there isn't a harvest of people in many neighbourhoods is that people just don't see the harvest and don't gather it. That's Britain, Suffolk, Felixstowe in 2008. It's not that people's hearts are harder or society is more unbelieving. Churches that see the harvest and gather it in do grow and there's churches around this area that are doing it.

I believe this statement of Jesus encourages us to be expectant. To expect a harvest to be there and to go and get it. It may be big, it may be small but we need to open our eyes to see it – it's there! And as I said last week, there's a significant one here in Maidstone Road. From the reaction I've got back, few of you seem to think that. But it's there and we need to open our eyes to it.

◆ Be Streetwise

I said that the reaping is easy. Make no mistake. It is when we have opened our eyes and prayed to the Lord of the Harvest. But Jesus alerts us to another truth of scripture. When we seek to reap, there are potential dangers. Last week in the evening we looked at Moses' first encounter with Pharaoh. It seemed that people thought that all Moses had to do was march into Pharaoh, demand their release and that would be that. What a crushing disappointment. The reverse happened and the people were burdened even more!

Satan never lets us take people from him willingly. We are in a spiritual battle and when we try to bring people to Christ, we will be opposed. It may be by the people we are trying to rescue, it may be by others, or it may be that we suffer a load of disappointments and problems we just can't bear. And we give up.

And Jesus knew this and gave us these words.:

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And as we read these words, maybe we are like many who think "well if it's dangerous, I'll not reap even though God says it's easy!"

We all know wolves are dangerous and Jesus compares us like lambs going out amongst wolves. And it's not like this Puma advertisement. Here the lamb and the wolf are inspecting this fine shoe.

It's perhaps more like the film, *Dances with Wolves*. There Kevin Costner has his pet wolf but it's about a man who befriends the Indians – befriends the enemy and they think he's pretty brave to have done that and they name him "Dances with Wolves". Yes we all know that wolves eat lambs. So why does Jesus give us these words?

There seem to me to be two things here. Firstly Jesus is encouraging us to be streetwise. We are called to reap, but don't place ourselves in a position where we are going to get "eaten". Being streetwise if you are on holiday (or in dodgy neighbourhoods) means making sure your valuables are out of sight and secure. It means that you have snatch proof bags, deep pockets. It means you avoid certain places at certain times. It means you don't wander around alone at night. We all know these. Streetwise keeps us safe and allows us what to do. We don't get "eaten".

It's the same in our Christian faith. We should be looking for a harvest to bring in, not placing ourselves in a position that will ruin us as Christians. Satan is out to get us. I think it goes almost without count the number of times I have come across Christians who have nearly (or have actually) shipwrecked their faith because they have not realised that they are not prepared for the people they are encountering. And as a result Satan gets them. It's like the person who wants to witness at work and does so *ad nauseam* to his workmates. He wonders why people then will have nothing to do with him in the office, or have lunch with him. He puts it down to persecution. But is it? There are ways of effectively reaching workmates – that isn't it.

Or take the person who tries to preach to his Muslim neighbours about Christ. He gets a bad reaction. He's spat at in the street. His car is vandalised. But he rejoices in his persecution. There is a way of reaching Muslim neighbours – that isn't it.

Or the student that does the old Creation and Evolution stuff with non-Christian students and ends up totally disillusioned with his own faith because they just tear him to pieces. There is a way of reaching students for Jesus (the most productive harvest field) – that isn't it.

Reaping is easy, but it requires some techniques. Be streetwise. If you want to reach people it is easy but we all need to be strong in our faith, prayerful in our lives, and prepared in our actions. Streetwise.

That being said, Satan will still oppose us. We need to understand that being vulnerable, being opposed, facing disappointment and the rest comes with the territory of all Christians. And if we want to see the blessing, we need to face the problems and take the risks. Jesus uses the word lambs here. This gives the passage its second meaning. A lamb was a sacrifice. Jesus was the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. He was prepared to sacrifice Himself to rescue us. And He did so willingly, and lovingly – facing all the risks and all the problems and all the pain. And now He commands us to be the lamb to our friends, our family, our neighbours.

It doesn't mean we are going to end up martyrs. When was the last time you heard someone from MRBC being martyred for their faith in Walton Hight Street? Quite. That said, there still are thousands of people each year who die because they are Christians and men and women who as missionaries are persecuted because they share Christ. The overwhelming majority are not white Europeans or Americans, they are Indian, Chinese, Indonesian, Pakistani and a whole host of others, martyred.

And all we are asked to do is be streetwise in a neighbourhood where the wolves are largely toothless.

Be Focussed

Jesus sends his disciples out along the road to towns and villages. Look what He asks them to do.

2 He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest. 3 Go! I am sending you like lambs among wolves. 4 Don't take a purse or a beggar's bag or shoes; don't stop to greet anyone on the road.

Seems a strange thing to say. They should take no money and no means to beg for it and don't hang around talking. They were called to focus on the task. They were sent out as itinerant evangelists. Itinerant Jewish evangelists were all about both getting money off people and making friends so that they could extend their influence. That was important because travelling rabbis could make quite a decent living out of preaching. Jesus didn't and he was encouraging His disciples to get on with the job in hand without worrying about cash and personal kudos.

Be focussed – don't be sidetracked. There are far more interesting things for us to do as Christians than reaping – aren't there? It's easy for us to convince ourselves that our time should be consumed with all sorts of areas of service in the church so we don't have time to reap. But is that just sidetracking from what we do. Or we say to ourselves – we don't have money for this and that so we can't afford mission.

But reaping requires no skill and actually requires no money either. We've come to think that mission requires resources. It does – just one – willing people. It costs nothing to be nice. It costs nothing to smile. It costs nothing to care. It costs nothing to be a friend who's there for someone. It costs nothing to love. What is easiest and cheapest to do – reaping – we still don't do. Why?

Perhaps it's because we realise, to us may cost everything. We are lambs amongst wolves and love can be costly, caring can be costly, but we have a Saviour, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world who found redeeming us costly. What He asks us to do as we go and follow Him in Walton, is cheap by comparison.

Let's pray.

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