

1) *See, I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves.*

That's what Jesus warns, as he deploys a team of envoys to proclaim the Reign of God.
See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions.

That's what He tells His team upon their return.

Lambs, wolves, snakes, scorpions—Do you see what I see? It's a real ZOO!

And it's not just an odd amalgamation of living creature METAPHORS that Jesus mixes.

He sounds like He's sending a mixed MESSAGE as well.

Now—you can't fault Jesus for failing to be candid

about the resistance his emissaries will encounter, the dangers they will face.

Yet He doesn't authorize them any self-protection.

He won't even let them carry necessities for the journey—

let alone resources they'd seem to need for their mission.

He dispatches them not only as defenseless,

but as dependent on the ones they're sent to help.

To revert to His odd metaphors, if they go out like lambs among wolves;

where will they find what it takes to tread on snakes and scorpions?

2) Puzzling though the metaphors and marching orders that Jesus gives may be;
these signal another, far deeper disconnect—

one that goes to the heart of their mission—It's a PEACE mission.

The preaching and teaching, healing and exorcising they're supposed to do—

these are only tactics in a broad strategic peace initiative that is unconventional at best.

PEACE?

- Peace is an ideal we can dream of, hope for, well-wish in greetings to each other.
- Peace can be aimed at, worked toward, fought and died to win.
- You can surrender unconditionally in seeking to gain it.
- You can negotiate, accept, or renege on its terms.

But peace isn't something you just up and announce—peace isn't simply “said and done.”

In the story Luke tells us, however, Jesus begs to differ.

3) *PEACE*, he tells his agents, *is, literally, a GIVEN.*

You can share it with others; but, come what may, it's yours, no matter what.

If the peace you share is sent back marked REJECTED,

it's no less yours for having tried to give it.

These messengers are to announce, in no uncertain terms, that God's Reign is near.

The Reign of God is the PEACE of God; and THAT peace JUST IS.

Human effort can recognize and honor it; ignore it or repudiate it.

But human effort can neither make it or unmake it. It's just a God-Given FACT.

A FACT that will make or unmake US, depending on how we deal with what we're given.

- 4) So, these 70 Peace Agents whom Jesus commissions aren't charged with making peace happen. They are sent to do what they can to assist others in making connection with the Peace that IS. A connection with the already present Peace of God.
- In a society where combat is constant, THAT peace can be hard to see. To help folks make the connection, the Peace Agents are commanded to practice it in their own connections with those to whom they name and show it. The single most critical element in rendering this peace announcement authentic and credible? Their willingness to be vulnerable to those with whom they speak and work. Teaching, preaching, healing, exorcising—these are all high-visibility undertakings. They can easily appear as controlling power moves (even if they are needed and welcomed). To be perceived as being in control, however, is no way to convey the message that God's Peace is not an OVERPOWERING but an UNDERGIRDING Peace. Peace that is or even seems imposed is not really peace at all.
- So, daunting though their marching orders are, what these Peace Agents of Jesus are not allowed to take—purse, bag, sandals—this sends a signal, loud and clear, that the messengers don't hold all the power cards. And what these Peace Agents are commanded to do—accept hospitality that is ready to hand, eat what's put before them, no matter what it is—these injunctions make it clear that mutual dependence is a signature structure of communities that practice the gift of God's Peace.
- 5) As the story unfolds, the 70 Peace Agents, apparently, do their job. As a result of their efforts, pockets of God's Peace-Keeping pop up here and there. Back home the agents come, and are they pumped: *We did it! We did it! Our mission was successful! Are we GOOD or WHAT?* Jesus gives them space for exultation—they did, after all, do exactly as He ordered. He agrees that the Peace they have proclaimed has brought down Satan—who is the personification of divine power perverted. But then Jesus gently warns: *Don't let this Peace Power go to your head. Besting Satan, in itself, is inconsequential. What really counts is that, in making connection with those whom you meet; you manifest and solidify your connection with the Peace of Heaven.*
- To revisit one more time the mixed metaphors Jesus uses: Counterintuitive though it sounds, the ONLY way to tread on Satanic snakes and scorpions, is to engage with others in the kind of vulnerability that is symbolized by sheep. And to do that even in the presence of—especially in the presence of—surrounding wolves.
- 6) A good thing, don't you think, that Jesus sends out His Peace Agents not in isolation, but in teams of two? One of them can attend directly to cultivating Peace connections while the other keeps a sharp eye out for how best to dodge the wolves. This mutual dependence further models the kind of Peace that they announce. A Peace not wished for, worked for, negotiated, or won—and thus a peace always under threat of being lost.

Rather, this mutual dependence is a Peace Practice, that,
can everywhere and always be undertaken,
as we connect with others in shared vulnerability and care.

St. Paul puts it well, and, for once, he puts it simply:

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

7) *See, says Jesus, I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves.*

So, in the world where peace seems to be dictated by the whims of those wolves;
we radically refocus our whole way of seeing—God's peace is a GIVEN.

Going out together, we are Peace Agents whom God means to send—So, two questions:

- 1) What seemingly essential baggage might get in the way, and needs leaving behind?
- 2) How can we be best be vulnerable to those with whom we meet?

That, says Jesus, is the way, the best way, perhaps the only way to give God's peace a chance.