

In the opening year of WW II, newly elected Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, delivered his inaugural speech to the House of Commons. His speech was given in the hopes of rallying together the people of the United Kingdom. His new policy was simple: to wage war against tyranny—by land, by sea, by air, by any means necessary. It was during this speech that Churchill said his now famous words: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.” For his unwillingness to compromise, for his ability to foresee the approaching danger and confront it with sober resolve, Churchill has been celebrated. I too have always admired his courage in giving this speech. It was, after all, his first speech, and he had no idea how it would be received. And yet, he spoke plainly, honestly, straightforwardly. We could all benefit from a few more people like that in this world today. No double speech or trickery, only truth. Churchill’s great speech came to my mind as I contemplated the words of Jesus this morning: “Behold, I send you out as sheep amongst the wolves”. How much more honest could Jesus have been with his followers about the real dangers that lay ahead of them? You will be sheep amongst wolves are Jesus’ parting words to the 12 disciples whom He sent out into the world. A great portion of Jesus’ ministry was devoted to preparing His disciples to continue His work after He had departed from this earthly realm. Right before His own death and resurrection, and before sending them out permanently under the banner of the Great Commission, Jesus sent His disciples out on a training exercise. He didn’t send them very far or for very long, but He did send them to do on a small scale what would one day be the universal mission of the Christian Church: “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations by baptizing, preaching, teaching and observing all that I have commanded you”. And so, these disciples went forth to practice what He preached, to practice what they had learned, and then to return to their Teacher and share their experiences. Before leaving, Jesus provided His followers with a few parting words. These words were not all that encouraging, but they did have the benefit of being true: “Behold, I send you out as sheep amongst wolves”. Jesus’ honesty is refreshing even if His words are intimidating. Too often I think the Church is concerned with taming the wolves, appealing to them, accepting them, befriending them, that it fails to warn the sheep of the real dangers lurking and prowling in the night. And this is a great disservice to God’s people, who need to be constantly reminded of just how dangerous this world really is, and how quickly a solitary lamb can get lost or separated from the flock. Stay together, Christ says, work together, dwell together, for there is safety in numbers. “Behold I send you out as

sheep amongst wolves”. This is not a possibility, but a reality. You are going out amongst the wolves. The danger is not in the distant future, but is a present right here, right now. There is no escaping the danger, there is no hiding from it. The threat is real and all God’s people should be mindful of Christ’s warning lest we stumble and fall. The world is a scary place. Mankind lives by preying on each other so who can you really trust? Being a Christian makes it even harder to trust someone. There are many in this world who live to proclaim the death of God, who work to see to it that God’s Church is ruined and God’s people discredited. Sometimes the wolves are on the outside, but what’s even scarier is sometimes they are hiding in plain sight, amongst God’s chosen flock, even within ourselves. You don’t know yourself well enough until you know the darkness that dwells within you. We should in one sense live in terror of what we are capable of lest we become the very predator we try to avoid. We all have it in us to be the lamb or the wolf. And the real battle for the soul is which side of us will have the preeminence in this life.

If the world is so full of danger, why does the Lord send us out? Why does He not instruct us to stay nestled up close beside Him? Why would he dare risk our eternal welfare by sending us out amongst those who seek our demise? Are we not, then, like lambs led to the slaughter? In a word, “yes!” But God has determined the danger is worth the risk. For there are many in this world who are in desperate need of God’s embrace; there are many who need to hear God’s message of salvation, feel the joy of His forgiveness, and experience His peace; There are many whom God desires to include in His pasture, and God commissions us to be His presence. We won’t always be successful, chances are we will fail more often than we succeed, but God’s measure of success is much different than ours- for one sinner who repents heaven rejoices. And though for this one, He asks a great deal of us, He does not send us out as sheep without a Shepherd. For Christ is our Good Shepherd and He goes out ahead of us. Christ knows His sheep. He lays down His life for His sheep, and He promises not one of God’s precious lambs will be snatched from His hand. That’s the promise we have from our Good Shepherd. For now, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we must live amongst the wolves, but we are fated for the safety of the greener pastures of Paradise. In this, we place our hope. Until then, though, let us enter the killing fields, and not be cowards. Amen.