

On May 13th 1940, in the first year of WW II, newly elected Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, delivered his first speech in office to the House of Commons. His speech was given in the hopes of rallying together the people of the United Kingdom and garnering support for his new form of government and leadership. His new policy was simple and straightforward: to wage war against tyranny- by land, by sea, by air, and by any means necessary. It is within this historical context that Churchill said his now famous words to his cabinet: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.” For his unwillingness to compromise, for his ability to see the end and then execute a strategy to obtain that end, Churchill has been praised and commended. I 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. But despite the odds, he spoke plainly, and we could benefit from a few more people in this world who are willing to follow in kind. No double speech, no trickery or lies, only transparency and brutal honesty about the way things are. Churchill’s great speech came to my mind as I contemplated the words of Jesus this morning: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of 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 harvest field. A great portion of Jesus’ ministry was devoted to preparing His disciples to do the Lord’s work after He had departed from this earthly realm. Thus, before Jesus’ death and resurrection, and in anticipation of sending them out under the banner of the Great Commission, Jesus sent His disciples out on a training mission. 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 were sent out to practice what they had learned, and then to return to their Master and talk about 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 too concerned with taming the wolves, appealing to them, placating them, accepting treating them as pets that it fails to warn the sheep of their danger; the real dangers that lurk just behind the cover of darkness. 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, there is safety in numbers. “Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of 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 present 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. *Homo homini lupus est* roughly translated means, “Man is wolf to man”. Mankind lives by preying on each other and 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 sometimes they are hiding in plain sight, amongst God’s chosen flock. Wolves in sheep’s clothing, as they are called. As the sheep of God’s pasture we should keep constant vigilance lest we become one, whom the wolves pull down. Or worse yet, we become a wolf ourselves. Stalking, exploiting, and devouring other sheep.

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 into a Christ-rejecting, God-hating world that delights in shaking the foundations of our faith? Are we not, then, like lambs being sent out to the slaughter? In a word, “yes!” The danger is worth the risk though. 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, which surpasses all understanding. There are many whom God desires to include in His pasture and become sheep of His hand. And God sends us out to be His presence in this scary world of ours; to be His voice of compassion and love, His hands of mercy, and His feet, which carry the good news to the ends of the world. And though He asks these things of us, He does not send us out as sheep without a shepherd. For Christ is our Good Shepherd and He goes out ahead, leading us along the way. Christ knows His sheep, He loves 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 and security of the greener pastures of eternity. In this we place our hope. Until then, though, let us enter the fray, fight the good fight of faith and not be cowards. Amen.