

Grace Episcopal Church  
Proper 6, Third Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev Brian C Justice

Psalm 100  
Exodus 19.2-8  
Romans 5.1-8  
Matthew 9.35-10.23

### The Serpent and The Dove

“I am sending you out ... so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

These are the instructions that Jesus gives us as he sends us out to love and to serve the world.

The serpent represents wisdom; the dove represents innocence.

That we are to be both may seem confusing and contradictory.

We associate wisdom with knowledge, with the scars won through suffering, with the lessons learned through experience, with age.

We associate innocence with purity, with simplicity of heart, with blamelessness of intent, with youth.

Wisdom and innocence, the serpent and the dove?

They do not seem to have anything in common.

And yet, to follow the Master on the Way, wisdom and innocence are both required.

We must be the serpent and the dove at the same time.

They are not two; they are one.

What at first appears to us as opposite traits are in fact integrated powers of the enlightened mind.

Without the serpent, religion becomes naïve, detached, imaginary, and useless.

Without the dove, religion becomes compulsive, reactionary, manipulative, and mean.

With the serpent and the dove together, religion becomes prophetic but compassionate, powerful but jolly, wise but innocent.

As the serpent and the dove at the same time, you and I can see what Jesus sees: that the harvest is plentiful.

Jesus sees opportunity everywhere, openings everywhere, possibility everywhere. He says,

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.

Translated into our lives, the instructions of Jesus might look like this,

As you go, be the good news that people are so desperate for, let people see the Kingdom of Heaven in your eyes. Sit with the sick, raise the dead-hearted back to life through your love, cleanse your house of guilt and worry, cast out the fear of this world. You have been given everything, go, give it away. And sing out loud as you go ...

Jesus, who is wild and free, always creates a lot out of a little because God is everywhere, because grace is everywhere, because the harvest is plentiful.

But we live in a culture that is trying to trick you, a culture whose political and economic systems teach scarcity, not abundance.

"There's not enough," we're told.

"We're under siege," we're told.

"This is ours," we're told.

"The harvest is scarce," we're told.

"Be afraid," we're told.

I'm sorry.

But no.

If we are to love God and love our neighbor in a culture that teaches *that* worldview, then we really are like sheep among wolves.

And so, we must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Amen.