

4 July 2010
Pentecost 6

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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"The Lamb Wins!"
Text: Luke 10:1-20

(This is a re-preachment of my sermon from three years ago. It is one of my favorite sermons, and as my flock has changed so much over the past three years, I believe its message still important and a good explication of the Gospel for the day.)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In sports and in life, there are many mismatches; but none as great as the one we heard of today: lambs against wolves. For that is no contest, but a bloodbath. That's not called competition, but mealtime. Lambs have no defense against the ravenous jaws and sharp teeth of wolves. They can't outrun them, they can't outfight them, there is no negotiating with them. There is only one thing wolves see in sheep – *lunch*.

So imagine what was going through the heads of those 72 disciples when our Lord said: **"Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."** Fear, doubt? Such a statement is not good news. And *then* Jesus instructs them, **"Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road."** For in this battle in which they are about to engage, they will not need these things. They will, in fact, do them no good. They are to go only to feed the wolves.

But although Jesus sends the 72 out empty-handed, notice that He does not send them out with nothing. It's just that instead of relying on the things and wisdom of this world, they are to take only what He gives them to take and speak only what He gives them to speak. Not their words but His. Not their authority but His. Not their strength but His. And so as they go they are not to **fight** the wolves, but **feed** them the Word of God. They are to **preach peace, heal the sick, and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near to you.**

And with that they go. We're not told how long they were gone, but when they return we find out that in this battle of Lamb versus wolf, the Lamb wins! All 72 return – not one is lost! – and they joyously report: **"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!"** To which Jesus replies, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** Or in other words, this victory is no surprise to Him. As the 72 went out, He saw each and every battle, each and every victory, for He was with each

and every one. For while Jesus sends out 72 men, He truly does not send out 72 lambs, *but really only one* – Himself, going through the preaching of the 72. Where they go, He goes with them. And as they feed the wolves with His Word, He works through their word, felling Satan and his kingdom. For as He promised: ***he who hears you hears me.***

And still today this is true. Which is a good thing, because the frightening, sinful wolves of which we heard today are not just *out there* . . . **Oh, what big teeth you have.** Yes, you. And me. Just ask the person whose reputation you delightfully devoured with your gossiping tongue. Just ask that family member you chewed out simply because things weren't going your way. Just ask anyone who has seen you bear your fangs so you would get what you wanted, when you wanted, in the way you wanted. Just think of the person you've been prowling around lately, looking for the right moment to pounce. And what about all the biting and devouring that now happens on the internet, to which you have perhaps added your uncharitable teeth! So quickly, so easily, so *anonymously*.

But not so anonymously to our Lord, who knows your heart, your mind, and all the wolfish sin in you which you try so hard to hide from others. **Repent.** And instead of biting and devouring one another, eat the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For still today our Lord goes out in the midst of wolves through the preaching of His Word, to be devoured by us wolves, *that we be wolves no more* – not by evolution, or improvement, or progress, or counseling, or the power of positive thinking, but born again as lambs by the forgiveness of our sins. The forgiveness that brings peace to our troubled hearts, makes divine children out of beastly offspring, and brings saints out of sinners.

And that is what has been done for you, for so you have been forgiven. For still today our Lord sends out His 72, to every corner of the world, to speak His Word and throw down Satan in the forgiveness of sins. I don't know the names of them all, the countless number of "72's" across the centuries – but I know the name of the One who speaks through them all, and works through them all, and gives life through them all. The One whose hand still baptizes, the One whose Word still absolves, the One who still gives His once crucified body and blood into our mouths. The Lamb of God still fulfilling His promise to feed the wolves, to feed us, that we be wolves no more.

Which is why Satan loves it – absolutely loves it! – when we in the Church rely on anything and everything but the Word. And why he is always tempting us to do so. To do things our way; thinking that we can do it better; that if we just use the right techniques or gimmicks or slogans, we can make the Church bigger, and better. To rely on our own wisdom and ways. **No.** It took a cross to save us, to free us, to forgive us, *and it still does.* So ***do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you.*** Or

today perhaps that would translate: Do not rejoice in bigness or success; do not rejoice in power and glory; do not rejoice in authority or the admiration of the world. **But rejoice that your names are written in heaven.** Rejoice that salvation and peace have been given to you. Rejoice that you are in the Lamb, and the Lamb is in you.

For in the end, that's all that matters and all that lasts. The love and admiration and tastes of the world come and go, and wolves that are friends one day may turn on you the next. But the peace and life of the Lord endures forever. For He knows what it's like to be a lamb among wolves. He felt the fangs, suffered the worst the world and Satan had to offer, entered the abyss of death, and then rose to life again. The conquered, now the Conqueror. The devoured, now the Devourer. The crucified, now the Victor. Not for Himself, but for you. That His death be your death and His life your life. That you be no longer wolves, but that you are what you eat – sons of God, and lambs in the flock of your Good Shepherd.

Which means that there are going to be times when the wolves of the world lick their chops over *you*, and see in you a tasty morsel, delighted that you have given up your fangs for forgiveness, and your claws for the cross. And they'll think you foolish, and you'll be tempted to take back your forgiveness and take up your fangs and claws and defend yourself. But at such times, remember who you are in Christ Jesus. And remember that the best way to fight the wolves is to feed the wolves. To feed them the Word and forgiveness of the Lamb who fights for you, and who is victorious. You are not alone. The kingdom of God has come near to you, for you are in the Lamb and the Lamb is in you.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.