

## **“The Wolves That We Have Created”**

**Luke 10:1–11, 16–20**

**Michael Hood**

**First Baptist Church, Raleigh**

**July 3, 2022**

Friends, happy July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. I will be honest with you. It was a hard week to write a sermon. I have had a lot of strong emotions, mixed emotions, and opinions about the choices made by the Supreme Court this week, and the hearings around the January 6<sup>th</sup> event. While I do love our nation; go ‘Merica! It is difficult to stand up here and speak on a national holiday when the lines between faith, politics, morals and ethics are all blending in a way that is... flammable really.

You have heard me preach enough to know I don’t shy away from the juicy stuff. Today I want to embrace the difficult topics, but I remember growing up with people always telling me what to believe about difficult topics without inviting me into conversation or teaching me how to have conversation so I can form my own beliefs. I hope that’s what happens today, that we are invited into conversation.

There you have it. We’re going to talk about it, but I wanted to be upfront and honest that this week is heavy and difficult and so I think it would be advantageous to start off light. I would say I need a vacation, but I just got back from one, and I think I’m still glowing, like a cat on windowsill. I need the essence of my vacation. So, in the spirit of magic and delight and joy we’re going to talk about Disney movies, ok? Ok.

Here’s why:

Just coming off our Disney World vacation, I wanted to watch some Disney movies that I hadn’t seen yet. So, Sara and I sat down and watched one that has stuck with me. We watched *Raya and the Last Dragon*. I think it is a sleeper Disney movie really. Who has seen it? It doesn’t have a singalong soundtrack, so I understand if you skipped it. But you should watch it because it is remarkable movie in my opinion.

My favorite part of the movie is the villain of the film. The true villain is called the Druun. This isn't a spoiler, if you watch the first five minutes of the film it tells you all of this. The Druun is not a person or people. It is a monstrous cloud that consumes people and turns them to stone. And the few who aren't turned to stone are bound to a fate of pneumo ultra-microscopic silico volcano coniosis: a disease where your lungs are inflamed from too much dust.

The Druun is this plague-like entity that is a physical manifestation of human discord and distrust. It consumes everything until the world is bare and empty.

It is compelling to me because the true villain in the world is not a person or tribe, but the manifestation of discord created by humanity itself. This is a complex narrative move that Disney has taken in the last decade with many of its stories that I love.

My top Disney movies at this moment are this; you ready? Frozen II and Moana. Those movies make me *weep*. When Elsa is on that horse and "Show Yourself" starts, UGH! or when Moana realizes who Te Fiti really is...

If your eyes are dry in those moments, then someone needs to resuscitate you.

All three of these movies share this complex narrative where there are obvious conflicts between the characters but the true issues at hand are the community-wide ramifications of our lives when we seek to have power and control over one another, and when we seek our own self-centered desires of what we believe is prosperity for *us* over the good of our neighbors.

These stories teach us how to navigate conflict and relationship within our communities while tearing down constructs that divide us and how to pursue growth and reconciliation. On weeks like this those stories hit like gospel and we need those stories. Much like that other beloved story of mine.

The story of Jesus speaks volumes on how we should navigate times of conflict in a way that is faithful to the call of discipleship. So, if you'll indulge me, let's look at the story our scripture presents to us today.

I'm going to go *real* Baptist today. What I want to do is give you three things from our gospel lesson today that will hopefully compel us and help us enter

conversation about the things going on in our world as a church and within our individual communities in a way that I think is faithful to the call of Jesus. If you so desire, it might be helpful if you follow along and look at the story in the Bible with me as we go through it. Much like the stories we've already spoken about, this Gospel lesson spurs us towards practical ways of *faithfully* navigating times of conflict like we find ourselves in today. Are we ready?

If I had glasses that made me look smart this would be the point where I gently slide them on and off as I speak

Point number one: We are called to be in conversation.

<sup>3</sup>“Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, (can't even wear shoes — that's tough) and greet no one on the road. (Here we go)<sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, *first say*”

Jesus tells his disciples (that's us) to *go into* a community and then do what? *First Say*. I think it is important for us to realize that conversation *is* action. If our work is not coupled with conversation, then we become imbalanced and disjointed. A conversation about anti-racism deserves to be coupled with work towards anti-racism. Work to clothe our community deserves to be coupled with honest and raw conversation about why that is a need in our community and the cycles of poverty that generate that need.

This is our baseline; Jesus calls us to enter the life of the world, and to care about what is happening. The Church should move towards the conversations happening in our world, not the other way around. If we want to be a Church that responds to the call of Jesus; we cannot avoid issues at hand. Skirting around real-life conversations in our world is not a faithful response to the call of Jesus.

So, if we establish that as baseline — that we need to have conversation about these things with ourselves and within our communities — then *how* do we do that? How do we approach these hair-trigger conversations when they come up with family, with friends, church members, co-workers, people on the internet?

Point number two: Lead with peace

“<sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ <sup>6</sup> And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you.

Have you ever felt attacked by someone who wants to make a point and wants to convince you of something? It never works, and it is always the worst. Don’t be like that — lead with peace.

Ultimately our goal is to share the news and show that the Kingdom of God is near. We must lead with peace. If we do not enter conversation with our goal being peace, reconciliation and compassion, then we will fail. It is not faithful to the call of Jesus. Lead with peace and if the other does not desire those things, it will be obvious.

In Raya’s story there is part where a character is so blinded by their rage towards another that they do not realize, or not care that the world around them is literally collapsing on top of people; leaving their friends to do deal with it.

In the Frozen saga, the major issues are generated by the desire of people to have power and control over another

In Moana, disaster is generated by one person’s desire for admiration and prosperity rather than the good of the earth.

The true villains are the circumstances we create when we choose to not lead with peace in our lives and in our conversations. Jesus is sending us like lambs into wolves, but it is the wolves that we’ve created when we do not lead with peace.

The world is on fire right now, but we must “first say peace.”

Please hear me clearly here though; Peace is not the avoidance of conflict; it is faithful navigation of it.

Point number three: Jesus does not expect us to avoid conflict and tension.”

<sup>8</sup>“Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The

kingdom of God has come near to you.’<sup>10</sup> But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say,<sup>11</sup> ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’”

Jesus doesn’t expect his disciples to remove themselves completely from conflict or tension. He calls them to stand their ground, and if it doesn’t work, move on to the next one. When we get in conversation, we have to learn how to faithfully navigate it, and I have an illustration that might help.

Find someone in the crowd. Put your hands like a fist against mine. When I push; what is your first instinct? *Push back*

What do you think my response is going to be?  
I push back harder; then what happens.

*Strained:* Imagine if this were a conversation. How do you think it is going? Not productive right? When you put energy into something, you will get a similar reaction.

Trying to “win” is not the way; I did not lead with peace.

Ok now you push first, and push hard this time ok?  
*Let them run over you.*

This is not peace, and this is not navigating tension faithfully. Avoidance in the face of tension only sets me back and keeps me ill-prepared for the next time.

But what about this: *Push a little.* What happens if I simply meet what they are giving me; enough to stand my ground, but not try and agitate or run over. How does this feel? In this way, even though there is tension, we are actually supporting one another. If this were a conversation, do you think it would be productive? Remember that.

Finally, there will be times where we need to move on. *Push hard, c’mon you can do more that!* Step aside.

I felt when there was too much, where balance and peace wasn’t an option.

So, I simply stepped aside, with my ground; still firmly planted and able to say; the Kingdom of God is near.

Peace is not the avoidance of conflict; but the faithful navigation of it.

I know that we as a church want to make an impact in our community. I hope that as things develop in our community, and as conversations (even if they are tense) start happening around us, we embrace them rather than try to step around them. We must! The church should be chasing down the conversations that are happening in our world; they shouldn't be chasing the church down.

We can't avoid the tension generating conversations about racism, LGBTQ inclusion, gun violence, environmental crisis, faith and politics, how we interpret scripture . . . you name it. Our good work deserves conversation, Bible study, film study, book groups, small groups about these things.

Avoidance in our lives doesn't set us up for faithful response to the needs of our community. And this church doesn't have a history of avoidance, But I pray that this generation lives up to that heritage as we enter a new era in our national life and our faith life. Amen.

Go now and embrace the world you are in

Lead with peace

And choose not to avoid the call of God in your life, even when it comes with tension

May the God who created you, who has redeemed you, and continually sustains you, go with you. Amen.