



SUCCESS

AND THE **SHAPE**

OF LIFE

Snakes and Doves

Matthew 10:16-20

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¹⁶ "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

The expectation from the “world of wolves” we’re sent into is that we just... become wolves!



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Instead, Jesus sends us out as sheep *among* the wolves.





be as
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and as
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as
doves



Matthew 10:16

shrewd = wise, sensible, and prudent

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The word communicates the idea of practical and discerning wisdom being applied to whatever circumstances are presented.

Doves symbolized purity, gentleness, peace, and faithfulness.



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In other places in Scripture, doves are thought of as “light-hearted” in a sense... even “silly.”



The Greek for "innocent" literally translates as "not mixed" or "not mingled."



“Life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony.”

(Martin Luther King Jr.)

Jesus is forming disciples who can remain loving without becoming naïve, and courageous without becoming cruel.

Fasting



We don't have to be controlled
by our appetites.



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by our appetites.

Discomfort won't destroy us.



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by our appetites.

Discomfort won't destroy us.

Desires can be tamed and
gratification can be delayed.



Isaiah 58:3-5

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³ 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴ Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Isaiah 58:3-5

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⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

Isaiah 58:6-10

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⁶ “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Isaiah 58:6-10

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⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

Isaiah 58:6-10

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“If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

One expectation of fasting is that it “toughens us up” and makes us aware of the kind of hurt and hunger present in our world.



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Feasting



Acts 10:1-5

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At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Acts 10:1-5

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⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.

Acts 10:19-23

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¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

Acts 10:19-23

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²² The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Acts 10:23-28

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The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along.²⁴ The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.

Acts 10:23-28

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²⁶ But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." ²⁷ While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸ He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean."

Distance allows us to hold onto our abstract assumptions about people. But, the sense of presence we experience in hospitality opens the way for tenderness.

After Jesus tells his followers to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,” he then warns them: people will not be happy about you following this “third way.”

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“Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.”

Closing Reflections



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Give thanks that you are a sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd and that you can fully trust God to provide and lead.

Closing Reflections



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Which is more challenging for you: the shrewdness of a snake or the innocence of a dove? Ask God to strengthen you in whichever area is weakest.

Closing Reflections



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Invite the Spirit to guide you into some form of fasting this week, keeping in mind the exhortation from Isaiah.

Closing Reflections



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How can you engage in the practice of hospitality sometime in the coming days or weeks?



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