

Rejoice your names are written in heaven. Our names are still written also here on earth. Families gather, the years go by, we can see the changes, especially in grandparent's faces. Most of you look too young to remember the bicentennial celebration of our country, even the bicentennial train. Now 46 yrs ago. **Lambs in the midst of wolves.** Farmers, shopkeepers might have felt like that going up against a professional army at the time of Revolutionary War.

Also 246 yrs. ago, I've told you this, great story, at a Lutheran church in Virginia, Pastor Muhlenberg began his sermon from Ecc., **To everything there is a season...**"; after reading the 8th verse, **a time of war, a time of peace,** he declared, "And this is the time of war," remove his vestments to reveal a Colonel's uniform. Personally requested, commissioned to serve by G. Washington. Outside the church door the drums began to roll, as men turned to kiss their wives, hugged their children, walked down the aisle to enlist. 300 men. By God's grace that won't happen today but we're all still on the battlefield. **Lambs in the midst of wolves.**

Christianity in our land is faced with many changes as we are a minority, even unwelcome minority, in a nation intent upon ridding Christian identity and morality as if it, we are the problem to freedom.

When everyone does what is right in their own eyes, not only Christianity suffers but our national identity, our common life of morality decays. Pray we remain faithful enough, strong enough to speak forth His Word of rescue to a nation intent upon hurting itself.

Jesus today speaks of rejection, battles that take place in His Kingdom because -His Word preached. For those who want just the loving, tolerant Jesus, His Words there are very sharp, harsh warnings of sin, even evokes Sodom and everybody knows what that means.

I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. What the disciples must have been thinking. Lambs against wolves isn't good news, isn't a good plan, but it's Jesus plan, so it's the best plan. Jesus instructs them, in this endeavor, this battle, you go out empty-handed. Notice, He doesn't send them out with nothing. It's just, instead of relying on things, wisdom of this world, they're to take only what He gives them, speak only what He gives them to speak. Not their words but His. Not their authority but His. Not their strength but His. **Preach peace, heal the sick, proclaim the kingdom of God is here.** Still today, His Word and Sacrament, His authority to forgive, His gifts – still sufficient for you; all that is needed; He takes care of all things. For in His preaching He still brings the peace, healing, not of this world, but of His kingdom, what you truly need. You too as His dear lamb go among wolves. Fight. Stand firm. He is with you. Bringing His kingdom still today among the wolves. Which is a good thing.

Like many great parts of Scripture, two things here, there's a beautiful depth that you are His dear lamb and also to see yourself- the frightening, sinful wolves aren't just out there.... Yes, you. Wolves, devouring reputations, waiting to pounce on others shortcomings, weaknesses; chewing into family members, bearing your fangs at others, uncharitable teeth to feed your wants. Wolves who fall short in bearing other's burdens. We're not as innocent as we want others to think. We aren't even as good as we think. You may fool others, but He knows you too well.

Still today our Lord goes out in the midst of wolves thru preaching of His Word, that we be wolves no more -not by our choice or self-improvement, our progress or counseling, or positive thinking, but by the power of His Word, a life of repentance, daily renewal of baptismal waters, continually making you divine lambs, saints out of sinners, to call you His beloved flock.

Rejoice, your names are written in heaven. Do you grasp what our Lord tells you? Join with angels, archangels, all the company of heaven, Christ is yours.

For in the end, that's all that matters, all that lasts. He gave His life to you. Called you in His harvest. He appeases the Father's wrath so you could have - peace. That His death be your death; His life your life.

Peace be to this house. This place where God dwells in His grace, where He comes. He has won you people who were no people, to be His people. Let the dust and the ashes of the saints cling to your feet. This is no mere building. This is the house of God. Let no one say: "It's nothing more than wood and stone, mortar and paint. It will burn on the last day." Indeed, it will, but this is a holy place. This place, this people, belong to God. For wherever God gives Himself to people in Word and Sacrament, that is a place outside of earth and time; a place where Lambs are brought to heaven and relieved of sin and its burdens; where they're given a glimpse of the future and a taste of His love. His Word endures forever. It will not burn. It will not pass away. **Peace be to this house!** Where sons and daughters of peace are born and live here; beloved lambs, the fruit of His harvest.

The harvest is plentiful, but not all are yet in. He is extravagant in His mercy. He will bring all His children home. The Harvest is His. He'll bring it in. There's no stopping it. The gates of Hell shall not prevail. The Kingdom of God is here. You have His Word and protection in this battle. The demons flee, even subject to you who bears His name. Sickness will not last. Nothing can truly harm you. Death will not overcome. Your time, your name written on earth, your days, 4th of Julys, our family gatherings, thank God He has given this land as our heritage, yet all this here is fleeting. He gave you His name, so that **your name is written in heaven. Rejoice always in this.**