

Speaking to the soul



Shrewd & harmless

Jesus said “Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.” Matthew 10:16

When we were in India, I got used to snakes being a constant threat. Every few months we would hear about deaths caused by snakes in our area, and they understandably generated a good deal of fear. When you

live in the presence of snakes, you quickly come to respect their cleverness and shrewdness. Here Jesus invited his disciples to try to be like them. As they headed out on their mission they were going to face fierce opposition. Their opponents were going to do everything possible to stop their work so they would need to find ways to outwit them. They would need to be creative and determined, constantly ready to adapt to new situations.

If Jesus had simply told his disciples to model their lives on the shrewdness of snakes they might have got the wrong impression. Snakes have never had a wonderful reputation! They are disliked for their slyness and cunning. Jesus balanced his observations by adding that, at the same time, his disciples needed to be as harmless as doves. Doves immediately give us an image of peace and unity. The disciples needed to be transparently honest in their dealings with people. They needed to have unmixed motives and be known for being utterly straightforward.

Jesus was saying that the disciples needed to be like him. Jesus was incredibly wise in the way in which he handled his critics. Time and again they tried to trip him up but with a quiet word, a thoughtful story or a further question, Jesus managed to respond to them with wisdom and grace. However fierce his critics were, he was always the man of peace and, tough as it might be for us when we are challenged, we need to seek to walk on that same path.

QUESTION

In what ways do you need to be shrewder and more harmless?

PRAYER

Lord God, help me to be humble enough to learn from Jesus' example. Amen