

SERMON AT GELORUP: GEOFF CHADWICK: 12/12/2021; ADVENT 3c:

LUKE 3.7-18: "VIPERS"

At home, we have a selection of wines from a collection with really cool names. There is the "Parliament of Owls" (Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot), the "Murder of Crows" (Shiraz) and the "Knot of Frogs". What we don't have though, is one called "A Brood of Vipers." I wonder what variety that might be: a rough red, a tawney port? A sharp white; or a badly cellared vintage on the turn?

Fancy that a wine called: "A Brood of Vipers"! You could buy a crate of it and give a bottle to all your friends. Of course, they would be aware that you always match the wine label with the character of the one receiving the gift...

"Brood of vipers". It's a great image isn't it?. The New Testament Greek can also be translated: 'You offspring of snakes.' But what on earth did John the Baptist mean by it?

Well I thought I'd find out more about the character of real vipers.

According to the Live Science Website:

Vipers are known for their extreme fangs, which are long, hollow, hinged and rotatable... These fangs connect to venom glands located behind the eyes at the back upper part of the jaw. Venom travels down through the teeth to be injected into prey as the viper bites.

Vipers can rotate their fangs together or independently, which allows them to wait until the last second to erect their fangs. Their mouths can open nearly 180 degrees so the ability to rotate their fangs within that space is an advantage. When not in use, vipers' hinged fangs fold up and lie against the roof of the snake's mouth. This allows their fangs to grow relatively long...

Most vipers are ambush predators, ..."They detect where prey is most likely to be chemically and just wait. Because they're not expending a lot of energy, [and

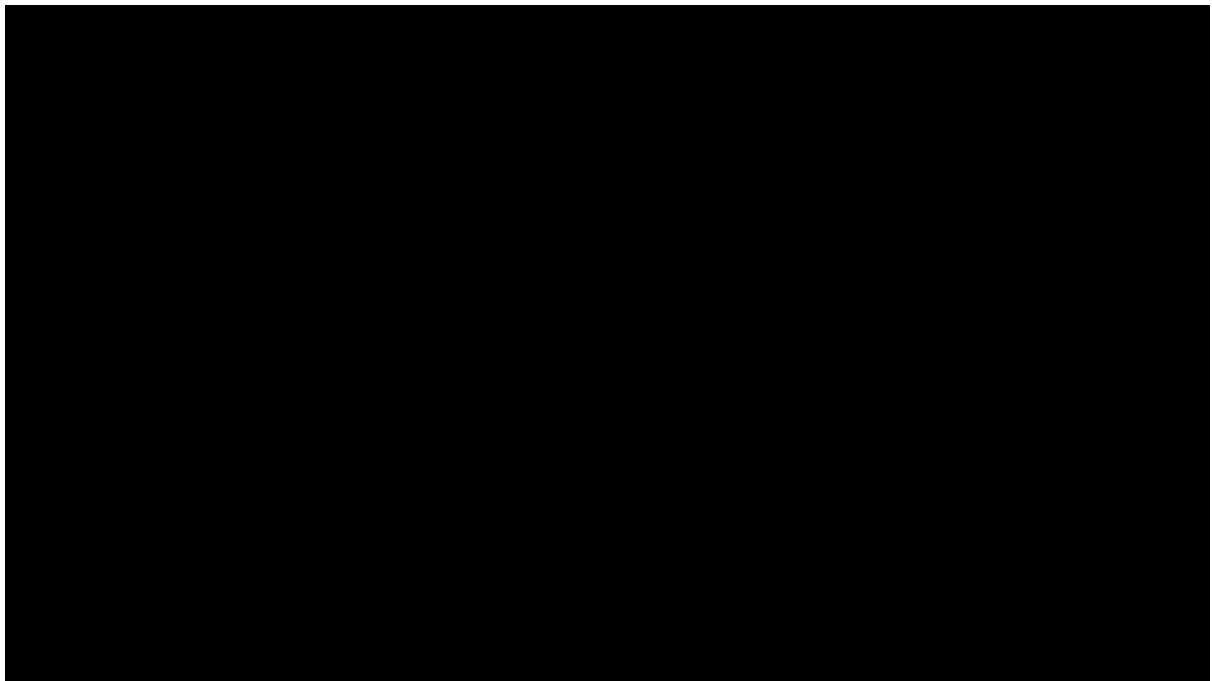
have a] low resting metabolic rate, and eat large things, they can afford to do that."

Vipers eat a variety of food depending on the size of the snake. Prey includes small mammals, birds, lizards and egg. When their prey is dead, they swallow it whole.

Vipers engage in a hunting activity called prey relocation... This means that once they have identified their prey, they strike it and inject venom. They then immediately release the prey so that it cannot bite back. The bitten prey wanders off, dies and the viper uses its sense of smell to find it.

(<https://www.livescience.com/54023-vipers.html>)

Now just for fun, those of you who remember Indiana Jones:



John the Baptist understood that he lived in an age of corruption. I'm sure you're aware of the skulduggery that went on in his time. The poor treated unfairly, government officials lining their pockets, and the nepotism that accompanied a culture of bribery.

It seems that John had frightened the people to go into the desert to seek safety from the impending doom of society. Nevertheless, these desert dwellers weren't that appealing.

“Brood of Vipers” is anything but an endearing description!

These desert vipers were well versed in the arts of venomous talk, toxic behaviour, and cunning deals. These “snakes” were experts at “prey relocation”:

Poison your victims just enough to catch them later with their life drained out of them.

Are these “vipers” merely remnants of the past? Could it be that our modern world is now devoid of such snakes?! Are we now living in a “*Viper free zone*?”

Of course not! We know too well the corruptions of the modern world. Our News bulletins are full of snake stories. We know that there are plenty of “snakes in the grass” out there.

The skulduggery is the same: the poor treated unfairly, government officials lining their pockets, and nepotism accompanying cultures of bribery.

Now John, aware of the venom of those coming to him, proclaims an antivenom. It's not complicated and its one the people should have known all along. Curiously there are 4 jabs!

All 4 would get you to a 90% vaccination rate!

- *‘Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none,*
- *and whoever has food must do likewise.’*
- *‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation,*
- *and be satisfied with your wages.’*

John, here, is echoing the words of the ancient Old Testament prophets. These four little commands (jabs) are a summary of the old social justice code. The principles were simple enough:

- give to those in need,
- feed the hungry,
- do not extort others,
- and do not be greedy.

Simple but oh so difficult to keep! (Will we ever reach a 90% vaccination rate?)

If we reduced our modern world into a village of 100 people:

- 30 would always have more than enough to eat.
 - 50 would be hungry some of the time.
 - 20 would be undernourished.
 - 1 would be dying of starvation.
 - 80 would feel safe.
 - 20 would be in fear of attack or violence.
 - 52 would have freedom of speech.
 - 48 would be unable to voice their opinions.
 - 20 would use 80% of the world's energy
 - 6 people would have control over 66% of the world's wealth.
- Source: Various off the internet.

Many of these things are systemic, complex, and difficult to correct. Nevertheless, we are challenged to resist the vipers who would have us to be complicit with the unjust structures of society. As individuals we can't feed all the hungry, disarm all the terrorists, or redistribute all of our wealth. But we can support those who are making a difference. We can be mindful of the food we waste. We can affect the government policies we support. We can have some choice in how our Super Funds invest our money. And we can be mindful of how we use our resources.

Of course none of us are totally pure and all of us can be a bit viperish! Even so we can aim for 90% vaccination, being people of the ant-venom even if it's only one jab at a time.

Now how did Indiana Jones deal with all those snakes?

That would be telling!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.