

January 19, 2014

Epiphany 2

"Behold the Lamb of God"

JOHN 1:29-41

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." ³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

You have heard the commercial for Dodge trucks. "Dodge trucks are ram tough." The insignia or logo for the Dodge Ram truck is a ram with large horns. It would be strange if they said, "Dodge trucks are lamb tough." The wild Rocky Mountain ram is so different from the little domestic, defenseless lamb. The ram stands proud on the high mountain cliffs and dares even the fiercest predator to challenge him. The little helpless lamb is easy prey for even the scrawniest coyote.

John the Baptist points to Jesus and calls him, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He does not call him "the ram of God" even though Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, the creator of the universe. By calling Jesus "the Lamb of God" John wants the whole world to see Jesus as the one who lowers himself to the position of a poor helpless lamb to be sacrificed for our sins at the cross.

This morning we invite you to see once again why these words about Jesus as the Lamb of God are such a source of comfort and peace and joy for us. Our greatest need in life is to be loved. We want to be loved by members of our family, people in the community, our friends and neighbors. Our greatest need is to know that we are loved by God. There is no greater love than the love we see in Jesus who was willing to become a sacrificial lamb for our sin. When you see and know and believe in this love from the Lamb of God you eagerly long and yearn for other people to share this same blessing.

Look at the Lamb of God for yourself

John the Baptist says, "Look at the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The word translated as "look" has also been translated as "behold." With this word our God calls on us to stop everything we are doing in life and take time to see what he has done to save us. There are things in life that are nice to do, things in life we should do, and things we must do. At the top of our must do list is God's urgent call to look at what he has done to rescue us from the dreadful consequences of our sin.

I am holding in my hand a picture of a lamb that is caught in a terrible blizzard, curled up and ready to die. Over the lamb is a dog, a collie, lifting up its head and howling in the wind for the shepherd to come and rescue the lamb that is lost. "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." We are no tough mountain rams that can survive in the bitterest blizzards that blow through the mountain. We are sheep, little lambs, without hope, eternally separated from God, with no hope of escaping the judgment to come. God in his mercy sends his Son to become a lamb who gives his life to rescue us.

Imagine you were there when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." You grew up celebrating the Passover. You joined with friends and family to slaughter a lamb that had become your pet. You listened to your father tell the story of the first Passover when the blood of the lamb was put on the door posts of the homes to spare people from the angel of death that passed through the land of Egypt. You travel to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. Your family brings a lamb. You care for it. You watch as your father hands the lamb to the priest. The priest takes the life of the lamb and sprinkles some of its blood on the altar. All these lambs that shed their blood taught you there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

"Behold the Lamb of God." Immediately you think of blood and see blood. Here is the real Lamb of God who will shed his blood for your sin. Isaiah the prophet said the Messiah would be led like a lamb to the slaughter and he would be pierced for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.

God's plan to have his Son become the Lamb sacrificed for us is a good plan. It is the only plan. There are no sacrifices I can make to atone for even the smallest sin in my life. The first part of the book of Romans tells us how bankrupt we are. It opens our eyes to see the overwhelming debt of sin that cannot be paid with the simple words, "There is no one righteous, not even one." But then we find hope as Romans 3 says, "We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented his as a sacrifice of atonement." God presented him as the Lamb to make the ransom payment we could never make on our own.

John the Baptist sees Jesus walking toward him in sandals. Elizabeth and Mary were cousins. That made Jesus his second cousin. John saw so much more in Jesus. He had been telling the people that a man was coming after him who "has surpassed me because he was before me." John knew Jesus existed from all eternity as the one true God. He knew Jesus was the Messiah because the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism. "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him." The Lord God told John the Baptist to baptize with water and the Lord told him that "the one on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." Because

of these amazing revelations from God, John is able to say, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

The Lamb of God is the Son of God. That means the sacrifice he makes for sin is genuine and real. The blood that flows from the Lamb of God is the blood of God himself. The blood of lambs and goats cannot forgive sin. But the blood of God himself is able to offer the perfect sacrifice that is reliable and trustworthy. It is even reliable and trustworthy for people like us who look back at our lives this past week and humbly confess, "God be have mercy on me a sinner."

I want to share with you what Martin Luther said on a sermon about this Lamb of God. "It is extremely important that we know where our sins have been disposed of. The Law deposits them on our conscience and shoves them in our bosom. But God takes them from us and places them on the shoulders of the Lamb. If sin rested on me and on the world, we would be lost; for it is too strong and burdensome. God says, 'I know that your sin is unbearable for you; therefore, behold, I will lay it upon my Lamb and relieve you of it. Believe this! If you do, you are delivered of sin.' There are only two abodes (or places) for sin; it either resides with you, weighing you down; or it lies on Christ the Lamb of God. If it is loaded on your back, you are lost; but if it rests on Christ, you are free and saved."

There is a story about a man, a stone mason, who was working on a cathedral in Europe. He fell off the scaffolding and landed on the street below. Did he die? No he survived because a flock of sheep had wandered in from the country and were walking next to the cathedral. Instead of landing on the hard cobblestones, he landed on the sheep, breaking the back of one of the mother sheep. Out of appreciation for this amazing rescue from serious injury or even death, he carved lamb out of stone. He placed it near the roof of the cathedral where he had fallen.

My life of sin has done more than break the back of God's Son. It is caused him to suffer and die at the cross and even be forsaken by his heavenly Father. In the death and resurrection of God's Lamb I know I am loved by God in this life and for all eternity. That's where we are safe and where we have hope.

Point out the Lamb of God to others

When you see Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, you long for other people to see what you see in Jesus. So it was with John the Baptist. He eagerly pointed his disciples to Jesus. "The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look the Lamb of God!' The two disciples immediately started following Jesus. When Jesus asked them what they wanted, they addressed Jesus as their rabbi or teacher and wanted to know where he was staying. They wanted to follow Jesus and learn from him.

What a special day that must have been for these two disciples. It says they spent the day with Jesus. You can almost hear Jesus explain to these disciples why he was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We think of the two disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Jesus opened the Scriptures to them that spoke about himself. "And beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he explained to them

what was in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Your best moments in life are those that are spent with Jesus. I am holding in my hand a wonderful daily devotional book with the title, "Together with Jesus." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts toward God."

Notice what happens when Andrew spends the day with Jesus. Immediately he goes to his brother Simon Peter and tells him, "We have found the Messiah." Andrew wanted his brother Simon Peter to have that same joy and peace. What do I want for my brothers and my sister, my wife and my children, and my grandchildren? I want them to be drawn more closely to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. What do I want more than anything else for the neighbors on our street, the friends I have in this community, and even casual acquaintances? I want them to have the peace and joy that comes with knowing Jesus is the Lamb of God.

In Boston's Trinity Church, there is a statue of Philips Brookes, the pastor who wrote the Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The statue shows him reaching out his finger and pointing. Those who are not Christian might ask, "What is he pointing at?" Those who love the Lamb of God know he is pointing to Jesus. That's why the Lord has left us here, to point people to Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God!" Amen.