

Midweek Lent Homily
St. John 1:29-34: "The Lamb of God"
April 1, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

Behold, the Lamb!

In Nomine Iesu

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St. John 1:29-34

The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (ESV)

Our loving Savior and Redeemer, who not only pled the cause of mankind before the tribunal of supreme Justice and were by Your Father stricken, smitten and afflicted for our sins, but also willingly gave Yourself over into the hands of wicked men, permitting them to take, bind, and abuse You, enlighten our eyes to see the wonders of Your love, patience, and meekness in Your sufferings, that we may acknowledge You the Lamb of God which has taken away our sins, accept Your merits by faith, and willingly follow You in all our trials, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 109)

In Christ Jesus, who came to offer Himself in your place, so you would be right with God, dear fellow redeemed:

We know the passage so well, that it doesn't seem strange to us: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" But I wonder what we would have thought if we heard John the Baptizer say this in person. We might have wondered, "Why did John just call that man a lamb?" There are so many titles for Jesus that would seem to identify Him more clearly: "Behold, the Messiah/the Promised Prophet/the Son of David and of God/the Savior!" But John said, "*Behold, the Lamb!*"

Of course the context of the Jews at that time was different than ours. Lambs were a much bigger part of their culture than it is for us. At that time, lambs were sacrificed daily in the temple. Their blood was shed as an offering for sin. John wanted the people gathered there to make this connection. He wanted them to know that the Sacrifice for the world's sins was finally here. The Old Testament promises had met their fulfillment.

We have reviewed some of these prophecies and pictures of Jesus over the last few weeks. We heard about the shepherd Abel who faithfully offered sacrifices to God before this innocent man was killed by his brother. We heard about Abraham who was prepared to sacrifice his only son at God's command before the LORD stopped him and provided another lamb. We heard about

the Passover when a spotless lamb was killed and its blood painted on the doorposts to save the Israelites from slavery and death. We heard about the offering of lambs at morning and at evening in the tabernacle on behalf of the people. And last week we heard the stunning prophecy of Isaiah describing the suffering and death of Him who bore our sins and was slaughtered for us.

These examples and many others pointed forward to the coming of the Christ and His work to save sinners. John looked to Jesus and said, *"There He is! That is the Lamb! He is the One who takes away the world's sin!"* This "taking" or "carrying" away brings to mind God's instructions for Israel on the annual Day of Atonement. The high priest was to select two goats. One was used for a sin offering. The other was brought to the priest who laid both his hands on its head and confessed all the transgressions of the people over it. Then the goat was sent into the wilderness to a remote area never to be retrieved (Lev. 16:20-22).

John was pointing to Jesus as the "scapegoat" for sin, as the one who would have the sins of the world placed on Him and would suffer for them all by Himself. It was at His Baptism that Jesus was officially anointed for this work. John testified that when Jesus was baptized, he saw *"the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove"* and rest on Him.

The prophet Isaiah had spoken about this many years before. He said that *"the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD"* (Isa. 11:2). Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to carry out His Father's will. Isaiah described the peaceful scene that would result from His righteous and faithful work: *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them"* (v. 6).

But Jesus' coming seemed to produce anything but peace. Though He healed and helped people and proclaimed the Gospel to them, many rejected Him and opposed Him. Eventually the Jewish religious leaders got what they wanted and were able to arrest Him. They convicted Him in a sham trial, struck Him, spit on Him, and turned Him over to the Roman authorities. They did this because they wanted Him dead, and they wanted Him to die painfully.

What they did not realize is that it was God's will for His Son to die. Isaiah had written about this: *"Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief"* (53:10). At the same time that the religious leaders worked to destroy Jesus out of bitter hatred and envy, He was working to save them out of His boundless mercy and love. When He went to the cross, He carried even the sins of those who sent Him to His death. His hands and feet freshly nailed to the cross, He prayed for them: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luk. 23:34).

This is what He came to accomplish. He came to forgive, to make peace between God and man. He said Himself that *"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (Joh. 3:17). That is why John called Him *"the Lamb"* – God's Lamb. The Son of God incarnate was the Father's answer for sin. He was the only Sacrifice that could satisfy the justice of a holy God.

The death of this Lamb means your wrongs are fully atoned for. His blood cleanses you, purifies you. It sets you free from your bondage to sin and death. But you and I have done

terrible things! How can we be certain that even those things are forgiven? Well what did John say? *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Jesus did not come to take away only the sin of the most faithful and the best-behaved. He came to take away all sin, *"the sin of the world."* So if you are in the world, then Jesus has taken away your sin. Like the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, each of your sins was placed on Jesus, and He took them far away never to bring them back against you.

Because your sins were placed on Him, they are not on you anymore. The Psalm states it beautifully: *"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us"* (103:11-12). This is what Jesus accomplished for you. **Behold, the Lamb!** He forgives all your sin. Amen.

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