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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Series A)

January 19, 2014

Text: John 1:29–42a

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Have you ever tried to summarize someone's life in a single statement? It's pretty hard. But John the Baptist manages to summarize the person and work of the Lord Jesus quite well in today's gospel reading. Twice, John points to Jesus and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (vs. 29 & 36) That's a statement we should never forget. Jesus is God's Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Everything we know about our Savior, from His birth and infancy to His glorious second coming, is included in that one statement.

So let's take some time this morning and consider this Lamb of God. Let's begin with the first word, "Behold!" It simply means look, pay attention, don't be distracted, not now, something most important is happening. For John and the people gathered around him, that meant looking at Jesus. According to the Bible, they didn't see very much, at least, not on the surface. Jesus would have been a rather ordinary looking Jewish man about 30 years old. And yet John testifies (vs. 32-34) that this man Jesus is the one upon whom the God's Spirit came to rest in the form of a dove; Jesus is the very Son of God.

The prophet Isaiah says this about Jesus, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2). Jesus' physical appearance was anything but spectacular. And yet, John the Baptist says, "Behold." Look at Him, not because of His physical beauty but because of who He is and what He will do. This ordinary looking man is God's Son, God's Lamb. The writer of the book of Hebrews picks up on this idea of looking at Jesus in 12:1–2, "... Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Today, we are here that we might behold the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.

It's a safe guess that the Jews listening to John would have been a bit surprised by John's statement. In Israel, lambs had one, primary purpose: to be slaughtered in sacrifice at Jerusalem's Temple. According to the Law of Moses, Israelites were to take a lamb to the Temple or possibly purchase one near Jerusalem (maybe from shepherds working around Bethlehem, sounds familiar) and sacrifice it. But you just didn't drop it off with the priest and think that it will all be taken care of. No, you placed your hands on the lamb's head, confessed your sins before the priest, and then offered the lamb as sacrifice to atone for the sins just confessed (Leviticus 4). The lamb died in your place, it bore the punishment of your sins.

That's what John the Baptist is saying about Jesus. Look over there. That man is God's Lamb. What normally happened to an animal – a lamb – was going to happen to Jesus.

Make no mistake about it. John is telling the crowd around him, and us through the inscripturated Word, that the world's sins will be placed upon that man; and He will be sacrificed like so many countless other lambs before Him. It's startling, shocking even. Nothing anything even close to a person being sacrificed to God had happened since Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac (Genesis 22). But even then, God provided a ram to be sacrificed in Isaac's place. But there will be no substitute for Jesus. He's God's final and perfect Lamb.

And that brings us to the next thing we should consider. Jesus is the *Lamb of God*; He's God's Lamb. I've said that several times now but it should cause us to pause. God the Father appointed His Son Jesus for this task: to be His final, perfect Lamb offered for the sake of humanity. And Jesus, the Son, accepted this task freely because of His love for humanity. Jesus is baptized, He heals the sick and preaches the gospel because He is God's appointed Lamb who takes away sin and its devastating effects.

We all know John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave..." What did God the Father give? His only Son. For what purpose? To be the final Lamb that fixes this horrendous mess the world's in. To fix the sinful mess we create for ourselves. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him..." Believe in whom? The sent Son who is also God's Lamb. Our Christian faith has an object, a person to which it constantly looks: God's Son, God's Lamb. "That whoever believes in Him, i.e., God's Lamb, should not perish but have eternal life." Looking to God's Lamb in faith brings eternal life. God the Father loves us, this world, so

passionately that He gives His greatest treasure, His only Son so that we might live in His eternal life.

That's what John the Baptist is telling us. Look to Jesus, God's Lamb. Believe in Him. Love this Man, Jesus. He is sent by God Himself to give us eternal life. Jesus does what all those other sacrificial lambs couldn't do. He gives true, abiding life. He restores to us what was taken away: fellowship with God the Father, freedom and joy, life without fear of death, a conscience that is clean and innocent. The blood of animals couldn't do that. But Jesus does. He's God's Lamb; perfect, pure, and sufficient, once and for all.

And what does this perfect, Lamb of God do to give us eternal life? Jesus takes away the sin of the world by being sacrificed in our place. Hebrews 9:22 reminds us that without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness. So the question becomes whose blood must be shed. Yours? It's not good enough. It's tainted by sin. The shedding of blood must come from somewhere else. And that leads us back to what John said about Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

All our hopes as a redeemed people are settled in Jesus, God's Lamb, and in what He does to save us, you and me. That takes us to the last part of John's preaching about Jesus. The Lord not only takes away the sins of Israel or the sins of the people living at the time but He takes away the sins "of the world." This final Lamb is more than sufficient for all people, of all times, of all places, including yours and mine.

The prophet Isaiah says the exact same thing about Jesus in today's OT reading from Isaiah 49:6, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." To save only one nation, Israel, is too light, too easy for what Jesus does. No, His death and resurrection are much too weighty and powerful to be limited to one nation. Jesus takes away the sin "of the world."

There is more than enough redemption in Jesus for Immanuel/St. John's, for you, for your loved ones. That's what John the Baptist is telling us when He says Behold! God's Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Because you are connected to Jesus through Word, Spirit, and Sacraments, your sins are taken away. He's your Lamb, given to you by God Himself.

But some may ask, isn't this all a bit too barbaric for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world? Lambs being sacrificed; the world's salvation given by means of the sacrificial death and resurrection of a 1<sup>st</sup> century Man? Well, the Bible says that Jesus is God's light to the nations; He is God's wisdom and salvation for the world.

In many ways, the proof is in the pudding, as the old saying goes. Just look at vs. 35-41. John the Baptist points out Jesus the second time as being the Lamb of God. Two of John's disciples begin to follow Jesus from that moment on! The NT Church begins to grow right then and there. One of those two disciples was Andrew. Andrew then goes and tells his brother, Peter, that they've found the Messiah. The Church of Jesus Christ has been growing ever since. This is the pattern for church evangelism: those who have seen God's Lamb by faith through Word and Sacrament telling others to look at Jesus.

Our life, the health and vitality of our congregation and the growth of the Church throughout the world are established and maintained because of who Jesus is and what He does. He is God's Lamb. And what He does is take away the world's sins. Let us follow Jesus in faith and joy. He's God's Lamb. Our sins are taken away.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.