

*Recognizing the Sacred*  
January 15, 2017  
Psalm 40:1-11; John 1:29-42  
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*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is 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 ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"*

*The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).*

"Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John the Baptist declares. The Lamb of God

We talked in Compassionate Kids this week about our nicknames, like Sara Beara, ElleBelle, Tad, Ty Ty, and sweet potatah, and how in this one passage, Jesus is given the nicknames of Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, Anointed.

Today we will focus on the nickname or title for Jesus, Lamb of God.

The Old Testament references the Lamb in the description of God's Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." And, "Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."

Also in the Old Testament is the paschal lamb of Exodus 12, whose blood marked the doorposts to spare the Israelites from the fate of the Egyptians during Passover. And, the gripping Genesis 22 passage, where Abraham is walking with his son Isaac, who is carrying wood for the sacrifice, and notices there is no lamb. Abraham assures him that God will provide the Lamb.

Besides the book of John, in the only reference to Jesus with this nickname Lamb of God in the New Testament is in Revelation, where the triumphant Lamb overcomes evil. We spent time on this Revelation passage in our Tuesday Bible study recently. The writer of Revelation, also named John, is in heaven and an angel presents a scroll and asks who is worthy to open it. John bursts out in tears because he realizes no one in heaven or on earth or below the earth is worthy.

An elder tells him not to cry, because there is a lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who is worthy. When John looks, though, he sees not a lion but a lamb, a slaughtered lamb. The announcement of the lion symbolizes ultimate power and the image of the lamb symbolizes gentle vulnerability and the two are fused together, indecipherable. The victory of the lion is won through the innocent sacrifice of the lamb. Lamb of God is a compelling nickname for Jesus because it signifies his humility and sacrifice, and the ultimate power in this humility.

It has been said that the greatest spiritual sin is blindness, and so the lamb who takes away the sin of the world accomplishes this by shining light into the darkness. Jesus shows us how to live. Jesus teaches us and guides us. Jesus is the Light and the Love, the Lamb of God that takes away the darkness of the world and gives us light. To see the light is to experience the transformation that occurs in the uniting of the human and the divine, the lamb and the lion.

In the Psalm read today, when the writer says, "The Lord heard my cry and drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." We are drawn by the light out of darkness, out of desolation, to firm and secure ground, and this is our salvation – that God's steadfast love and faithfulness leads us to the light upon solid ground.

John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the light.

He points this out, and Andrew and another disciple choose to follow Jesus. The first line spoken by Jesus in John's gospel is profound. When he turns and sees Andrew and another following him, he asks, What are you looking for? Other translations include, What do you want? And What do you seek?

Those first disciples don't answer him directly; instead, they ask a question back to him: Where are you staying, and he invites them to come and see. They remain with him, and later Andrew tells his brother they have found the Messiah.

How would you answer the question Jesus poses: What are you looking for? What do you want? What do you seek?

Can we trust that God will provide, and will we recognize it when it is provided?

There was a woman named Darlene who was looking for a church home. She said she was going to try out a new church that Sunday. She showed up with great expectation as the church was near her house and she was in need of spiritual community. The service was familiar to her from her youth, with prayers, hymns, a thoughtful and touching message. After the visit, however, Darlene was completely overcome with anger and rage: "Why doesn't anyone go to church anymore?" she demanded to know. She complained that the service was poorly attended, not enough people in the choir, not enough children. Why aren't people coming to church?!" she seethed.

Yet she had attended the service, and there WERE people there. I'd be apt to say that God was there. It seems she just didn't see it. Maybe she was looking for something else. Maybe it wasn't a good connect or match for her, which I understand. To say with anger, though, that *no one was there* was not accurate. There were people there. Faithful, loving, caring and seeking people like herself, right there in her midst. She didn't stay to meet them, to hear their stories or share hers with them. She didn't give them a chance. Consequently, she missed an opportunity to be served, and to be of service.

Alternatively, Carla tells about a time that she was asked to speak an inspirational message at a halfway house on Christmas Eve. The person who invited her to speak and to introduce her didn't show up. It was a rainy evening. She was upset that her precious time had been wasted. As she stomped to the exit door shaking her head in disgust, a voice behind her said, "Excuse me..." She turned around, and a waif-like and scraggly fellow, said to her, "Can I help you? My name is Matt." A few months earlier, Carla had lost a son to a sudden illness, and she was very angry with God about it. Her son had been diagnosed and died in the hospital just 36 hours later. Carla's only son, who was newly married, with a bright future ahead of him. Her son's name: Matt.

When the fellow at the halfway house introduced himself as Matt as Carla was about to leave, she recognized this as a sacred moment. *My name is Matt. Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* Carla decided to stay after all, and spent her Christmas Eve talking with Matt, who, through their connection, shined a light in the darkness, who lifted her out of the miry bog. And to this day, she is forever grateful. More Matts have come into her life, and she sees God reaching out to her every time; God sending Matt after Matt after Matt.

We had a saying in seminary that sin is turning away from God, like God offering you an apple, and you say, thank you, but I'd prefer a pear, and turn and walk away. To see the light is to participate in God's realm, to take the apple offered. Some say

Jesus died not *for* the sins of the world, but *because* of the sins of the world; he was put to death by those too blind to see he was the gift of God's own self. He rose so that those who were blind might see. So that we would all see the goodness and graciousness and faithfulness of God, who never leaves us suffering.

In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., whom we honor tomorrow, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that; Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

In the spirit of light, love and service, today we will be ordaining and installing our church officers for this new year ahead. Deacons who are called and ordained to see and serve wherever there is need, and Elders who are called and ordained to guide and govern the church; all of them, deacons and elders, with the compassion of Christ's powerful and humble presence and with the sound judgment of Christ's courage and wisdom.'

The good news today is that whatever is we are looking for can be found in the guiding light of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We need only look up and around and within, turn to the light, and follow.