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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
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John 1:29-42
“All about Jesus”

The sermon title today is “All about Jesus.” “Lamb of God” was inadvertently repeated from the anthem. I’ve called this sermon “All about Jesus” because that’s what the passage is all about and what the church today should be all about. No Jesus, no church. No Jesus, no Christianity. It’s as simple as that.

Everything revolves around Jesus in the scripture passage read today. John sees Jesus and calls him the Lamb of God and Son of God. God incarnate has arrived and takes center stage. John recedes into the background.

There are three aspects of this “all about Jesus” passage. One, Jesus takes away the sin of the world; two, he begins to build his community; and three, “word” about him begins to spread. There’s forgiveness of sin, community and evangelism, all in one short section of the Bible. These are vital ingredients for the church today.

Jesus as “Lamb of God” has multiple connotations in the Hebrew Bible but here it most likely refers to Jesus as sacrificial lamb for expiation of sins. It’s an image that resonates in the day. Through faith in Jesus, one’s sins are forgiven.

The word “sin” is out of fashion these days and so it seemed to me until I read recently a modern book by one of my favorite persons Chris Hedges. Hedges is a son of a Presbyterian pastor, he graduated from seminary at Harvard Divinity School and instead of going into ministry, he became a leading foreign correspondent for major US newspapers. He was a member of the team that won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting for *The New York Times* coverage of global terrorism and he received the 2002 Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism.

He has seen and experienced humanity’s inhumanity to humanity, which draws him to conclude that while we are evolving biologically we are morally as bad as we’ve ever been. Mass killings, bombings and holocausts are some of the outcomes.

In his book, *I Don’t Believe in Atheists*, he names the malady as “sin” and describes it incredibly well. He says history is a spiral. We aren’t going in a straight line – a linear view of history – getting better and better until we reach perfection. The sin of the world spirals back again. What goes around comes around.

Quoting Freud and Proust and a host of other folk he claims that we are by nature good and bad and we wrestle with both aspects individually and corporately. Sin is an ever-present reality in our lives.

He writes, "We discard the wisdom of sin at our peril. Sin reminds us that all human beings are flawed – though not equally flawed. Sin is the acceptance that there will never be a final victory over evil, that the struggle for morality is a battle that will always have to be fought. Studies in cognitive behavior illustrate the accuracy and wisdom of the Biblical concept.

"Human beings are frequently irrational. They are governed by unconscious forces, many of them self-destructive. This understanding of innate human corruptibility and human limitations, whether explained by the theologian Augustine or the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, has been humankind's most potent check on utopian visions. It has forced human beings to accept their own myopia and irrationality, to acknowledge that no act, even one defined as moral or virtuous, is free from the taint of self-interest and corruption. We are bound by our animal natures."

In South Africa, a popular sport among retired members of society is bowling on the green. The bowling ball has a bias. It always curves one way. One rolls it towards a white ball and in doing so one must make allowance for the bias.

Our Presbyterian pastor in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the Rev Donald Dowie, a staunch Reformed Presbyterian, said that human beings have a bias for sin and the allowance we make is to believe in Jesus Christ who helps us to rectify the bias. We turn to Jesus because it is too difficult and hard to take care of sin by ourselves.

That's how we are introduced to the adult Jesus in the Gospel according to John today. John says, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven, says a usual assurance of forgiveness after we say the prayer of confession.

It's amazing that Jesus is first introduced in the Gospel of John as the one who forgives our sins. That's a pretty good place to start in scripture and to start as Christians and members of the church. God is merciful and just and forgives us all our sins, if we name them and take them to God in prayer.

In the Oscar-nominated animated feature film "Frozen," which is based on a story by Han Christian Andersen, the princess inherits a dark force that her parents cannot control. When the force gets out of control, they mask the force with gloves and isolate the girl until her coronation as queen. During the coronation, a glove is inadvertently removed and the force causes great damage to the palace and the town. The queen banishes herself. The queen's

sister pursues her and only her act of deep concern, love and sacrifice undoes the dark force. God loves us no matter what. God pursues us and loves us and in Jesus frees us from any dark force that threatens to undo us and those around us. We are called to love like God in Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The next aspect of Jesus in the gospel story is the establishment of community and it begins organically. The text reads, "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.'"

In reality, they remained with him for three years, up to the time of his death. There was something very compelling and appealing about being with Jesus. The take home here is that when we come to church we "meet" Jesus in the Body of Christ. The church is alive when there is a palpable feeling of the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst. We feel him in our hearts and minds. We feel him in love and concern. We feel him in giving and sharing. We feel him in community. We call this the "living presence of Jesus Christ."

Finally, the presence of Jesus is so great and already means so much to those who initially follow him that one of them, Andrew, finds his brother Simon and says to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brings Simon along and Jesus calls him Peter and so begins this special relationship. We hear much of Peter in the Gospels.

Andrew is called the first evangelist, in other words, the first to tell others about the good news of Jesus. His brief encounter is so good that he wants others to join the company of the anointed. The lesson for us is to feel great about ourselves as a Christian and to feel good about this community and invite others into the fold. It's a tough task in Marin but let's persist in doing this in all the ways we can. We saw good signs of our inviting and welcoming in the past year.

Suellen and Melissa came up with the great idea of inviting primary school children to an after school study hall with learning, eating, play and music and Stephanie invited some of her friends whose Bible study class folded to join our Bible study group on Tuesdays which doubled the size of the class. We hosted Scout Sunday last year and God brought in regional scoutmaster Ed Vorous who has been a real trooper as one of our newest members. Melissa brought Beth; and Anna and Alan appreciated their relationship with us to come along and then feel and appreciate the spirit of Jesus in our midst.

This is contagious. It was for the early disciples and the tradition continues in our midst and in churches throughout the world.

The fullness of our faith really is “all about Jesus” who takes away the sin of the world; who builds and affirms community, and challenges us to invite family and friends to this special way of life.

And, of course, there is a lot more to say about Jesus. There’s a lot more to learn from Jesus. There’s a lot more to experience in Jesus and that’s why we are active members of this church and friends who join us in worship and fellowship and in a host of other events. We feel the spirit and are grateful. Amen.