

Second Sunday after the Epiphany January 15, 2017

John 1:29-41 (EHV) – ²⁹The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know who he was, but I came baptizing with water so that he would be revealed to Israel.” ³²John also testified, “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. ³³I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.” ³⁵The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He told them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying. They stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated “the Christ”).

Introduction

Some may be of the opinion that it’s absolutely inappropriate for a pastor to ever wear a tie that indicates allegiance to a certain football team. I’m glad we don’t have any of those members here.

Speaking of inappropriate attire, how might you react if a man shows up at a future worship service in a hairy brown camel-hair vest and straggly brown hair that’s way overdue for a trim? If it happens to be a potluck Sunday, imagine that he brings along a platter of locusts and a little bowl of unstrained honey in which to dip them. Would you be polite enough to try one? Of course, the more civilized of John’s day weren’t exactly wearing Armani or Croft & Barrow, but at least they had nice robes to wear to the temple.

Theme: God’s Final Old Testament Prophet Preaches the Gospel.

It’s too bad that those are the only things some people remember about John the Baptist – his peculiar diet and clothing. And if they remember anything about his message, it’s probably that he blasted the Pharisees and Sadducees, warning them that they’d get what they had coming for their unbelief. “**You brood of vipers**” isn’t exactly what you’d call the good news of the gospel!

We don’t have the complete literary works of John the Baptist, but we’re told in Luke that he “**exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.**” My personal feeling is that this text contains John’s most beautiful gospel sermon recorded in all of Scripture. Let’s listen as **GOD’S FINAL OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET PREACHES THE GOSPEL. His gospel identifies Jesus. His gospel inspires us.**

Part I: His gospel identifies Jesus.

Chronologically the events of this text occur several weeks after Jesus’ baptism. In keeping with the theme of Epiphany, we’ve seen how he was revealed as the Savior of the Gentiles when the magi visited, and how he was revealed as the Anointed One at his baptism. We haven’t heard it yet, but the 40-day sojourn in the wilderness immediately after his baptism revealed him as the sinner’s perfect substitute who resisted all of Satan’s temptations. That story always serves as the Gospel Lesson for the First Sunday in Lent, coming up in a couple months.

At the time of our text, Jesus had since returned from the temptation in the wilderness. One day, John was confronted by the Jewish religious leaders, who asked to see his credentials. He took them back to Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah's forerunner, and then quickly directed them toward the Messiah himself. And then: **"The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"**

John's gospel first of all identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. The Old Testament people of Israel were very familiar with the role of the lamb in their spiritual lives. Long before any commands were given in that regard, Abel offered a faith-borne sacrifice to God from his flocks. Abraham told Isaac that God would provide a lamb for a burnt offering, when in reality, he was prepared to offer up his own son on the altar. The Passover festival revolved around the eating of a lamb and the use of its blood on the exterior doorframes to escape the Lord's vengeance. In a quick glance through Leviticus and Numbers, you could easily come to the conclusion that the sole purpose in raising sheep was to provide a steady source of sacrificial animals. In instituting all those sacrifices, God made the statement: **"The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."**

Sadly, some would try to convince us that the Old Testament holds no value for the New Testament believer. Although it's true that the Old Testament civil, ceremonial, and even moral law (as it was specifically worded) was limited to the Children of Israel, it's vital that we familiarize ourselves with the Old Testament, and it's crucial that we read it in light of the coming of **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."** Those Old Testament pictures of forgiveness are so clear that it would be an absolute shame to pass over them (no pun intended). That's because, even though we're not bound by the same form of worship, the maxim holds true here in the New Testament: **"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."**

Were it not for the sacrifice of God's Lamb, every sin that you and I commit – be it in thought, word, or action – would be held against us into eternity. That's because my blood isn't worth a penny and neither is yours – it's utterly tainted by inherited sin. And no matter how many sacrifices of works we can build up in our accounts, God turns away in pure disgust because of their filthy nature. They simply don't measure up to his standards. They *can't* measure up.

But that's all law. Now listen to the gospel, proclaimed by John the Baptist in our text as he refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God, but here recorded by John the Apostle: **"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** And then also by the author to the Hebrews: **"We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."** Just before that verse in Hebrews, it says that the blood of bulls and goats – even a billion gallons of it throughout the centuries – can't possibly take away sin. But John the Baptist's gospel identifies a second characteristic of Jesus. It identifies him as the Son of God. He says, **"I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God."** And be sure of this: the blood of the Lamb of God – the blood of the Lamb who is himself God – is more than valuable enough to take away all sin of all time. It is valuable enough and it was valuable enough, because this is reality we're talking about, not something hypothetical. The same blood that many of you will partake of in a little while was poured out on the altar of the cross for the forgiveness of all your sins. The Lamb of God took away the world's sin; he's taken away your sin. But whether or not you receive it in that sacramental way this morning, know that it's been given and shed for you to make you holy.

Transition

As God's final Old Testament prophet preached the gospel, he identified Jesus as the substitutionary Lamb. He also inspires us with his words of good news.

Part II: His gospel inspires us.

First off, we need to define the word "inspire." An inspirational speech can be one that simply causes you to leave the auditorium feeling really positive. An inspiring piece of music can be one that simply touches the emotions. That's not what I'm trying to convey with the word "inspire." I'm thinking more in terms of affecting our actions than our emotions. The good news about Jesus certainly makes us feel good about our new status before God, but it also *prompts, instigates, enlivens* and *motivates* us in our lives of faith.

Just as Jesus has been revealed to us as the Lamb of God, we have a newborn desire and ability to reveal him to others. That's what John the Baptist did, and that was just the beginning of the gospel's ripple effect. **"The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus... Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, 'We have found the Messiah!'"** People who know the good news are inspired to share the good news.

You all have the motivation to tell others about Jesus. That's part and parcel of being a Christian. The only things we sometimes lack is confidence and a little direction. The confidence comes from trusting God's promises to be with us and to bless our proclamation of his gospel. As to the direction, I have some suggestions:

Make a point to introduce yourself to the visitor that you've caught sight of at worship. Obviously, you don't have to talk so long that you cut into their lunchtime, but talk for a couple minutes about what great things God has done and continues to do for you as you hear, study, and meditate upon his Word.

As you're on your morning or evening walk, stop for a brief moment to talk to the person shoveling snow (or working out in the yard when it gets to be that time of the year – we can dream, can't we?) or coming home from work. Tell them you don't mean to be nosy or pushy, but are simply wondering if they'd like to come to church with you some Sunday morning – maybe on Easter Sunday.

Start making plans to enlist your kids to come with you to pass out Easter card invitations in just a few short months – or VBS fliers a few months after that.

Suggest and then help direct a service project with some of our youth that allows you and them to say a little something about the One who so lovingly served us.

None of those require getting into deep theological discussions, but simply tell them how much the good news of God's Lamb means to you and invite them to come and hear it for themselves sometime. That's what inevitably has happened from the earliest of times. In the text, John the Baptist told Andrew and John. Andrew told his brother, Peter. John probably shared it with his brother, James. Later on, Philip would tell his good friend Nathanael. And so on down the line. Let the good news of Christ, the Lamb of God, inspire you to become a bearer of good news yourself.

Conclusion

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Amen.