**2nd Sunday after Epiphany – Year A – January 19, 2014 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on John 1:29-42 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Look! The Lamb of God!**

**I. He takes away the sin of the world**

**II. He looks to you to point others to him**

*29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God,* *who takes away the sin of the world!* *30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'* *31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.* *33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water* *told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'* *34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."* *35 The next day John* *was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"* *37 When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38 Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi"* *(which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. 40 Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).* *42 And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called* *Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter* *).*

Imagine for a moment… that you are living in Palestine, 2,000 years ago. You would have gone to church yesterday, the Sabbath day of rest. You climb the wide stone staircase up to one of the temple gates, you walk through the gate, past the temple guard and step into the courtyard, it is filled with hundreds perhaps thousands of people, you hear the priests playing their stringed instruments, rams’ horns and trumpets, tambourine, drum, harps, the singing of a thousand voices. Your nose and your eyes are drawn to the smoke rising from the altar. The altar looks and smells very different from the one you see here. It is 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 15 feet high, there are steps leading to the top of the altar, where a huge iron grate covers the top of the altar. This altar is made of bronze. You can’t miss it. It is the focal point of the courtyard in front of the giant doors of the temple. Fire and smoke rise from the altar. The smell of burning flesh fills the air. The smell of fresh blood touches your nose. You see blood, dripping from the hands of the priests, blood stained on their white robes, blood drips onto the ground, onto the altar itself…

…because every morning a year old male lamb is butchered and burned on the altar. Every evening a year old male lamb is butchered and burned on the altar. In the spring you travel to Jerusalem every year, to spend time with family, and to slaughter another lamb, and you roast it whole over a fire, you eat the meat, through this Passover meal you remember that the blood of an animal once saved your ancestors. Your ancestors painted the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their homes so that the angel of death would pass over their homes, spare the first born son. Every year during the fall, you travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Day of Atonement. You stand in the courtyard and watch as the priest selects two goats. The one he slaughters and burns on the altar. He places his hands on the head of the other animal, confesses the sin of the nation, and you watch as a man leads that goat out of the city, way out into the wilderness and abandons it where it will die.

You’ve been out that way, toward the wilderness, east of the Jordan River. You walk the banks of the Jordan River. One day as you are walking you come upon a crowd of people sitting on the banks of the river, some of them are wading in the water, and you see a man, long hair, long beard, his clothes are made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, he’s up to his waist in that water, baptizing the people. You listen to him as he walks out of the water and teaches the people about the coming Messiah, the Christ. As he’s teaching he looks up and he stops, he’s quiet and his gaze is fixed on this Jewish man in his 30s walking along the banks of the River and he points to him and he cries out, “Look! The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

And your heart races. Because you know what he means. All of those sacrifices… and all of the words of the prophets collide together and meet in this person, in this man. You remember the Sabbath school teacher reading a section from Isaiah the prophet who said, **“He, the servant of the LORD, was led like a lamb to the slaughter, the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He took up our infirmities, and carried our sorrows.”**

What all of those sacrifices - the hundreds of thousands if not millions of animals that were slaughtered on that altar - could not do is forgive sins. They were only a picture, a reminder to the people, that one day, a lamb, the lamb would appear. This lamb would not be selected from a shepherd’s pasture. He would be hand-picked by God himself, sent by God himself. And upon that one lamb the guilt of the world’s sins would be confessed, just like the goat on the Day of Atonement, and upon him would be laid the sin of the world, and he would bear that burden alone, and he would be led outside of the city, and there the lamb’s blood would be splattered, his blood would be spilt, and his body would in essence be roasted on the altar of the cross, and his blood would cover that cross. There on that altar forgiveness would be earned, forgiveness would be won. The burden of sin would be lifted from the world. The price sin would be paid. Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! That’s who the prophet is talking about: this man is the lamb from God, the lamb who is God and Man.

What burden are you bearing today? What weighs heavy on your soul? What keeps you up at night?

Is it anxiety and worry? About what? And I know, you’ve been praying about it, very earnestly, and I pray that you’ve also gone to God’s Word to find hope and comfort in his promises, but try as you might, you cannot seem to let go and let God handle it, as if you don’t trust him enough to keep his promises, and you forget that the Lamb bears your burdens, your cares and anxieties.

What burden are you bearing? Has this ever happened to you? Out of the blue, the memory of a past poor choice rushes out of your memory banks, and you look back with regret, and the guilt of those sins keeps nagging at you. Some mornings you can barely look at yourself in the mirror. Maybe you’ve looked at things on the computer or tablet that you shouldn’t be looking at. You were looking at someone else’s test or quiz at school, borrowing someone else’s work to complete your work.

Others of you may not feel the need to listen to John the Baptist and look at the Lamb. You feel that your guilt is not that great, not as much as others. Perhaps you have looked down in judgment on other people, usually it’s silly little things, isn’t it? It makes you feel better about yourself. But if your guilt is not that bad, why was it necessary that the Lamb of God die on the cross? Your guilt is great because in your pride you don’t think it’s that bad.

One other angle… John tells us to look, not just for you, but inviting others to look at the Lamb, because he takes away the guilt of the world. Sometimes you might think, “Well, their guilt is too great. It’s not worth the effort of inviting them to gaze at the lamb. It won’t do any good.”

As I think about my burdens, times I’ve been too prideful, too judgmental, too full of worry and anxiety, my head looks down at my feet in shame, while the weight of my guilt presses on my shoulders, weighs down on my heart and soul, it doesn’t seem to go away.

But then my head rises as I hear John standing on the banks of the Jordan and I hear him shout again, “Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

The Lamb takes away sin, took away sin, of the world, that means you, you are part of the world. This sin of the world is not just the individual sins we commit, but also the guilt and consequence of those sins – all laid on Jesus and taken away, removed completely.

Martin Luther preached a sermon on this section of Scripture and said, “How amazing it is that the Son of God becomes my servant, that He humbles Himself so, that He cumbers Himself with my misery and sin, yes, with the sin and the death of the entire world! He says to me: “You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. You have not sinned, but I have. The entire world is in sin. However, you are not in sin; but I am. All your sins are to rest on me and not on you.” The Son of Man performs the filthiest work. He does not don some beggar’s torn garment or old trousers, nor does He wash us as a mother washes a child; but He bears our sin, death, and hell, our misery of body and soul. Whenever the devil declares: “You are a sinner!” Christ interposes: “I will reverse the order; I will be a sinner, and you are to go scot-free.” Who can thank our God enough for this mercy?

When the lamb of God died, the use for an altar became obsolete. The shepherds no longer needed to supply animals for sacrifice. No more blood needed to be shed. And so our altar means something different, too. One thing hasn’t changed, it is the focal point of this space. The altar says something about our theology. Notice that the altar is not used as a stand for flowers, a Bible, or even our offerings. Going back to the time of Martin Luther, Lutheran churches understood that the altar represents three things: number one, the sacrifice, not ours, but the Lamb of God. Which is why the lamb looking as if it ready for sacrifice is inlaid on the top of the altar. That is why two candles stand on the altar, to remind us that the Lamb is both God and Man in one person, to remind us that by his sacrifice and resurrection he is the light for the world. Secondly, the altar reminds us of a table, and as you notice today, Christ has prepared a sacred meal for you, the new covenant, the new promise in his blood, the promise that forgiveness of sins is yours, that salvation from death and the devil is yours. Thirdly, the altar represents the presence of God. The pastor turns toward the altar to offer the prayers of God’s people to our heavenly Father.

And we turn and cry out again and again to our God in our songs, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. Have mercy on us!” And look, here is the Lamb of God. He is here and listens to your plea. And he answers that prayer through the altar, through the sacred meal that is offered here for you. Come, and allow the Lamb to remove that burden from your heart.

When John cries out, “Look, the lamb of God,” we see him here, in the water. The Lamb’s Word of promise is attached to this water when it is poured out on sinners. His promise is that he has cleansed you, washed you clean by his blood. John the Baptist said, “He will come and baptize with the Holy Spirit.” That’s what he did for you here – the Holy Spirit descended upon you in baptism, covering you in Jesus’ blood. That is why we sing, “Should a guilty conscience seize me since my baptism did release me in a dear forgiving flood, sprinkling me with Jesus’ blood?” (CWS 737)

When we hear John cry out, “Look, the lamb of God,” we see him here in the Bible, proclaimed from this pulpit, because the whole Bible points to the Lamb. When you feel the burden of your sins, look! When you feel the anxieties of life weighing you down, look! When you realize that you’ve been looking down on others, look! When you think that others couldn’t possibly benefit from the lamb, look!

That’s what John did for his disciples. He pointed them to the Lamb. They got up and followed Jesus. He knew they were following him, so he turned around and asked them, “What are you looking for?” Well, they wanted to spend time with the Lamb. Those disciples spent the day with Jesus, learning from him. That’s what John wanted for his disciple, to know the Lamb. That’s what Jesus wants. That’s what you and I want for others…

For those people who share that same feeling that their guilt is too great, or maybe they feel that their guilt is really not that big of a deal, of they are weighed down by anxiety and worry... point them to the Lamb, and say, Look! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Amen.