**John 1:29-41** January 19, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

*John 1:29The 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 meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ 31I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.” 32Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33I 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.’ 34I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”*

*35The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” 37When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. 38Turning 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. 40Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).*

Dear Friends in Christ,

***“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*** If you know your Bible well, you might have missed how silly that sounds. I mean, isn’t that a ridiculous picture? A lamb, not even a sheep, but a little lamb carrying a world-sized load?

If you watch NFL football, you get to see the sorts of things that carry big loads. Here I am not talking about that Tennessee Titan running back, but the commercials. Just about every commercial break has one or more ads for pickup trucks. This year it seems that the key selling point for pickups is towing capacity. This truck can tow 14,000 lbs., that truck 15,000, another 17,000. Those painted, chromed four-wheel-drive monsters are the sorts of things that haul big loads. But a lamb?

“Yes,” John the Baptist says, “a lamb. This lamb is going to load up and haul off a planet sized load, the sin of the world.” Not a part, not some, but the entire mountain of humanity’s sin.

**“Look, the Lamb of God!”**

**I. A Message to Be Revealed to Us**

**II. A Message for Us to Reveal to Others**

What does it mean—the lamb? I suppose that a lamb is one of the cutest things there is. Their fluffy softness makes you want to go over and give ’em a squeeze. And, they are about the most harmless thing there is: no claws, no fangs, no poison. Their harmlessness also suggests an innocence. Yes, that is what we think of with lambs: cute, huggable, harmless, innocent.

But Israelites, even Israelite children, knew that there is more to lambs. I don’t doubt that many Israelite children living on farms, had soft spots for the little lambs. They also knew that every year on the fourteenth day of the first month, one of their cutest lambs would be slaughtered. It was the Passover Lamb. That cute, huggable, innocent lamb was an annual reminder in every Israelite household that when God claimed Israel as his people, he had treated them with undeserved love. As those children grew, they learned that this wasn’t the only time lambs were victims. They learned that in the Jerusalem temple, every single morning and every single evening, one of those cute, innocent lambs was slaughtered as a sacrifice for the sins of Israel. It was a reminder that we people are sinful, and God is forgiving. Every sin of thought, word and deed is hateful to God. Yet those twice-a-day lamb sacrifices were sermons saying that God forgives us, through the payment another would make.

That’s what came to mind when the Jewish audience heard John the Baptist turn, look at Jesus, and declare, ***“Look, the Lamb of God.”*** They knew John was talking about their sin and a sin bearer. This lamb, Jesus, was not one of the thousands which lost its life for one half-day of forgiveness, so to speak. John said, ***“***This Lamb ***takes away the sin of the world”***? The guilt of millions, of billions, he takes up and carries it away.

Last week we heard of Jesus fulfilling all righteousness for us. This week God’s word focuses on his atoning for our sin, his paying for our guilt. Last week his active obedience in our place, this week his suffering for sin in our place.

What a comfort! The guilt and shame of our failings, our sins, our anger, our harsh words, our selfishness—it is all there on the Lamb’s shoulders. He is carrying it away to a cross. I can breathe!

When our conscience bothers us about the fool things we did this last week when our temper got the best of us, we can tell our conscience, “That is over, paid for completely by Christ Jesus.” When people around us find out what we are really like, even while confessing our wrongs we say that this too has been forgiven by our Lord. When Satan dredges up our ugly past and accuses us with it, “Could God really forgive someone who did that?” we can say, “That too was taken away by the Lamb.” That’s why the picture of the Lamb of God is so precious. That’s the beauty of that hymn we just sang, *The Lamb*.

This message of God’s undeserved forgiveness in Jesus—no one else knew yet. How did John know? He said, ***“I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me.”*** “I would not have known.” Imagine that! John was a prophet—I mean a real live “from God’s mouth to my ear” prophet. None of us are that. Yet John admitted, ***“I would not have known him, except…”***

Scripture beginning to end tells us that by nature we are lost, spiritually dead, sitting in complete darkness. We are not morally neutral, and we most certainly are not “basically good.” It is also the witness of Scripture that “we cannot by our own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him.” By nature John did not know his Savior. Neither did I. Neither did you. But God chose someone in your life to reveal God’s truth to you. That’s what it means when it says, *“No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Corinthians 12:3).

**II. A Message for Us to Reveal to Others**

Which brings us to a very important point. This message of salvation *from* sin, *for* eternal life had to be revealed to us. Therefore it is of paramount importance that we reveal this truth to others.

Failure to do so is like a witness who refuses to testify. There is hardly a greater travesty of justice than a witness who refuses testify when he or she can set free the falsely accused. There may be reasons the person does not want to testify. But in our heart of hearts we know that a person simply must, even at great personal cost. Witnesses hold the lives of others in their hands.

That is just the language John the Baptist used. Look at verse 32, ***“Then John gave this testimony…”***  Look at vase 34, John said, ***“I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”*** John didn’t just “say” something, he “gave testimony,” he hand-to-heaven “testified.” He knew the implications of what he was saying, and he knew the implications of not speaking. He knew that if he didn’t speak, he would have people’s blood on his hands. So he “testified” that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Look at what happened when John the Baptist testified. People who were following him saw their Savior for the first time. Two of those turned and followed the Lamb all the way to the cross. Then they became his witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and the ends of the earth. In verse 41 one of those two also testified, ***“The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him.”*** And his brother came to Jesus. This Simon, later became that enthusiastic, if sometimes bungling, apostle Simon Peter. But unless someone had stood up and testified, none of that would have happened.

For a moment, let’s go back into the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, there was something called a sin offering. When the Israelites committed a sin, they were supposed to make an offering. Now a question naturally arose—in fact, a couple months ago when we had a Bible study about the Old Testament sacrifices someone asked this very question: “If I have to bring a sacrifice every time I commit any sin, every time I say a bad word or get selfish and take the largest pork chop, I would have to spend all my time and money at the altar. Do I have to bring a sacrifice for every single sin, or just certain ones?” Good question. So in the Old Testament, in Leviticus 5, God gives a sample list. It is not an exhaustive list. It is just meant to be a sample list of offenses serious enough to require you to bring an animal sacrifice.

Do you know what the first example on the list is? It’s not murder, it’s not adultery, it’s not fraud. *“If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible”* (v.1). The first example God gives for a serious sin is a witness who does not testify. It doesn’t matter what the reasons were. First on the list is a witness who doesn’t testify. Now, of course, that is talking about a court of law. But is there not a parallel to people who have the Gospel but don’t share it? Are they not witnesses who have the power of life, if only they will speak up.

There is a moral imperative to testifying to the Gospel. Eternities depend on it. Think about that when you hear ***“…Then John gave this testimony… I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”*** What has been revealed and had to be revealed to us, we must reveal to others: The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

But just like court witnesses got cold feet, we have also considered comfort and self-preservation more important than other people. Like a witness who does not want to be inconvenienced by coming out of the shadows, who fears for his own life at the expense of another, is it not sin?

So does that mean that every time you walk into Aldi’s you have to evangelize the check-out tellers. Sure, you can always get yourself off the hook with silly questions like that. But it is reasonable for me to ask myself, “When was the last time that I talked, even lightly, about Jesus to someone who does not appear to have a living faith?”

I say this realizing that not everyone has the same ability to testify of their Savior. Yet there are ways to be the support personnel for the infantry. One of our hymns speaks of this beautifully when it says,

*If you cannot rouse the wicked With the Judgment's dread alarms,*

*You can lead the little children To the Savior's waiting arms.*

*If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion's wall,*

*Pointing out the path to heaven, Off'ring life and peace to all,*

*With your prayers and with your off'rings You can do what God demands;*

*You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet's hands.*

(573:2,3 – *Hark! The Voice of Jesus Crying*)

Our outreach meeting in two weeks’ time (February 1) can provide those sorts of opportunities both for testifying and supporting those who do. We need people to man booths at Hooray for Heroes. We need more than eight singing Christmas carols walking streets. We need more putting those door hangers on doors.

As we self-assess, we realize our failures. We remember people whom we had the opportunity to point to the Lamb, but now that window has closed, and they are no closer to their Savior. We realize our cowardice, our love of comfort. And so I turn back to the Lamb of God, and I look at the burden he labors under on the path to the cross, and in that mountain of sin we see that a big chunk of it has my name on it, and I realize that Jesus is not just the Savior of the world, he is the Savior of me!

Now, Jesus, please, please, please, help me to glorify you, to testify to you, the Lamb who took away the sin of the world. Amen.