

Preacher: Pastor Twyla
Scripture: John 1:29: 42

The Lamb of God

²⁹ 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!” ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” ³³ 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.’ ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

The First Disciples of Jesus

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ 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?” ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² 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).

This year for Christmas, I took a chance on buying my granddaughter Felicity a light, but this wasn’t just any light. It was shaped like a ball with a bumpy surface. It was mostly dark colors swirled together with a few pinks and white colors mixed in. It really wasn’t very attractive; but when the light was turned on it turned into something quite beautiful. It looks like a piece of outer space that you could hold in your hands. The glow of the orb is mesmerizing, so much so that you don’t want to stop looking at it. Felicity loves it. It lights her room beautifully and gives her a feeling of peace as she drifts off to sleep.

Once again, this week, we are spending some time with John the Baptist. As we’ve recognized through other reflections on texts involving him, we are aware of the fact that he was a bit unusual, his dress and eating habits challenged the norms of most people in his day, and they make many of us cringe today. But there was something about him that made people stop and listen to him. The message he proclaimed commanded the attention of those who were near enough to hear him. His voice continues to pursue the attention of our souls today as well. The message he shared with all who would listen was challenging in part, but it was also filled with promise and hope.

Some might say he was a lunatic, but they could not deny his passion to announce the Good News that God was busy carrying out his plan to fulfill his promise to send someone special to save his children. He recognized that special someone to be Jesus. He recognized this even before he was born. The scriptures tell us that even as he was being formed in his mother’s womb, Elizabeth’s womb, he knew there was something special about Jesus. The recorded biblical story tells us that when Mary, the mother of Jesus went to stay with her cousin,

Elizabeth, for a bit, she was greeted by Elizabeth; and as she approached Mary, John the child within her, leapt.

As the years passed, we learn that John grew to have a greater understanding of who his relative Jesus was, especially on the day he baptized Jesus. John himself says here that when he baptized Jesus, The Spirit revealed to him with certainty that Jesus was the Chosen One, the one who came to save God's children. He said it was the Spirit who came like a dove upon Jesus that made this known to him.

Who was this Spirit, and how did this Spirit communicate this knowledge to John? A little background information from those days may help answer some of our questions. You see, in Palestine in those days, the dove was a sacred bird. It was not hunted, and it was not eaten. Perhaps, this came about beginning with the story of creation where we read in Genesis 1:2 that the creative Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The Rabbis used to say that the Spirit of God moved and fluttered like a dove over the ancient chaos during creation, breathing order and beauty into it. The picture, then, of the dove was one which the Jews knew and loved. For them, it was a sign of God's presence.

It was at baptism that the Spirit came down, like a dove, upon Jesus with power. We must remember that at this time the Christian doctrine of the Spirit as the Holy Spirit, the Helper, the Advocate, had not yet come into being. To the Jew, there were three basic ideas of the Spirit. The Spirit was power, the Spirit was life, and the Spirit was God.

So, the baptism experience did not end as our baptisms end with a prayer, calling upon the Holy Spirit to move into the one who was baptized and to guide and shape the candidate's life. We have to wait for the last chapters of John's gospel and for Pentecost for that understanding to emerge. So, when John the Baptist spoke of the Spirit coming upon Jesus, he must have been thinking in Jewish terms.

Matthew tells us that when John finished baptizing Jesus, "the heaven was opened, and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove alighting on Jesus in those moments came, revealing him to be God's Son. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" One might ask, did John actually hear a voice speak from the sky?

Quite honestly, I don't think it matters if we have the answer to that question. Through stories we read in the Bible, we know that God spoke to people in different ways. We read that he spoke through dreams, angels, and prophets. Those with have faith in God today know that God speaks to us. We hear him as he speaks to our hearts, our thoughts, through experiences we have, through other fellow believers.

It's not important that we know exactly how God spoke to John. What is important is that John believed God was at work in the world to fulfill his promise and plan for his children, and so he was on the lookout, having a willingness and openness to hear God speak, creating the opportunity for him not only to hear God speak, but also to see God's Spirit come to rest upon Jesus, not for just a moment, but to remain forever. Whatever happened exactly, of this we can be sure, it made a huge impact on John, and he could not contain his enthusiasm and passion to share the Good News to anyone who would listen.

We find in today's text that when Jesus passed by John, not just once, but twice, he pointed Jesus out to those near him, announcing for the second time that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was passing by them. John declared this. He exclaimed this. To declare is to openly or formally assert or announce something. To exclaim means to cry out suddenly in surprise. Both of these descriptions of how John communicated tell us he was enthusiastic about pointing Jesus out to

those with him. He did not merely utter words to convey information, or an opinion or an instruction. He caught the attention of those gathered, and they listened. There was something about him and what he said that caught the attention of those within the range of hearing and seeing him that made them listen.

What was it that drew their attention to him and what he said, in spite of his uniqueness? This is what made me think of my granddaughter's cosmic ball, dark and somewhat unattractive until the light was turned on, and then it glowed with an attractive and mesmerizing light. If we read and study the text, we know that John was turned on by God and what he believed God to be doing through Jesus, and therefore, he glowed. People could see the glow of his belief and faith, through his unleashed passion.

But there was also something about what he said that made people stop and listen. He called Jesus "The Lamb of God." Why was calling Jesus, The Lamb of God so significant? We find in further study that this name references a ritual the Israelites practiced as they were instructed in the law, which we find in the Old Testament scriptures in Exodus 29:38-42. Every morning and evening in biblical times, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people. Later in Isaiah 53:7, we read that the prophet prophesied that the Messiah, God's servant, would be led to the slaughter like a lamb. He said someone had to pay the penalty for sin, a life had to be given, and God chose to provide the sacrifice himself. John recognized this lamb to be Jesus.

John, calling Jesus The Lamb of God, reminded the listening Jews of the words of the prophet and thus shared the long-awaited good news that the prophecy had been fulfilled, that The Messiah, the promised one, was Jesus. As time went on, we learn that many did not understand fully the role of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah warned that this would happen further on in his prophecy. They were looking for other attributes in the Messiah. They believed the Messiah was coming to set them free from current oppressing outward circumstances. But at least with the announcement from John, the door was cracked opened for the Messiah to speak to the hearts of the people to hear the greater good news of the spiritual freedom from the oppression of sin that he brought to the world.

We know that the sins of the world were indeed removed when Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice. The 'sin of the world' means everyone's sin, the sin of each individual, for all time. Jesus paid the price of our sin by his death, so that we don't need to. We receive forgiveness by confessing our sin to him and asking for his forgiveness. Because of Jesus, we are set free from the sins of our past and can move on into a new life.

Remember, John baptized for cleansing and purification, for repentance, a change in life, and making a commitment to a new life and a better life. We do the same at our baptisms. We take vows at our baptism; or perhaps, later as we commit or recommit ourselves to Christ and his church. An inward spiritual change happens in us because we have confessed our sin and we have been forgiven. Through our living out of our commitments that we made to Christ and to following his example and teachings, and to our participation in his church, we also make evident an outward change in the manner of our living.

We, like John the Baptist, become illumined. Like John, we know the chains that held us to our sins from the past. The feeling of hopelessness that is entwined with those sins have been broken. We too, are free to the awareness of the Living God in our lives, but not only to be aware of Him, but to be engaged in a relationship with God.

One who has been forgiven and walks with Christ has the knowledge of God and God's will. One knows what God's purpose is, what life means, and where duty lies. Some of God's

wisdom and light has come into him or her. One who is a true believer and follower of Christ is all aglow with the Spirit of God, just like Christ and John the Baptist. Other's will see through the way we live and hear as we share what Jesus means in our lives, the passion in us and wonder and hopefully choose to join us by following Jesus, just as two of John's disciples saw and heard it from John and went on then to follow Jesus.

The question we must ask ourselves personally, and as the church is if we have been dulled over time from the glow of this manifestation of Jesus, that he has come to save the world from sin and hopelessness, to bring salvation to all. Has God's amazing love, revealed to us through Jesus, been clouded from our souls by other things we give our attention to.

The lights of Christmas, the candles of the Christmas Eve service, connect with that place inside of us, the place of excitement that Jesus had come to earth. But when the celebration is over, and the lights and the candles are put away, does the excitement go away? Does the glow of our faith fade? Does the passion of our relationship with Christ weaken?

We allow this to happen! The world is a dark place for many. We, as Christians, need to remember we've been forgiven and that we have made a commitment to Christ. And even as we walk further and further away from the manger, we need and the world needs, the manifestation of God more than ever. Christmas is over, but Christ lives on. The gifts have all been opened, but God keeps giving. We know these things to be true. The world's observance of Christmas concludes, but the church still celebrates the light that the darkness cannot overcome.

"Henry Van Dyke, an American writer, poet, and minister in the late 19th and early 20th century once wrote, 'Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death—and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem, is the image and brightness of Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas. And if you keep it for a day, why not always?'"

Passionate John the Baptist is a good model for the church, of which we are all a part, to be guided by in these post-holiday days. John's passion, his witness, his declarations are the church's commission: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' May we too, be all aglow, boldly passionate as we proclaim this message in word and deed to the world around us! Amen.