

**“Behold, the Lamb of God”**

*“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).*

The historic icons of John the Baptist always portray him as intense and feral, with piercing eyes and unkempt hair. And these images aren't baseless. In the words of the Gospel writers, John appeared in the wilderness wearing, “a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.” Patterned after the prophets of the past, John the Baptizer boldly preached a message of repentance, and railed against the political and religious leaders of his day, and people came from all over to see and hear this untamed and unbridled prophet.

Today's Gospel lesson highlights the tail end of John's ministry. At this point, the crowds had already flocked to the desert to see John, the church leaders from Jerusalem had already sent their spies to question John's motives and methods, Jesus had already been baptized, and John was at the height of his popularity. And here, in the glare of the spotlight, and with his own disciples hanging on his every word, John sees Jesus coming toward him and he makes one of the most remarkable confessions of faith found in Scripture, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

In these words, John the Baptist identified Jesus with the language of sacrifice. Here, John pointed to Jesus as the One who takes away sin, and this imagery was not lost on the Jewish crowds that had come to hear John preach. You see, their lives *revolved* around the sacrifice of lambs! From the daily sacrifices in the Temple and the annual Passover ritual recalling the blood of the lamb that had protected the firstborn in Egypt, to the Day of Atonement which involved placing the sins of the nation onto a scapegoat, the substitutionary death of a lamb meant that sin was taken away and the relationship between God and His people was restored. And when John said, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” he was telling everyone exactly what Jesus came to do.

“The next day” the scene is repeated as John again says to his followers, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” And here, something extraordinary happens. When these two disciples hear John's announcement, they follow Jesus. Now, this action may seem simple enough, but don't miss the miraculous nature of this response. After all, why would these two men who had left lives and livelihoods and come out into the wilderness to follow this bizarre prophet suddenly leave him at the drop of a hat? Why would these disciples of John the Baptist, who had been drawn by his rhetoric, touched by his message, and baptized by him in the Jordan River instantly walk away from their charismatic and compelling leader? The answer is that they had heard the Gospel! When John said, “Behold, the Lamb of God” these two men heard words of forgiveness, and they heard words of life, and through this proclamation of Good News the Holy Spirit opened their hearts to faith.

So, right then and there, these men leave John the Baptist and they begin to follow Jesus, but before they can get very far, Jesus turns and He faces them. He sees that they have left John and are now following Him and, in His first recorded words from John's Gospel, Jesus says, “What are you seeking?” This question seems pretty straight forward, and yet there's much more to this inquiry than meets the eye. As one commentary states, this question was, “meant to get those who would follow Jesus to think about what they expect from Him.” And “What are you seeking?” is a question we should all consider.

Like many who followed Jesus in His day, our expectations of the Messiah are misguided and we often seek things from Jesus that have nothing to do with the reason He came. If we're honest, we seek

things that feed our egos and make our lives more comfortable. And we desire things that validate our feelings and celebrate our successes. But that's not why Jesus came!

Today, Jesus asks, "What are you seeking?" And when we take this confessional question seriously; when we look at what we want from God; when we honestly expose our expectations and come clean with what we are seeking, we discover that our hearts are turned in on themselves. And there we find fear and brokenness. And we see selfishness and pride. We unearth the ugliness and desperation that sin has brought into our lives, and when we hold these things up to the light of God's Word, we quickly discover that what we desire leads to death. So, the question Jesus asked these disciples in the desert, and the question Jesus asks us today, is a question designed to reveal what we *need* rather than what we *want*, and this is a question that must lead us to repentance.

In today's reading, the convicting question of Jesus appears to leave His disciples confused, because their immediate response seems to have nothing to do with what they'd just been asked. "Where are you staying?" is their reply to Jesus and this disconnected response seems out of place, if not totally oblivious to the serious implications of what Jesus had just asked them. And yet these words have a much deeper meaning. The Greek word translated here as "staying" is the word "meno" and it's found all over John's Gospel. It can mean to dwell or remain, and it can mean to continue or endure or tarry; but the term most often associated with this Greek verb "meno" is the word *abide*. And this is relationship language. This is the language of connection. Listen how Jesus uses this verb "meno" later in John's Gospel. Jesus said, "If you *abide* in my word, you are truly my disciples" (8:31). And later "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you *abide* in me (15:4). And again, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. *Abide* in my love (15:9).

Stunned by Jesus' question, the disciples asked Him, "Where do you abide?" And this question may as well have been, "Who are you?" or more importantly, "to whom are you connected?" And in response to this question Jesus says to His bewildered disciples, "Come and see." And this answer is remarkable because the truth is, where Jesus abides, *there* is God! And where Jesus abides, *there* is forgiveness! And where Jesus abides, *there* is life! And after spending the day abiding with Jesus, Andrew found his brother Simon and he boldly told him, "We have found the Messiah" and he brought him to Jesus.

And this is how the Kingdom of God works. When our hearts have been exposed and opened by the love and forgiveness that is found only in Christ, our response is to share it; to point to the place where we have hope; to point to the place where we find life; to point to the One who gives us what we *need* rather than what we *want*. And when this message of Christ is shared, something miraculous happens. You see, when John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God" his disciples heard words of deliverance, and through these words of rescue the Holy Spirit opened their hearts to faith.

Today's Gospel assures us that when we point others to Jesus Christ, God abides with them, and that in Jesus Christ, sin is removed, and that through Jesus Christ, eternal life has already been given. Paul writes, "Faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). It's not our job to bring people faith. That's God's work. But, as He abides in us and we abide in Him, we can point to the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" and in our witness...that is what happens.

Today, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" has taken your sin too and, today, my friends, your life begins anew. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today. Amen.

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