

Sermon for Epiphany 2A
Sunday, January 15, 2017
“Behold the Lamb of God”

Text: John 1:29-42

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I'm going to start off this morning by asking you all a simple, and very loaded question. Just what do you make of today's Gospel lesson? After pondering, reading, mulling over, and chanting today's gospel, I keep asking myself—and I ask you—just what do we do with all this information that John the Evangelist has presented us with today? At the very beginning of the passage, John the Evangelist presents us with John the Baptist doing his job, doing that which he has been born and called to do. John the Baptist recognizes Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed One, and he declares it to the world. “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” John the Baptist recalls the moment when he baptized Jesus and how he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove to declare to the world that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Anointed One, the Holy One of Israel. That was an Epiphany moment, a theophany, a manifestation and declaration of God in the world and in the midst of humankind.

That was no ordinary moment; it was a transformative moment. It was a moment that would dramatically alter the lives of John the Baptist, Andrew, and his brother Simon Peter. They were followers of John and suddenly, they became disciples of Jesus. “Look,” John exclaims, “here is the Lamb of God!” And Andrew tells his brother, “We have found the Messiah!” It was four o'clock in the afternoon. Did you ever wonder why John the Evangelist wrote that in his telling of this story? Why does John tell us rather surreptitiously, matter-of-fact, the time of day that all of this occurred? Because it's so important that he remembered the exact time of day.

Moments that significantly change our lives are usually remembered by the exact time they occurred. They are etched in our memories. If I said to you, “Where were you on 9/11?” Every one of us who remembers that day can picture exactly where we were and what we

were doing when we heard the first news reports of an airplane hitting the first tower. I can even remember where I was in my medical office, who I was looking at, the blue sky and the trees in the window behind her. It was about 9:00 in the morning. Major events in our lives are recorded, not by generalities, but by specific dates and times. I was born on November 6, 1968 at 9:22 AM; it would not suffice for me to say that I was born some morning in the fall 48 years ago. Whether we actually know the information or not, somewhere is recorded the exact day and time of the births, baptisms, graduations, weddings, deaths, and other major milestones of our lives and those around us. So when John wrote that it was 4:00 in the afternoon, he was saying to his audience that the moment of the Messiah's revelation to the world was important.

And then there's the part about the lamb. Twice in the story John declared, "Here is the Lamb of God!" Why a lamb? When I think of a lamb, I see a succulent chop on a plate with green beans and mashed potatoes. But to the mind of Jews living 2000 years ago, lambs represented sacrifice, lambs represented the burnt offering that was performed in the Temple for the atonement of sins and transgressions. Lambs reminded them of that day in ancient times when the angel of the Lord passed over the houses of the Hebrews living in Egypt whose lintels were smeared with the blood of a lamb, just hours before the Exodus. Lambs represent salvation. John the Evangelist mentioned the lamb as a reminder of the eventual salvation that would take place through the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.

The Lamb of God could do that, because he came into the sinful world to take sin and sinfulness head on and carry it away with us to set us free. Judea was in the throes of occupation by the iron-fisted Romans. Their king was a puppet for Rome, and by the time of Christ's death, they couldn't even agree on who was the valid high priest of the Temple. All throughout the Christmas and Epiphany season, I have repeated that our remembrance of Christ's nativity reminds us that he came into the world in the midst of the sin and sinfulness of the world, in the midst of its chaos. The world was chaotic back then, it's still chaotic, and it will still be chaotic 2000 years from now, unless, of course, the Messiah decides to return before then.

I anticipate that this coming week will be pretty chaotic, because this Friday, January 20 at 12:00 Noon, Donald Trump will become the 45th President of the United States. Many people in this nation will be excited about that, some folks will be glad to see the Obamas go, but many of us will be saddened and downtrodden at that moment of transition. Many of us in this nation have great anxiety and concern over what the future might hold under the new administration. For many of us living in this country, and even those who wish to remain here there is an angst about an uncertain future. I can only imagine how much more insufferable Facebook postings will be this coming week. I might not even look at Facebook this week. (No! I can't stand up here and lie to y'all like that!) Our nation and our world are in an uproar and chaos swirls around like a black cloud. But, John's proclamation, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," reminds us that God's greatest work happens in the midst of the worst chaos of our lives. John's story of a few lives being changed because of that proclamation reassures us that transformation is still possible and doable, despite the chaos.

Some of the conversation among us clergy folk that I read on Facebook this week raised the issue that many are going to have problems including Donald Trump by name in the Prayers of the People. They suggested omitting naming our politicians, so as to avoid naming him. Well, whether we like the guy or not, he is still going to be the President of the United States. We can't edit the religious leaders or politicians for whom we ought to pray like that. The structure of our common prayer allows for the naming of particular individuals, and what is that saying about us as Christians if we pray only for the people we like or with whose position we agree? We should especially pray for those with whom we disagree; we should especially pray for those whom we don't like or don't like us. We should be praying for a mutual sense of respect and maintenance of each other's dignity. And we should pray for ourselves that God will help us to avoid withholding the gospel from people whom we think don't deserve it; those are the folks who need to hear the gospel the most! Remember the words of Isaiah that we heard in the first lesson this morning: "Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, 'Kings shall see and stand up, princes...shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'" Donald Trump isn't God. Barack Obama

isn't God. Hillary Clinton isn't God. They are all human, they are all sinners like you and me; they have virtues and they have vices. Whether they or anyone else to whom we entrust civic or religious leadership, they are not God. Kings shall see and stand up, princes shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful.

The season of Epiphany reminds us that no matter what life puts before us, God's presence continuously and consistently breaks into our midst, whether it's in the stories we tell in Scripture, or his presence we receive in the Holy Eucharist, God becomes flesh and dwells among us. His timing may seem unexpected, inconvenient at times, or sudden. The chaos of the world and our lives may make us wonder, even if for a brief moment, whether God is there or not. The Epiphany message offers us a resounding, "Yes! Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sin of the world." Amen.

Resources

Karoline Lewis, "Timely matters" in *The Working Preacher*,
<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4793>.

<http://biblehub.com/text/isaiah/49-7.htm>

Richard Swanson, "Commentary on John1:29-42" in *The Working Preacher*,
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1879