

Sermon for Epiphany 2A
Sunday, January 15, 2023
“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.

Behold! What does it mean ‘to behold’? Beholding goes beyond merely seeing, but conveys a sense of awe and wonder. Something awesome and wonderful is happening when we behold. John the Baptist said, “Behold the lamb of God!” The NRSV translation that we just heard doesn’t do justice to John the Baptist’s declaration. Saying, “Here is the lamb of God,” does not convey the sense of awe, wonder, or intense amazement as, “Behold the lamb of God.” 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 has just recognized the Messiah before him, and he declares it to whomever is listening: Behold! Take it all in, because he is so wonderful. This is the message of St. John the Evangelist’s record of Jesus’s baptism. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, declaring to the world that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Anointed One, the Holy One of Israel. That was an Epiphany moment, a theophany, a manifestation of God to the world and a declaration that he is here in the midst of humankind. One could do nothing but *behold*.

That was no ordinary moment; it was a transformative moment. It was a moment that would dramatically change the lives of John the Baptist, Andrew, and his brother Simon Peter. They had been 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!” And it happened at four o’clock in the afternoon. Why does John the Evangelist tell hearers of his gospel the time of day? How many times have you heard me say that we have to pay attention to details in scripture, and if St. John the Evangelist bothered to tell us the time, then it bears attention.

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?” you can probably recall exactly where you were and what you were doing when you first heard the news reports of an airplane hitting the first tower—or perhaps you witnessed it with your own eyes. I can remember precisely where I was in my medical office, which office staff member I was looking at, the blue sky and the trees in the window behind her. It was about nine-o’clock 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 one morning during the fall 54 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. Now

when John wrote that it was 4:00 in the afternoon, he may not have meant 4:00 as we know it according to modern time-keeping standards, but he probably meant sometime late in the day, just before sundown, and that the moment of the Messiah's revelation to the world was important and memorable.

And whom does John the Baptist tell his disciples to behold? The Lamb of God. Why a lamb? When I think of a lamb, I see either a docile, woolly creature or a chunk of meat on a kebab. But to the minds of Jews living 2,000 years ago, lambs represented sacrifice and 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.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. His name means 'the one who saves.' 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, the 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 is still chaotic today, and it will still be chaotic 2000 years from now and beyond, unless, of course, the Messiah decides to return before then. John's proclamation, "Behold 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 even worst chaos of our lives. In the gospel story that declaration changed a few lives that day. Transformation is still possible, because in a short while we will hear those same words as I lift up Christ's Real Presence before you and invite you to behold Christ who is in our very midst today, despite the chaos.

No matter what life puts before us, God's presence continuously and consistently breaks into our present reality. Whether it's in our testimonies or in his presence in the Holy Eucharist, God becomes flesh and dwells among us. His timing may seem unexpected or inconvenient at times; the chaos may even cause us to wonder whether God is there or not. But, the today's good news offers us a resounding, "Yes!"

Behold! The Lamb of God. Behold him who taketh away the sin of the world. Happy are we who are called to his supper. 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