

**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 15, 2017, Year A
St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL**

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40:1-12
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

What an incredible statement. John the Baptist has seen the Messiah and declares to all who can hear, then and now, that Jesus is that person, the Messiah, the Savior promised to us by God himself from all the way back to Adam and Eve.

Last week, our reading from the Gospel of Matthew told us that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove after he came up out of the waters of baptism. In today's reading from the Gospel of John, we have the eyewitness testimony to the same event by John the Baptist. It says, “And John bore witness, ‘I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.’” John saw the epiphany take place, he was a personal witness to this manifestation of God to mankind, and since there were many other people present that same day, we might assume they saw the Spirit descending on Jesus too.

Many people heard John the Baptist proclaim that Jesus is the Lamb of God. In fact, the Word tells us that he made this proclamation more than once, and he probably added it to his teaching from then on. God had told John that this person upon whom the dove would descend and remain is the Messiah, and then John saw it happen.

John referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God to symbolize the sacrificial death that Jesus would make on behalf of all mankind, including you and me. He used Old Testament teaching to provide context for what Jesus would become in our relationship with God, the Father. In the Old Testament way of life, a lamb was sacrificed at the temple every morning and evening for the sins of the people. God gave this instruction to Moses at Mt. Sinai as recorded in the Book of Exodus (Ex. 29:38-42). Lambs were a symbol of innocence, and they bore the peoples' guilt as a substitutionary offering. The penalty for sin was then, and still is, death. To pay the penalty for sin, a life has to be given.

Why a life? Why does God demand such a sacrifice? Because God is holy, and he will not tolerate sin of any kind in his presence. This is non-negotiable. And we have to understand this attribute of God to understand why Jesus had to die on the cross. If God let us off with an apology, how important would obedience seem to us? We apologize for our sins in confession, but the removal of the stain of sin, its eternal effect, can only be accomplished by giving one's life.

This is about discipline, and the word “discipline” means “instruction as to how one should live,” not just punishment. We all know what children are like. They tend to do things that are not

good for themselves, so adults need to correct them and teach them what is right and good, what is holy, so that they will be safe and they can live their lives to the fullest extent possible.

As we grow older, our errors and their consequences become more grave, and our Father God corrects us like we adults correct children to keep us from harming ourselves. If we do something wrong, if we sin, the penalty is death, so get it right. But when we don't get it right, something has to be done to correct the situation.

When an adult corrects a child, there may be punishment and tears, but if discipline is carried out properly, then after a time love smoothes things out and the relationship is restored and strengthened. The stain or sting of the wrongdoing is removed by love. God loved us enough to send his only Son, Jesus Christ, to take our punishment for us, to pay the death penalty for our sin, so that when we apologize for the error of our ways through confession, the stain or sting of our errors, of our sins, is removed, and our relationship with God is restored through his love for us.

Jesus died on the cross in our place. He was our lamb, our innocent substitutionary sacrifice, who died in our place for our sins. We owe a debt to Jesus for his sacrifice in our behalf that we can never repay. We can live because he died.

But we are talking about much more than receiving forgiveness for the commission of some specific sin. Jesus' sacrifice paid for all of our sins – past, present and future – forever!! And even beyond that, he rose from the dead to conquer death itself so that we might live with him forever!

So when John's disciples heard him say, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," they left John to follow Jesus. This was an amazing statement that John had made. The Israelites had long expected a Messiah who would rescue them from sin and separation from God, and here he was, right in front of them. And he is right in front of us this morning too!

One of these two disciples who left John the Baptist and followed Jesus was Andrew, and the other was either John or perhaps Phillip. The text is not clear on who the other disciple was. And look what the gospel tells us about Andrew. Andrew "first found his own brother Simon [whom we now know as Peter] and said to him: 'We have found the Messiah!'"

The Good News is that "We have found the Messiah!" When Andrew realized who Jesus was, he went and told somebody! He went and told somebody because what he had found was so incredible that he could not keep it to himself. Other people need to know about this. "We have found the Messiah!"

That's what mission is – passing on the Good News about the coming of Jesus and his message of salvation. "We have found the Messiah!" We may need to add other factors into a plan to go share this Good News with some one or the people of some far away place, but the message is unchanged. "We have found the Messiah!" The only people alive today or yet to be born who do not need to hear this message are those who have already heard this message, believed it, and are now acting on it as they live out their lives in God's good grace.

This is the message that describes the foundational purpose for our lives and the very essence of who we are. This is the message that defines who we are as the Church in our time and place and the message that should direct our actions as we live out our lives.

It is who we are. God decided that when he called us into his family. We don't have a choice. "We have found the Messiah!" And more importantly, he has found us and called us into his family as his own.

Later today, we will meet together as a parish family for our Annual Meeting. As I shared with you last year, I want to encourage you to see our Annual Meeting as a time to look forward to what we can do to serve our God in this place at this time. How will we share the unchanging message of Jesus Christ with the changing world around us in the days and months ahead? What vision will we cast for ourselves as co-workers with God in his great missionary enterprise to redeem and restore the creation to himself?

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" "We have found the Messiah!" So what will we do with that Good News in 2017?

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.