

## The Lamb of God

### John 1:29-42

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

<sup>32</sup> Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. <sup>33</sup> And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup> I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

<sup>37</sup> When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

<sup>39</sup> "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup> The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup> And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter<sup>[a]</sup>).

**In our gospel passage from John 1**, we hear John the Baptist refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In fact in this passage John also cites lots of other titles — the chosen one, the son of God, the Messiah, the Christ and later, the son of man. But the lamb of God struck me as I read this over. Did John the Baptist know what he meant? Or what this title implied? And have we got so familiar with it that we have lost the wonder of it?

When we read 'Lamb of God' the connection we find most readily is with the **passover lamb** from the exodus story. This, however, did not take away sins, so much as deflect death — to take part in the passover (and in the first passover, to smear the lamb's blood on the door frames) was an act of faith, an act of choosing the Lord God over other deities. But John talks of the lamb that *takes away the sins of the world*.

Is he perhaps thinking of the **day of atonement**? But that was a *goat* that was sent into the wilderness, symbolically carrying the sins of the tribe.

How about the sacrificial lambs of the **levitical code**? They are given as a sin offering, but for *particular sins* — and such a lamb is never called the Lamb of God...

Most obscurely, there are pre-Christian texts that stand outside the Bible (in a group that get called the Pseudepigrapha), which refer to a lamb that apparently comes more in **judgement**. This is a lamb with horns, that is powerful! And curiously, if you read Revelation you encounter this strange image again, a lamb with seven horns, who is clearly Jesus. This image is very curious, because a lamb is very small, frail and gentle. But the seven horns are a code for having great power.

We can see this in what John the Baptist says: 'behold the lamb of God' ... and we think of a small, vulnerable creature. 'Who takes away the sins of the world', he continues... and this takes some doing, some power, because the world doesn't really want its sins taken away without a fight, and that needs power!

So John presents an **enigma**. This enigma is answered for us much later in the gospel, because the lamb does indeed go meekly to the slaughter; Jesus is crucified, putting up no physical resistance to the violence. But we also encounter the power of the lamb — in his goodness, and in the rank injustice of the cross he has the power to make hard men stop and admit that he truly is the son of God. He has the power to rob sin of its power to dupe us that its violence is justified and good. And in his resurrection Jesus shows the power of God to overcome death and the gates of hell, and to stand a promise that those who believe in him may also have life beyond death.

The lamb of God is such an **oxymoron** of powerful weakness, of mighty frailty that we must reconsider all the basic wisdom of the world, throw it out, and pick God's wisdom instead.

So to follow the Lamb of God we are going to have to choose rich poverty, mighty weakness, impervious vulnerability and thin-skinned toughness, if you see what I mean. We will have to be weak and meek in ourselves, but in the knowledge that God, who is with us in the Holy Spirit, is more than strong enough to defend us.

**What will that mean for you?** The courage to tell the truth, the courage to be more generous than your wisdom thought sensible, the courage to make leaps of faith, the courage to pray with expectation, the courage to risk being a fool, the courage to step into the fear — because of the hope of Christ in you.

Jesus, the lamb, calls us — small and weak and insignificant as we usually feel, to be just that, but in his strength, and see what he can do if we have the courage to let him.

A prayer.

Father God — who are we, and what can we do? Not much on our own, too little to make a difference, we often think. But you, Lord, show your goodness and your glory by taking people like us and making good things happen. Help us to trust you, that you can make good happen, with us and through us, in Jesus' name, amen.