

The Lamb of God

John 1:29-42

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

This week I attended a workshop called "Stop the Bleeding." The first part of the information was about acts of violence, what we usually call active shooter events. Now they just call them acts of violence because now-a-day people use guns, knives and automobiles to hurt others. The active and retired Detroit police officers and Emergency Medical Service staff asked us to get involved! One film clip showed how many people on a London street stepped over an ill person before someone stopped to help. For a person who looked like he may have been homeless or poor – who lay mourning for 45 minutes before anyone stopped to help. When that same person had on a business suit he got help in less than a minute. Staff also showed when just one person took the initiative to help most of the other passersby also stopped to assist, they were willing to get involved. The bottom line is someone has to take action for everyone else thinks its okay to assist the person in need.

We are in the season after Epiphany, that time between Christmas and Lent, the time in the church calendar when we learn of the gifts of the Magi, when we learn of Jesus' baptism, when we learn of Jesus' signs and miracles. It is the season when we learn

what it means that God came to earth and was present with us – manifesting His presence and taught of his love and mercy for the people of His creation through the acts and ministry of Jesus. In our scripture reading from John's Gospel, we hear something of a retelling of two key moments in Jesus' life: his baptism and the call of the first disciples. If we had been here last week, on the First Sunday after the Epiphany, we would have heard of Peter's account of the baptism, and how that baptism is available to all people who believe in Jesus' work and sacrifice. **David Toole**

Today we hear a different account of Jesus' baptism and its meaning. Do you remember the old Sesame Street game that had four squares and a jingle that went something like, "Which one of these is not like the other, which one just doesn't belong"? If you played that game with the four Gospels, John's Gospel would certainly be the one with the lights blinking around it at the end. John records no birth story but has two temple-cleansing stories. He records no parables and identifies Jesus' miracles as "signs." He quite often relates not simply *what* Jesus did or taught, but also *why* or *for what reason* he did such things. When compared to the other Gospels, John paints a more divine portrait of Jesus, seemingly not wanting his readers or us to forget or miss the fact that this earthly Jesus is God's Son who existed before all time.

Another distinctive feature of John, which is evident in our passage, is the greater depth of insight concerning certain individuals in the various stories. Here, at the time of Jesus' baptism, we do not hear Jesus speak, as in Matthew, nor do we get the fuller set of details related in Mark or Luke. Instead, the evangelist records a first-person reflection by John the Baptist concerning Jesus' baptism. In the end, John the Baptist's words serve as a record of the event, but even more as a testimony concerning its significance. The evangelist signifies Jesus' baptism as a testimony of his true identity, not just as the earthly Christ but also as the very Son of God (1:34; cf. 1:7; 15, 19).

In our scripture context is important. Our passage speaks of a specific time and place.

- —Day one: The priests, Levites, and also Pharisees come out (from Jerusalem) to question John about his identity (is he the Messiah? Is he Elijah? Is he a prophet?) and his baptizing activity (vv. 19-28).
- —Day two: Jesus comes out to be baptized and receives the Spirit from heaven; John recognizes Jesus' superiority to himself and announces Jesus as "the Son of God" and "the Lamb of God" (vv. 29-34).
- —Day three: John, standing with two of his disciples, sees Jesus and proclaims him again as "the Lamb of God." John's two disciples accept Jesus' call to follow him, and Simon also becomes a follower (vv. 35-42).
- —Day four: Jesus goes with these new disciples to Galilee, recruits Philip and Nathanael, and teaches them that they will see and experience even "greater things" (vv. 43-51).

As a whole, the evangelist, John the Gospel writer, communicates several very important points about Jesus' identity at this early stage of the movement: (1) "Jerusalem" is aware of John's activity in the wilderness, and there is wonderment about his identity; (2) John is not the Messiah; (3) the Messiah will come later, and he will be the Son of God; and (4) when the Son of God comes, John's disciples are to follow John no more.

Our verses encompass the middle two days in the sequence. In the first of these two days, John the Baptist's testimony includes a declaration of Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (1:29). It is clear from John's words that he did not recognize Jesus as such at first sight, as twice he says, "I myself did not know him" (vv. 31, 33). But when John did recognize Jesus, he understood Jesus to be the one and unique Lamb of God. Often the image of a "lamb" communicates to us a weak, vulnerable animal ready for sacrifice or slaughter. However, here and in some other Jewish writings, the lamb is powerful. The lamb reigns in the heavens and will bring about judgment on the wicked and secure salvation for the righteous. **Troy A. Miller**

What John recognized was the true identity of Jesus. John understood Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Commentator Jack Miles has written that the startling image of the Messiah as lamb radically rejects earlier biblical images of royal majesty, and that in choosing this metaphor, God (through Jesus) is choosing weakness and electing to play the role not of the All-Powerful Passover Deliverer but of the sacrificial Passover Lamb. **Greg Garrett**

It is in relation to this lamb that John recognizes his own inferiority or lower rank. Jesus "ranks ahead" (v. 30) of John because Jesus precedes him in time (i.e., Jesus preexisted, vv. 1-5), because Jesus baptizes with the Spirit and John only with water, and because in God's plans John is the one who prepares the way (see Isa. 40:3 in John 1:23). But, John's testimony is not diminished by this. Though "no one has ever seen God" (v. 18), just various manifestations of God, John *has* seen the Son of God. In line with the writing of Philo, the Jewish philosopher, hearing God takes second place to actually seeing God (when the person doesn't die!). John has seen God because God has allowed it, and now he gets involved and voices the testimony—that Jesus is the Son of God—even before Jesus demonstrates it in his earthly ministry.

The events of the subsequent day (i.e., day three) communicate the relative positioning of John and Jesus already testified to by John. Jesus' superior rank and priority mean that any disciples of John, if they rightly digest his testimony, must take action and move their allegiance to Jesus. John's exclamation "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (verse 36) is one that calls his disciples to detach from him. John the Baptist started a chain of events. He spoke out to those around him about his belief that the one walking by was the "Lamb of God." One thing led to another. We too are called to speak our witness to others. I know this is uncomfortable for some of us. **Troy A. Miller**

One of the commentators told of an incident in his life. He says a couple of years ago, a good friend and colleague at the seminary where he works, who was concerned about his schedule and commitments and hectic pace and looking tired, insisted on

taking the commentator out to lunch and said it was urgent. When they sat down at the table, the professor asked what was going on. His colleague told him she had some good news for him. Perplexed, the professor asked her what the good news was. She smiled and said, "I want you to know the Messiah has come!" Now the professor was thoroughly confused, so she told him she had even better news for him: "You are not him!" It is true we are called to be witnesses of the Lamb of God, not to be the Lamb of God. The real danger is that we come to believe that if we truly are Christ's body in the world, then if the world is going to be saved, we have to do it. We are called to be more like John the Baptist—to call attention to Jesus Christ and then to say to all who are within hearing distance, "Hey, look! See! God is alive. God is in our midst. The Holy Spirit is at work in us and through and for us and even in spite of us! Behold! The Lamb of God!" **Rodger Y. Nishioka**

As we grow in our faith and as we witness to Jesus' presence in our lives, others will also come and their lives will also be transformed. May this transformation, this new identity formation, occur within the whole world through John's testimony (and ours) of Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). **Troy A. Miller**

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration.