

**Worship Series: *Jesus Appears***  
**Service Theme: *As the Lamb of God***

**Sermon Theme: *Look, the Lamb of God! (January 15, 2023)***  
**John 1:29-41**

Imagine that you're in danger, and you can summon one animal to help rescue you. What kind of animal would you choose? It depends on what kind of danger you're in, right? If someone was attacking you, you might choose a lion or a bear, because they're stronger, fiercer, and scarier than any attacker. If you were drowning, maybe you'd choose a dolphin to swiftly swim you to safety. Or if you fell into a well, maybe you'd choose a faithful dog to go get help, Lassie-style.

There are plenty of good options in the animal kingdom, but I have a hard time envisioning any scenario where you would say, "I'm in danger! I need... a Lamb!" Woolly little lambs aren't powerful, fast, wise, or brave. They're more prone to wander *into* danger themselves than to save you *from* danger. There's a reason that no sports teams call themselves "The Lambs." Because lambs don't make people scream, "Ahh!" They make people go, "Aww!"

That's why it might seem odd that when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking toward him, he didn't exclaim, "Look, the Lion—or Tiger—or Bear—of God!" Rather, when John saw Jesus-- the one he proclaimed would rescue the world from danger—he proclaimed, **Look, the Lamb of God!**

In last Sunday's Gospel, we heard the account of John baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River. Sometime later, John spotted Jesus coming his way. Pointing to him, John told everyone around him, "***Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me! I saw the Spirit come down from heaven***

***as a dove and remain on him. 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. I have seen and testify that this is God's Chosen One.'***"

What did John mean? God had chosen and called John to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the one who would come first to prepare the way for the Messiah's coming. So, John began his ministry first, and then Jesus came after him. And yet, as the eternal Son of God, Jesus was around long before John began his ministry! But why would John say he didn't know Jesus? After all, they were second cousins. And in a family-focused culture, it's hard to imagine that John and Jesus didn't spend any time together as they grew up!

Certainly, John knew who Jesus was personally. But he didn't know Jesus, in the sense of truly understanding and taking to heart who Jesus really was, until after Jesus' baptism. There, John had witnessed the Holy Spirit come down upon Jesus, identifying and anointing him as God's Chosen One!

But why call someone as important and powerful as the Son of God, God's chosen Messiah, a Lamb? For 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, whose interaction with lambs is mostly limited to petting zoos or field trips to the farm, it might be a misunderstood picture. But for a Jew in John's day, hearing John call Jesus the "Lamb" would immediately connect their minds to a number of sections of Scripture.

They would have seen father Abraham, hiking up Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, born to him and his barren wife in their old age, just as God had promised. But ringing in Abraham's ears would have been God's command to offer his only son as a sacrifice. While they climbed, Isaac innocently asked his father, "***The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the offering?***" And Abraham trustingly replied, "***God himself will provide the lamb for the offering, my son.***" And he literally did—providing a ram as Isaac's substitutionary sacrifice.

Or they would have thought about the “without defect” Passover lambs, whose blood was painted on the doorframes of the Israelites’ houses in Egypt, so the angel of death would pass over them, sparing their firstborn and freeing them from slavery.

Or they would have heard Isaiah’s prophecy that the Suffering Servant Messiah would be ***“led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”***

Or they would look around at the lambs being brought to the temple in Jerusalem to be slaughtered and offered as sacrifices to make payment for the sins of the people.

Do you see the pattern? Whenever Scripture talks about lambs, it’s almost always in the context of a sacrifice; bloody, substitutionary sacrifices offered to save people from death. Lambs played a vital role in Israel’s worship life. Whether at the Tabernacle or Temple, God had instructed his sinful people that if they intended to approach his holy presence, they better bring along a sacrifice. That was a stark reminder of a couple things: sin is serious, and ***“the wages of sin is death.”*** As the author to the Hebrews wrote, ***“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*** But also, as the people of Israel brought those innocent animals—certainly the lambs, bulls, goats, and birds had done nothing deserving of death—God was communicating an important truth. The seriousness of sin requires bloodshed and death. But in mercy, God didn’t demand his people’s blood and death. Instead, he placed the punishment on another—on a substitute. On an innocent sacrifice.

For 1,500 years, the Israelites had been bringing innocent lambs as sacrifices. Time and time again, they brought their lambs, because time and time again, they kept on sinning. But when John points to Jesus, he doesn’t say, “Look, one more of a countless line of sacrificial lambs.” No, this is THE Lamb of God. Every other sacrifice had been pointing the people’s hearts and minds ahead to when THE Lamb of God would be sacrificed, once and for all, to ***“take away the sin of the world.”***

The Son of God was offered as a sacrifice on a hill in the same area where God had provided a substitute so that Abraham’s son didn’t have to be sacrificed. The perfect, sinless, “without defect” lamb whose blood painted the wooden beams of a cross, so that death might pass over us and free us from our slavery to sin. The silent lamb who didn’t open his mouth to defend his innocence or to prevent his unjust death, because he knew we needed a Lamb to take our place, our sin, and our death.

As John said, Jesus would “take away” the sin of the world. But the Greek word literally means “to bear, or carry” the sin of the world. To take away the sin of the world, the Lamb of God took the sin of the world on himself, and paid the price for it all. Every sin-- from jihad to jaywalking; the Holocaust to hacking; the sins that keep you up at night, and the sins you’ve convinced yourself aren’t that serious. The sins you just can’t forgive yourself for, and the sins you just can’t forgive others for. For every person—from serial killers to serial liars to serial gossipers. The Lamb of God hefted the weight of the world’s sins on himself at the cross, suffering the horrific punishments of Hell caused by our horrific sins, as the innocent, substitutionary, sacrificial Lamb.

And that’s not some future wish or uncertain hope. John pointed and said, ***“Look, the Lamb of God!”*** You don’t point and say, “Look!” to draw people’s attention to some future thing that hasn’t happened yet. You point and say “Look!” when you can see something that is here and now! No longer did the people have to patiently wait for the promised Lamb. He’d arrived! And as we hear John exclaim, “Look, the Lamb of God,” he’s pointing us back to the Lamb who has already come and has already taken away the sin of the world. It is finished!

But people don’t always want to picture Jesus as the Lamb. Like in my introductory hypothetical, what kind of animal you’d choose to rescue you depends on what kind of danger you’re in. And what kind of “animal” we want to picture Jesus as depends on what we think we need from him.

Some people want to treat Jesus like he's a loyal dog; your best friend who constantly approves of and validates everything you do, no matter what. A loving "good boy" who wants us to be and do whatever feels good, and would never tell us we're wrong.

Others want to treat Jesus like a wise old owl. Someone we can go to for sound wisdom and good advice on the occasions we feel like we need it, but otherwise doesn't really need to be our priority because we're doing just fine by ourselves.

Others want to treat Jesus as a fearsome lion who always scares away and destroys any enemy or adversity that comes against us, giving us the life free from trouble or trial we think we need.

But we don't always want to treat Jesus as the humble, lowly sacrificial Lamb. Because doing so means we have to admit that our greatest need isn't an approving buddy, a little bit of advice, or an easy life. We need someone who can take our place to save us from our sins. We have to confess just how unworthy and unable we are to save ourselves from our sins; to acknowledge that we deserve nothing but eternal condemnation from God.

But that's exactly why we need Jesus to be our Lamb, first and foremost. Because we needed a substitute; a sacrifice; a Savior. And because Jesus came as the Lamb of God, we have one. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, "***[God] forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.***"

When John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, it was impactful. Two of John's disciples-- Andrew, and another who goes unnamed, but is likely the John who wrote this Gospel-- began following Jesus at their master's urging. They spent the day with him, as he taught and instructed them who he was, and what he had come to do.

And moved by the amazing news, "***the first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah."***" Having heard John say about Jesus, "Look, the Lamb of God," Andrew went out and immediately found another person to point to

Jesus and say, "Look, the Lamb of God!" And that's encouragement for us to do the same! As God's Word has pointed us to Jesus as the Lamb of God, so we also want to point other people to Jesus as their sacrificial Lamb and Savior too!

That might seem intimidating. It's easy to psyche ourselves out, thinking we need to go out and tell every stranger off the street about Jesus. And we certainly can do that, and God will bless it. But look where Andrew goes first. He finds his brother, Simon. He goes to family; to those closest to him; to those he already had built and established a relationship and trust with. He goes immediately to the people he loves, and points them to the Lamb of God who had come to take away their sins.

I doubt when Andrews went to tell Simon, that he was thinking, "I've gotta tell Simon! He's going to become Peter, one of the most prominent and well-known Apostles and leaders of the Christian Church!" No, he just went and told his brother! But think about how amazingly God blessed that simple witness to family!

So my challenge to you this week, dear friends, is to identify someone in your life--someone close to you, be it family, friend, or acquaintance-- and proclaim to them the good news of the Savior; of the Lamb of God, who took away their sins, your sins, the sins of the whole world. A Lamb. That might not fill anyone's hearts with terror. But he fills our hearts with eternal peace.