

## THE JESUS WE NEED TO KNOW

### The Lamb of God

John 1:29-36

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Our framing questions during this sermon series have been as follows: Who is Jesus? How does culture distort our understanding of him? How exactly does he save us? What does he save us from? Today's Bible passage is about Jesus, the Lamb of God. Our Trinity window behind me, high up in our sanctuary, depicts Jesus as the Lamb. Twice in our text, John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God (vv. 29, 36), reminding us of its importance.

But what does it mean that Jesus is God's Lamb? Well, first of all, we have to deal with a distortion of the gospel (remember one of our framing questions deals with this need). In our folk theology, we've settled for an angry, bloodthirsty God who is violent. He's mad at us and in a temper fit, says, "I'll kill my Son; someone has to pay." This is a terrible thought, especially if you've grown up with an abusive parent, assuming God must be just like that parent.

God doesn't need to be bribed or coerced to love us. After all, love that has to be bought is not love. God didn't start loving you on Good Friday; God has loved you before the foundation of the world. As God's Lamb, Jesus freely gave the gift of his life to God out of love for God and us. Richard Rohr has said it well: "The Cross doesn't change God's attitude toward us; it changes our attitude toward God." [*The Universal Christ*, p. 151].

To grasp some of the symbolism of Jesus, the Lamb of God, we need reminding of Exodus 12, the story of God's people being liberated from 400 years of cruel slavery. Right before they were delivered from Egypt, the blood of a lamb without blemish was sprinkled on doorposts so that the death angel might pass over them. As we celebrate Martin Luther King Day, it's a good time to remember that the Lamb is not just one who forgives sin but also one who liberates. Salvation is not just forgiveness and cleansing; it is liberation. Set free from addictions and cycles of slavery.

God does all this because we are worth it. Jesus the Lamb also saves us by bringing a new sense of self-worth to us. I Peter 1:18-19 reads: "You know that you were ransomed ...not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish." If you want to know your worth, see what someone would pay to ransom you. You're not trash! Perhaps someone here this morning is in an abusive situation. Perhaps you feel unworthy, as if you deserve such treatment? You don't have to sacrifice yourself; someone has already died for you. I repeat: You're not trash.

But of course the most central understanding of Jesus the Lamb of God is the one who takes away our sin. Notice it's sin, not sins. We're not talking about dandruff; we're talking about

disease. Not a few bad habits, but our posture of rebellion against God. The Lamb draws out the poison, exposes the sin and hate and drains it of its power.

The Lamb takes care of the sin of the entire world, not just for me and my kind, skin color, nationality, viewpoint. The world! And note the Lamb doesn't cover sin; he takes it away (the verb means bearing it away, carrying it off). Some Bible verses talk about sacrifices covering sin. The Lamb takes it away. If you are a person who is carrying guilt around because you don't think God can forgive a particular sin, then you have made that sin bigger than God. He takes it away!

The noted theologian Karl Barth worked at a desk which had a print of Grunewald's famous painting of the crucifixion hanging above it. That long, bony, crooked finger of The Baptist, pointing to the dying Lamb, even as John has a lamb at his feet. Barth once said, "I want to be that finger, pointing to the Lamb, for all to see." "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."