

John 1:29-42

1:29 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!"

1:30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'

1:31 I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

1:32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

1:33 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.'

1:34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One."

1:35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples,

1:36 and as he watched Jesus walk by he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

1:37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

1:38 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?"

1:39 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.

1:40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

1:41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).

1:42 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).

Sermon: Come and See Anew

Don't miss the forest for the allegory. I know, I know, it's tempting. We want neat and tidy solutions. Life is easier this way. There are tales of a Passover Lamb at the Exodus, and of a Suffering Servant in Isaiah who is led like a lamb to slaughter. Therefore, all we need to do is draw a straight line seven or eight hundred years into the future, connect it to Jesus, and all the atrocities of Rome. And once we do that, one horrible, gruesome, senseless death on a cross can atone for all the sins of humanity. We can justify the violence. We can systematize our faith. We can dominate and control narratives. We can hold power in our pockets, excuse any immorality we choose. Violence is just the cost of transformation. Then we'll just walk through the cashier's line like we're at Target. They'll even print us a receipt. The transaction is complete. We've done our part, and now we can move on to what's next.

I don't mean to be so blunt. That's not true. Actually, I do! Because, Millbrook, if we're gonna commit to seeing the world in a new way, to

breaking the overwhelming divisiveness that hangs over us like the unrelenting humidity of summer, we've got to use our eyes and ears to hear and see anew, and our hearts to feel anew, and most importantly, our minds to think and process anew.

The evangelist tells us twice, "Here, here is the Lamb of God." And on the first mention, here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin (note the singular there) of the world. The easy thing to do, the predictable thing to do, honestly, the lazy thing to do, is to let our minds go straight to Golgotha. Here is Jesus, and God has cooked up a plan. The sacrifice is set in motion. Jesus will pay the ultimate price for our flawed, evil, sinful nature. And then, once it's all said and done, we can move on to the other side of Easter, the happier side, the uncomplicated side, the compartmentalized side.

To follow in this direction, is to not only miss the point of today's pericope, but it is to miss the point of John's entire Gospel.

So let me start by saying this. We've got time, in the season ahead, to consider the cross. And we will. And we're gonna do so in a way that looks beyond atonement and transaction. But we're just starting our story.

So we've got to slow down. We've got to back up. We've got to remember our shared history. We've got to stop letting the future write our past.

When we hear *Lamb of God*, we immediately think of the Passover Lamb from Exodus and the Suffering Servant from Isaiah. It is vital, beyond vital, for us to remember that the Passover Lamb and the Suffering Servant are not about sacrificial atonement or pardon or

martyrdom. Yes, these are virtues that medieval Christianity will bring into the mainstream, but they aren't the First Century virtues of the earliest Jesus-Followers, not to mention those faithful Jewish believers who preceded them. Atonement theology is too often projected, shoehorned even, into concepts that aren't, at their core, about sacrifice and payment.

Captivity, first in Egypt, and later in Assyria and Babylon are representative of the worst, the most unimaginable suffering, to this point, in Israel's history. Her people are brutalized. If this history is too ancient for you, or too removed from your consciousness, consider the Holocaust, or the Inquisition, or the October 7th attacks, all instances of blatant, cruel, and uncompromising disregard for human life. It is amid this kind of suffering, the scriptures tell us, that God reveals Godself to be present.

God hears the cries of God's people. God resolves to work for healing. The Passover Lamb is a mark of protection, a balm of connectivity, and the Suffering Servant is a mark of solidarity, and a light of hope for a more prosperous future. And the sin this God of ours seeks to resolve is not some virus corrupting each of our souls, some list of individual assaults each of us has accrued upon the divine, but rather, it is our collective tendency to misidentify the false peace of Pharaoh and Caesar as a compelling source of healing, to turn from our intended purposes, to lose the bearings of our inherent compass.

One of the great mysteries of life is determining the purpose of pain, and evil, and things not of God. We have a deep desire to give a rational explanation to the occurrence of bad things. What would precipitate Pharaoh and Caesar's unquenchable thirst for power? What purpose does it serve? Because all this loss, all this pain, all this inhumanity must

somehow serve a greater cause, must somehow be a sacrifice that ushers in light. Right?

Well, to be honest, I don't know of a just reason for Israel's enslavement to Egypt. Joseph is as faithful a person as you'll find, and in his life is revealed a poignant story of transformation, and he creates a model faith community that thrives for many years. It's not that Israel has wronged Egypt; it's that Israel has become too prosperous for Egypt's liking. In the story of liberation, God acknowledges the suffering of God's people, but never the *why* behind their suffering, and then God sets about a path of freeing them. And then, even after liberation, God never offers a diagnosis as to what brought on the inhumane actions of Israel's captors. Instead, God focuses on *how* Israel might overcome Her suffering, and *how* She might ensure She will not one day mimic the inhumanity of Her former captors. Torah, a covenant, binds God, people, and land, but also reminds Israel what it's like to be a stranger, to be a widow, to be an orphan, to be marginalized from power.

So again, the Passover Lamb, and the Exodus story it represents, remind us of God's enduring presence, and of God's unshakable belief in our ability to ultimately extend and expand God's compassion in the world. Put another way: God faiths in us!

If we immediately jump to the cross as some formulaic resolution to the crisis at hand, we remove the solidarity Jesus shares with us in the human experience, but also the profound power of our own witness throughout the story. The Samaritan Woman, Nicodemus, Blind Bartimaeus, Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and countless others come to faith long before the cross, know of God's deep, lasting, eternal transformation, long before the cross. I do not want to undercut the importance of the cross; I believe it remains central to who we are. But

the more I read John's Gospel, the more I believe Jesus lives, we live, beyond death, not because of the cross, but despite it.

So...I beg you to hear these words today: Here, here is the lamb of God. One who invites us to come and see where he stays; to come and follow him to Samaria, to Capernaum, to Jerusalem, to anywhere the Spirit blows; to meet people who see, and hear, and understand God in new ways; who live and claim abundance in new ways. Jesus, agent, Spirit, umph, connector, sibling of God, invites us, US, to be present in this process. Jesus says, I can't get so bogged down in the why of things, the reality of things, that I stop addressing the how of things, and more importantly the how of God's healing and renewal. And Jesus shows us how to love, love, love.

I beg you this morning, to hear John's witness. Unlike in the other gospels, John's closeness to this story is less active. It's only upon baptizing Jesus, that the might of the Spirit is revealed to John, and it is John's witness that ignites a chain of like witnesses. It's not just that each of us has heard and been moved by the story, but it's that our willingness to express that movement to others increases momentum, increases abundance, increases love.

God is present with us. And our witness matters. We needn't wait till Friday.

We don't need to wait for state-sanctioned violence to occur to believe in the dignity of all life. We don't need to wait to be overwhelmed by the systemic abuses of power – rampant food insecurity, uncontrollable housing costs, deepening wealth gaps – to advocate for the rights of our neighbors. We don't need to settle for Pax Romana.

Come and See Anew
Bob Stillerman
Second Sunday After Epiphany
John 1:29-42



Jesus says, “Come and see where I am.” Samaria. Galilee. Jerusalem. Our own backyard. The Lamb of God is here! Perhaps we can muster an expression of Torah that honors that presence.

It may not yet be Passover, but we ought not pass up our chance.

Amen.