**The Sacrificial Lamb of God**

Based on John [1:29-42a](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn1.29-42)

Preached on January 15, 2017

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The central teaching in today’s scripture is that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus takes away the sin of the world, First, because he is the sacrifice for our sins. Second, because he baptizes us with the Holy Spirit, and finally because He sends this teaching through his witnesses, that is, his apostles.

First, Jesus takes away sin because he is the sacrifice for our sins. When he approaches the Jordan River John says of Jesus, “**Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” This has two references to the Old Testament, perhaps three, that unpack exactly how this can be. A Lamb is a sacrifice, a substitute; Jesus is a sacrifice; a substitute for us.

In the book of Genesis, God called a man named Abraham to Father a nation of His people. And God promises to give Abraham a son. At his old age, God gave him a son, and he is named Isaac. Years later, an Angel appeared to Abraham telling him to sacrifice Isaac his son. No explanation as to why, he is supposed to kill his Son, the son of promise, the Son through whom God said he would make of Abraham a great nation. Abraham is simply told to do so, and He obeys.

Abraham’s faith is revealed to all generations in this action…that he was willing to sacrifice his only son simply because God commanded it. He knows that the God he worships; the God who has been faithful in all things, the God who is greater than he, Governs all things and knows what he’s doing. This blind trust in God offends all human reason and self-reliance. It makes the worldly wise sneer and scoff or else make excuses for God. It doesn’t matter though; God doesn’t need the approval of men. What God needs from us is faith, faith to believe His Word if for no other reason than that He commands it. And so God gives such faith to Abraham.

Human reason and dignity is offended by the idea of sacrifice and substitute. It seems primitive and barbaric to the wise and to the intellectual of this age. **But no one is wiser that God who has said there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood** (Hebrews 9:22), and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23).

Abraham took the wood of the offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. . So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “**Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**” Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, by son.”

God did provide for himself the lamb for the sacrifice. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he proclaimed, “**Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**” Abraham was spared having to sacrifice his Son. But God so loved the world that he did not spare His only son, but gave him up for us all (Rom 8:32), as a lamb, who carried the wood of his cross up the Mountain where he was sacrificed for the sin of the world.

Later on, in the book of Exodus, God sent a plague of death upon the firstborn of Egypt in order to coerce Pharoah into letting his people go. So that His own people would be spared from this Death, God commanded that all Israelites slaughter a one year old male lamb without blemish. **They were to gather the blood and smear it over their doorposts and lintel.** The blood would be a sign so that, when the Angel would see the blood, he would know to “pass over” that house and not enter in and would not strike down the firstborn. The next morning there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. But the households whose entrance was marked by the blood of a lamb were spared from such judgment and death.

Romans 3 says, “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. **This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins** (22-25). All have sinned, Egyptian and Israelite, Christian and Pagan, Believer and Unbeliever. And every person from Adam and Eve Christ would have been destroyed and suffered eternal death were it not for the blood of the lamb of God. God had “passed over” former sins on account of the blood of his son Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And in the book of Leviticus, on the day of atonement. The high priest selected a goat and laid all of the sins of the people upon it, and then led it out into the wilderness, carrying away their sins. **On the day of atonement, it was a scapegoat, who was appointed to take away the sin of the people.** This was not a lamb, but it fits the words of John. Jesus Christ is the sin-bearer, the one who takes our sin upon himself, carries it outside of the holy city to be crucified. Behold, the scapegoat who takes away the sin of the world.

First, Jesus takes away sin by being a sacrifice. Second, Jesus takes away the sin of the world **because He baptizes with the Holy Spirit.** John says in our Scripture, “I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘**He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, *this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit***.”

Your sin has been paid for by the blood of the lamb, but it still clings to your flesh. And the greatest mistake of the world--in addition to rejecting free forgiveness in Christ--is to think it can overcome sin on its own, with it’s own self-help strategies and healthy positive living techniques. That would be true if we were born sinless, and if the devil was only a myth. But you weren’t born innocent; and Satan is real. These are our real enemies. Ephesians 6 says, “**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places**.”

You have problems. Everyone has problems. Worries, anxieties, enemies, and sins. These are problems, but they are not problems you can overcome. You are of the flesh, born under sin, but your problems, each and every one of them are spiritual. **The devil is spiritual, and he prowls around you like a roaring lion, searching for that chink in your armour to wedge a foothold.** He is smarter than you, stronger than you, and he is more focused than you. Like water in a vessel, if there’s an opening he’ll find it, and it’s only a matter of time before you’re sunk, overtaken.

The world is the same way. The world for us is a *spiritual* problem. An illustration: When our own District of the LCC was caught in a bankruptcy bind with its Church Extension Fund, the very leaders of our church body, and our Synod exposed our spiritual problem with the world. They said publically at convention that even though people are hurt and may have been sinned against, we cannot address forgiveness and reconciliation yet. We need to handle the legal affairs, and keep silence until the lawyers allow us to speak.

I asked one of the Synodical officials involved, “Christ our Lord say that reconciliation always comes first, that we are too seek first the kingdom of God. Only then will we have peace in the world, if we simply keep faith.” He said to me, I kid you not, “**Yes but Nathan, there’s millions and millions of dollars on the line**.” It is a spiritual problem when a pastor with official status in our synod teaches that you are to seek ye first the kingdom of God, except when there’s millions of dollars on the line. You cannot serve God and money, and yet when a real crisis happens, a persons God is revealed in whom they turn to to save them.

And it’s no different for those who teach their children that good grades in school are more important than learning the catechism. **That making hockey practice is more important than making it to church.** This is a spiritual problem. Only devilish trickery could actually make someone think that success on earth takes priority over success in heaven.

And all this temptation comes from a spiritual inclination towards evil. This is original sin, and you cannot fight it,a nd preaching God’s Law can identify it, but only the Holy Spirit can overcome it. You cannot by your own strength or willpower change it, because it is a spiritual problem. But God sent His lamb to take away the sin of the world. You have a spiritual problem, he gives you a spiritual solution…his own Holy Spirit. **Equipped with the spirit you can overcome temptations and they cannot choke you, you can resist the devil and he will flee from you, you can supplement your faith with virtue…not by yourself, but by the lamb of God who baptized you with the Holy Spirit.**

Apart from the Holy Spirit you would not have faith to believe Jesus takes away sin. Now you have faith, but you can fall away, you can lose faith. Apart from the Spirit will return to your sins and die in them. But you have been given the Holy Spirit in Baptism; don’t forsake Him; don’t turn to worldly help. Acknowledge Him, use Him. He is always at work in the Word of God, and when you keep God’s Word, you are in the Spirit.

Finally, Jesus takes away the sin of the world by sending his apostles to preach his Word. And so our scripture today includes the calling of several of the apostles. Here’s how the account goes. John witnessed Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. **And standing in the presence of two of his disciples John announced, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples *heard* and followed Jesus.**

The lamb of God could have died on the cross a thousand thousand times, but it wouldn’t have done anybody any good were it not announced, proclaimed, that is, if it were not *preached*. Because **faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ. And how are they to preach if they are not sent.** So too, God send Pastors to proclaim the Gospel, so in every village and town, the victory of Christ would be preached faithfully and souls may be won for him even now and until he comes again.

The central teaching in today’s scripture is that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus takes away the sin of the world, because he is the sacrifice for our sins and makes payment for them, because he baptizes us with the Holy Spirit who has power to fight our spiritual enemies, and because He sends this teaching through his witnesses, that is, his apostles whose message has been preserved even until today, when their gospel is fulfilled in your hearing it.