

**+ John 1:29 + See Your Savior's Sacrifice! + Good Friday + 25 March 2016 +**

In the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Weimar, Germany, there stands behind the altar a triptych—a painting made of three panels that are connected to each other. The smaller left and right panels depict worshipers including local rulers from the past, but it's the large centerpiece that not only draws the eye, but takes your breath away.

The centerpiece is rich with Christian symbolism, but everything in that painting emphasizes or illustrates the one detail that dominates the entire picture—Jesus Christ crucified on a rough, wooden cross. At one and the same time, the scene is both heartbreaking and uplifting. Christ hangs lifeless and bloody with nails piercing his hands and feet. A crown of thorns covers the top of his head, and blood flows from a spear wound in his side.

Now if that was the only detail, it would be a very sad portrait—one that cries out, “You are condemned! Look at what your sins have done!”, but there's more. Directly beneath the pierced feet of Christ stands a lamb—a white, fuzzy, plump lamb standing victoriously—and just to the right of the cross stands John the Baptizer—the final prophet of the Old Testament, the forerunner of the promised Savior, the one sent to prepare the way for the Lord's coming. With his right hand he points to Christ on the cross. With his left hand he points to the lamb and he turns towards the artist, who symbolizes all who believe in Jesus, and tells him, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

To emphasize that truth even more, a single stream of blood flows from the side of Christ across the painting to the head of the artist, cleansing him of all his sins. On the other side of the artist stands Martin Luther pointing to Scripture's promise of eternal life through the Savior who takes away the sin of the world. On the other side of the cross stands the risen Lord crushing death and Satan beneath his feet, because the Lamb took sin away. It's a stunning masterpiece because every detail comes back to this, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

When the Baptizer first proclaimed those words, he was introducing Jesus to the world. John had been calling the people to repent—to turn from their sins and live because the Messiah—God's chosen One—was coming soon. He was out in the wilderness baptizing and proclaiming that judgment and forgiveness were coming, but then one day Jesus came to the Jordan River and asked to be baptized. John objected since he knew that Jesus was the sinless Son of God, but Jesus had **“to fulfill all righteousness”** (Matthew 3:15)—to put himself in our place, to bear the burden of all sinners. Days later, John saw Jesus in the crowd. He knew his work of preparing hearts was nearly complete because Christ had come. So with a loud, clear voice, he pointed at Jesus and cried out, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

A lamb? Why a lamb? Why not a great teacher to emphasize his divine wisdom? Why not a mighty king to emphasize his divine power? Why not a holy judge to emphasize his divine holiness? But a lamb? A weak, lowly, ordinary farm animal good only for meat, for wool, and for sacrifice. Countless lambs had been sacrificed on Israel's altars over the centuries. The blood of countless lambs had been poured out before the Lord as sin offerings and had been used to save the Israelites from death centuries before in Egypt. Male, unblemished lambs were chosen and sacrificed every year in remembrance of that Passover victory.

Can you see why the Baptizer does not call Jesus a great teacher or a mighty king or even a holy judge? He calls Jesus **“the Lamb of God”**—a lowly, innocent sacrifice for those who deserve it not. Why? A world of sinners did not need a great teacher. A world of sinners did not need a mighty king. A world of sinners did not need a holy judge. A world of sinners desperately needed **“the Lamb of God.”** So when John cried out, **“Look! See! Behold!”**, he wasn't just getting the crowd's attention, he was doing everything he could to make this world of sinners sit up and pay attention. Like the Baptizer in that stunning altarpiece, John cries out to every sinner, **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

...And yet how many listen to the Baptizer's pleading cry? Do you sit up and look to the cross? Do you see the Lamb crucified for you? Or do you get distracted? Oh, there is so much to distract you and me from looking to the Lamb—the circus of politics, the horror of terrorism, the diversion of sports and entertainment, the lure of temptation—and that's just this week!

Maybe you simply don't want to see the Lamb of God hanging pierced and bloody and dead on the cross! The reality of guilt or grief or pain or worry or fear seems overwhelming. You don't want to see what your sins have done or you think that Jesus can't do anything with what troubles you. The truth is, that's never been unique to

Christ's followers. His own disciples completely forgot what he had told them about what would happen and why it would happen. So it should be no surprise if you and I fail to listen and look to the Lamb.

Yet the Baptizer grabs your arm, points to Jesus, and cries out again, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** He wants you to stop and, for a moment, set aside all those distractions to look at the Lamb. Look at the Lamb, whom God himself chose to be the sacrifice for your sins and mine, not like all those lambs sacrificed on Israel's altars that only symbolized how God would forgive sin through the shedding of blood, but the chosen sacrifice who would actually take away your sin. That's why John wants you to listen and look. **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** "Pay attention! Look at what he does for you!"

So you look, and And you see God's chosen Lamb willingly and uncomplaining go to the cross to take away the sins of the world, even yours, even mine, to remove them forever. He goes so the guilt of your past, your present, and your future would be nailed to the cross through his holy hands and feet. He goes to bear the full weight of the burden of guilt that you and every other sinner in the history and future of the world have built up over the centuries. He goes to bleed for you so his precious blood—more priceless than all the silver and gold in our world—can ransom you from your empty way of life. Is it any wonder why the Baptizer cries out to you and every sinner, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

So there you are beneath the cross like the artist who painted himself into that beautiful masterpiece—and the blood of Christ flows freely from his pierced side to you. You are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. You now stand pure and righteous in the sight of the holy God, who lovingly sacrificed the Lamb for you—and you understand why Good Friday is so good. You look past all of those distractions, past all the details that try to get your attention, past all the effects and consequences of sin that try to prevent you from looking, and you see the most stunning masterpiece of all. You see **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"**, even yours.

Last night after our service, I had a discussion with our children about this verse I put them to bed. I asked them how those words of the Baptizer made them feel and they all said, "Happy!" I asked why and they told me, "It means Jesus took my sins away. I'm going to heaven." I asked them why this matters for other people and they told me, "We gotta tell other people this too so they don't turn into bad sinners and go to hell. They need to know so they can go to heaven."

As we ponder our Savior's love beneath the cross, isn't our task to be like the Baptizer—to take our loved ones by the arm and tell them with all urgency, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"**? The Lamb of God came to take away their sins and their guilt and their grief and their pain and their death too. What a privilege to be like the Baptizer, to point people to the Lamb of God hanging on the cross and tell them, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away your sin too!"**

So my dear friends, stand beneath the cross with me and every believer of all time and look to the Sacrifice hanging there. Look to the Lamb and see your Savior's love. See your Savior's sacrifice. See your Savior take away your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world—every sin from every sinner. Leave all that weighs on your heart with him, and listen to the Lamb speak words of forgiveness and love and fulfillment and victory from the cross, because the Lamb finished what he came to do. On this holy night, hear the Baptizer tell you once more why Jesus is on the cross. **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** Amen..