

**SERMON Preached at 11 am Mass, All Saints, Clifton for
Epiphany 2 19 January 2014**

John 1.29-42

***In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen***

'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'.

Words we hear as we are about to receive communion, sacrificial words, words that prepare and place us as one with the sacrament. In the Authorised version we hear the word 'Behold' rather than 'here', and this gives the statement so much more gravitas.

In the final scene of Jesus's trial before Pilate, as John tells the story, the Roman Governor turns to the people, and says, "Behold the Man" This phrase loses something in its modern renditions. "Here is the man" doesn't carry anything near the power of "Behold the Man." When you hear this phrase in the King James Bible, you can feel the tension in the crowd. There he is, the governor, standing before the people, holding in his hands the power of life and death, and turning to the people, as if he's presiding over the arena and inviting them to decide: Thumbs up or thumbs down? Which is it?

Here we are on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, and we're still contemplating the revelation of God's presence in the world. Good Friday seems so far off, and yet this Good Friday scene stands behind the testimony of John the Baptist when he meets Jesus. Even as Pilate shouts out with all the imperial might behind him – "Behold the Man" – the John the Baptist also points to Jesus and says "Behold, the lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." Again, I use the King James version, because it adds drama to this testimony

During Advent we heard a lot about John the Baptist and his ministry to prepare the way for Jesus. John and Jesus were cousins and I sometimes wonder just how well they knew each other. Did they play together as boys? Did they meet up much at all. Did John have a growing awareness of his cousin's special nature as they were growing? John knew that he was preparing the way for the Messiah, he was showing the people – and us - the way.

When we think of Mary and see icons of Mary, Mother of God, she is always pointing at Jesus, and I feel that she and John are both sign posts as they are pointing and preparing and looking to Jesus. There is a type of icon of Mary known as The Sign, and it portrays Our Lady with her hands in the *orans* position, and the child Jesus in a circle of light in her breast.

May I suggest at this point that perhaps after Mass you might wander over to the icon of our Lady by the Calvary and see how she points to Jesus.

Epiphany means 'revelation' and so the season of Epiphany is all about revealing the implications of the great wonders of the Incarnation, so in the beginning of John's Gospel he introduces us to the Light that came into the world. The 2nd century Church Father, Origen wrote a commentary on the Gospel of John in which he devotes the whole Gospel to The Light, and the Logos.

John recognises that the Spirit rests and remains on Jesus and sees this as this permanent indwelling of the Spirit as evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

So in this Gospel passage we see John pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God, John is a sign post.

Why does John call Jesus the Lamb of God? Well, for the Jews – and let us not forget that John and Jesus were Jews – the term would echo the sacrifices of the worship in the Temple. Here an unblemished lamb would be offered every morning and evening as a sacrifice and at the Passover a lamb was slain.

Remember, the Passover lamb was to do with the Exodus, the time of rescue and freedom from slavery. Later in John's Gospel we read that the Passover lambs were being killed at the time that Jesus was being crucified. So Jesus is the true Passover Lamb and through him we are saved and we are freed from slavery, the slavery of all our sinful obsessions that keep us from loving God.

The Gospel writer, John wants us to understand these events in the light of a new and a better Exodus story. God brought the children of Israel out of slavery in the land of Egypt so he was now bringing a new people out of an even older and darker slavery. But John sees the Jesus as God's Lamb taking away the sins of the whole world, beyond the people of Israel and out into the whole of creation itself. We too are the new people because as John tells us earlier in the Gospel

'But to all who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become Children of God.'

Everybody can become a child of God if they believe.

'Throughout John's gospel we see the ancient people of God unable to see the meaning of Jesus, but we see the people on the periphery, outside the 'in' crowd getting the point and finding themselves forgiven and healed by God's wonderful transforming love. But only when the lamb has been killed for the world's sins can the Spirit of the living God be poured out on his people. Only when the temple has been made clean and ready, that is the temple of human

hearts, polluted by sin and rebellion, can the presence of God come and live there.'

The *Agnus Dei*:

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; grant us thy peace.

is at the heart of our Eucharistic liturgy and it addresses Christ who is sacramentally present at the consecration of the bread and wine.

The history of this at this point traces back to the 7th C when it was introduced to cover the breaking of the Eucharistic loaves for communion. 'Grant us thy peace' was added because the fraction was followed by the sharing of the Peace.

We hear this as our invitation to communion: *'Blessed are those who are called to his supper'*

Let us rejoice in these gifts of mercy and peace given to us by Our Lord in his passion and sacrificial death.

May our worship and our music point to Jesus the Lamb of God so that we receive in heartfelt thanksgiving the bread and the wine, the Body and Blood, He who takes away the sins of the world, He who gives life to all.

Amen

Liz Badman, Lay Minister