

Text: John 1:29-36. Second Sunday after the Epiphany. **January 15, 2017.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Look, up in the sky, it's a bird! It's a plane! No! It's Superman! Look! You use that word when you want to get someone's attention. You say, "Look!" with an exclamation mark, when you see something amazing and you want to share it. Look! It indicates something momentous, stupendous, incredible! Who's more worth your attention than Jesus? What's more amazing than God not just flying through the sky, but coming to our earth? What's better to share than Jesus himself, the momentous man, the stupendous Savior, the incredible Immanuel?

We are in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means to show or reveal. It's really a time of year when we say, "Look! Look at Jesus." He's the Savior of all. Look at Jesus. He's more than a man. He is truly God. Look at Jesus! Or as Jesus' good friend John the Baptizer put it, "Look! the Lamb of God."

Look! But it's so easy to lose sight of Jesus. Ah, Christmas is over. All that peace on earth and good will stuff is gone. People are grumpy and grouchy in January. It's cold. It's dark. Ahh, I know I said this was going to be the year that I started reading the Bible, but have you actually done that? Could you possibly make it through the lists of names? Two weeks in and I stopped a week ago. Lost sight of Jesus? Ahh, I tried so hard to invite my friend to church. But he was out of town for Christmas and now the lights are down, I don't have an excuse to walk over there. It's so cold, we can't stand outside and chat. Maybe next year. Lost sight of Jesus? Put a separation between yourself and him?

Look! Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Lamb, the special Lamb, the one and only Lamb. "Well, I know that word Lamb has been in every hymn, but what does it mean? How is Jesus a Lamb?" Ok, he's not a lamb. Jesus is the Lamb.

The lamb was the usual animal of sacrifice. Jesus is the sacrifice for all our sins. Every one! Every time we lost sight of Jesus? That sin is on the lamb. Every time we got lazy in staying close to God's Word? The sacrifice is already made. Every time we didn't point a friend or neighbor to Jesus? That sin has already been paid for. The Lamb, the one and only Lamb, made the once and for all sacrifice for all our sins. You see, there was something about lambs that were sacrificed. They had to be without blemish, without defect. You couldn't use just any lamb as a sacrifice to God. Only a perfect lamb would do. Jesus was perfect. He is perfect. He was the perfect Lamb of perfect sacrifice. It's only because Jesus was perfect, without any blemish of sin, without the tiniest defect of original sin, that his sacrifice as the Lamb of God mattered, was any good. God could only accept a perfect sacrifice. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was that perfect sacrifice.

But wait, there's more to that Lamb. A lamb was a visual way to show that God allowed substitutes. Lambs that were offered weren't the guilty ones who had committed sin. Yet those lambs were allowed as substitutes for the guilty people who had sinned. I know that sounds unfair. I know it sounds cruel to animals. But God was giving a very vivid, very visual aid. God will let something take your place. Jesus, the Lamb of God, took our place. We, the guilty ones, don't have to die. Jesus, the innocent one, died in our place. God allowed the perfect life of Jesus to substitute for our sinful lives. God let the death of Jesus count as though we had died. Wow! That's something worth looking into. That's something worth looking at. The innocent dies for the guilty. The substitute takes the place of the sinner. That's the Lamb of God!

But wait, there's still more to the Lamb. He went willingly, gladly. The Bible makes this comparison. As a sheep before the shearer is silent, so Jesus did not open his mouth. Jesus didn't object to the "unfair" treatment he received. He went willingly as the innocent Lamb of God. He was led like a lamb to the

slaughter. He went quietly, meekly, willingly as the Lamb of God.

Who takes away the sin of the world. You see, there's still more connections to be made between the Lamb of God and lambs. This one is a contrast really. Lambs were offered twice a day, every day. Twice a day, every day. Every morning, a lamb. Every day at twilight, a lamb. Aren't you glad that's over? Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice as the Lamb, the final, finished, complete lamb. It was impossible for the blood of lambs to take away sin. But the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect? His blood actually took away all sins, of all people, for all time. See the contrast? Lambs? Offered over and over and can't actually take away sin. The Lamb of God? Offered once and he actually did take away sin.

But let's not stop there. Just because the Lamb of God made the one sacrifice doesn't mean the effects of the sacrifice are done. The words John used, "who takes away," indicate this is the one, most important thing about Jesus on which to focus. He takes away the sin of the world. And it says, "Look! He keeps on taking away the sin of the world." Yesterday's sin of being short with your spouse. Taken away! Today's sin of groaning, "Do we have to go to church?" Taken away! Tomorrow's sin of being lazy at work. Taken away! The Lamb of God keeps on taking away the burden. The Lamb of God keeps on lifting up sin from our shoulders and placing all those sins, every day, on his shoulders. Allow me to quote a couple of things from Martin Luther on this one. "Jesus has said, 'You are no longer a sinner, but I am. All your sins are to rest on me and not on you.'" Wow! Luther also said, "There are only two places sin can rest, either upon you, or upon Christ." My friends, leave your sins on Christ. He is the Lamb of God. Look! He has already taken away your sin. He keeps on taking away your sin.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We aren't done with that phrase yet. The sin of the world! The world. The whole world. Every last person. Every last man, woman, child, black or white. The Lamb takes away your sin. Yes, yours. How much more inclusive could God be? How much more certain could you be, that your sins, yes yours, are taken away by the Lamb of God?

There is definitely a comfort and certainty in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There's also something even more amazing about God's love. The words, "the world," are used in the Bible not just to include every person, but also to describe the popular and sinful attitudes that exist in the world. Everybody's doing it, so it must be ok. That's the world whose sins the Lamb has taken away.

The world is the place that has made opposing God popular and then hides behind the popularity the world created to defend opposing God. That's the world God loved! That's the world the Lamb died for.

Wow! You better take a close look! That's some Lamb. You better keep looking. You aren't going to see any other lamb like this. You better stay focused. The world will try to drag you away from the Lamb.

In my study notes for this sermon, I jotted down, "There's a whole sermon in the phrase, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'" Maybe you are thinking, "Good! I think we are finally done with that phrase, so maybe we are finally, at least, done with this sermon." Can you hang on for a little while longer, because John uses more phrases to get us to look at Jesus?

John is actually the first book of the Bible one studies Greek at the Seminary, because the Greek words are quite simple. But the thoughts are incredibly profound. Verse thirty is a great example. "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." Whoa! That's heavy stuff. Jesus came after John the Baptizer in time, just by a few months, but Jesus always was before John because Jesus has always existed. Whoa! That just got a lot more heavy. John initially didn't know Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior of the world. Yet John pointed the way to Jesus as the Way, to reveal Jesus as the Way to all Israel. This word reveal is the key word in Epiphany. Remember Epiphany means to show or reveal. To reveal something, it has to already be there. The glory of Jesus was already there. Jesus already was

the Savior. John's purpose was just to show him as the Savior. And not only to Israel as a nation, but to the spiritual Israel, to all who believe in Jesus as the Way.

John gave this testimony. God's voice spoke to John. John had the great privilege to baptize Jesus, a scene you can see in the window right over here. God's voice came down from heaven. This is my Son. The Holy Spirit came down as a dove, a pure, innocent bird of peace. Doves are released at the Olympics, not vultures. The dove is the symbol of holiness, faithfulness and all virtues. What a scene that John saw! Jesus himself! God's voice from heaven! The Holy Spirit as a dove! You can't unsee that. Yes. John couldn't unsee that. That window image was seared on his mind. When John said in verse 34, "I have seen." He indicated. I saw that in the past and I keep on seeing it. I can't ever unsee that. And when he said, "I testify," he gives us the sense, "I testified in the past and I will keep on testifying. I will never stop testifying. Jesus is the Son of God."

Wow! Wow! And would you believe, the very next day, the very next day, John got the chance to testify again. This time there wasn't a big crowd, just two of his disciples. But John kept on testifying. When he saw Jesus, he said it again. Look! The Lamb of God! Look! Don't stop looking! Keep your eyes focused on this guy. John the Baptizer took a good, long, hard, intent, earnest gaze at Jesus and what did he see? What did he say? Did John see a good teacher and say, "Look, go get some education"? No! He saw the one who would make the sacrifice for his sins, so he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" These guys had almost certainly heard the fuller version the day before, so John keeps it short this time. Did John see a nice man and say, "Look! There's a guy you want to be buddies with"? No! John saw the innocent Substitute for the sins of the world, so John said, "Look! The Lamb of God!"

What do you see when you look at Jesus? And so what do you say about Jesus? Where in your life can you see Jesus passing by and see the Savior and say, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? Will it be the lights that are still out, shining brightly, pointing to Jesus as the light of the world, the Lamb of God? Will it be the present that still works, reminding you that Jesus made the greatest present: his life, his blood, his death, his resurrection. Whom can you point to Jesus? The neighbor who hasn't taken his lights down yet? How can you point to Jesus, with an after-Christmas present that seems so out of place, but can be just the thing for the coldest, darkest month of the year? Maybe the coldest, darkest month could use some warmth, some light, some Lamb. Look! It's not a bird or a plane. It's a lamb. Look! It's the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.