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Epiphany 2 a –Jan. 15, 2023

“Behold, The Lamb of God”

Read: John 1: 29 – 42/ Memorize John 1: 29

So last week, we dealt with Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptizer. I read this amusing story concerning John the Baptist recently. It’s about a biblical scholar who traveled to Jerusalem. He was walking down a quiet alley when he was waived into a small shop. The merchant assured him that he had a priceless treasure for him. He reached behind a pile of carpets and brought out a small bundle, which he carefully unwrapped to reveal, a human skull.

“This,” said the merchant, “is the skull of John the Baptist!” The merchant went on to say that the skull had long been lost but recently had been found. Then he asked his guest how much he would be willing to pay for it.

The scholar responded, “Well ... I was in another shop just yesterday and the man there also wanted to sell me John’s head, but his was bigger.” Without missing a beat, the shopkeeper replied, “Ah, but this was John the Baptist’s head when he was a boy.”

This week we’re focusing on another aspect of Jesus encounter with John the Baptist. As we know from the Gospel, John had a great deal of impact on the people in the area around Jerusalem.

He was also a very eccentric person with his camel hair clothing and diet of locust and honey. All the while he devoted himself to warning his generation of the wrath yet to come. Undoubtedly, that was part of his appeal. His call for a way of living differently, was attractive, especially to those for whom life was a struggle.

Jesus had done nothing astounding up to this point. Yet, as He comes towards John to be baptized, the baptizer utters these remarkable words: “Behold! the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” Only the Gospel of John, gives this accolade to Jesus.

The gospel writer wanted us to not only know that Jesus came into the world but also what that means. He is the one who gives us these imagery phrases in his gospel: “The Word made flesh, the light that shines in the darkness.” But there can be no image greater than “the Lamb of God.”

When the baptist asks us to “behold the Lamb” he is prefiguring that dramatic scene in Revelation where angels and the elders all bow down before the only being who is worthy to break the seven seals and open the sacred scroll. They sing that great canticle “worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor and glory and blessing.” So John is giving us this preview of the stunning portrayal of the majesty of Christ.

Just as it was for John the Baptizer, you and I desperately need an appreciation and understanding of Jesus’ majesty in our own lives. It seems frequently, that very little is holy any more. We need more than ever before a knowledge of the One whose very essence was holiness.

Do you remember when Peter walked on the water? The scene is very instructive. He starts out walking on the water, coming towards Jesus, but then takes his eyes off of Jesus and instead sees the waves and begins to sink. It is easy for us to make the same mistake as Peter did, of taking our eyes off Jesus.

When our gaze gets fixed on the problems, frustrations, limitations and poverty of either money or resources, we will never make any headway in coping with life. It is truly a matter of focus. We have the resources for achieving amazing things, if we will only keep our eyes on Jesus.

In 1952 a young Hungarian athlete won a gold medal with his ability to shoot a pistol. His right hand and eye coordination were so perfect that he did not miss the bullseye in any of his shots. Six months later, the young man lost his right arm.

Yet, at the next Olympics, he won another gold medal. This time, he was shooting with his left hand. Can you imagine how difficult it must have been to master this skill with his opposite arm and hand?

If you don’t think God can handle your problems, you’ll likely be right because you’ll fix your attention on the circumstance rather than the solution. We need Jesus, the master of the wind and the waves, in our lives to help us.

We need a Christ in our lives who can make us think of being victor, rather than victim. We hear it in those words of John, "Behold the Lamb" and that's exactly what we need to do. We need to look beyond our present difficulties to the one who can deliver us from them. We want to behold the majesty of Jesus as the Christ.

We also want to remember that He is the Lamb "who takes away the sins." We are summoned to contemplate His majesty. We are challenged to consider His mercy. We dare not forget that the Lamb of God who took away the sins, "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross," to redeem us from the power of sin, death and the devil. Some have said that in creation God shows us His hand, but on Golgotha God gives us His heart.

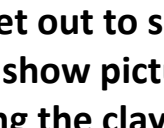
God sent Jesus into the world to die on the cross. The cross changed the world forever. That cross came about because "God so loved the world..." It is the outpouring of His love that has made such a difference in this world.

A young soldier was called out by his commanding officer, the officer completely humiliated the young man. He had gone beyond all the bounds of acceptable behavior. So he said nothing as the younger man said, through clenched teeth under his breath, "I'll make you regret this if it's the last thing I ever do."

A few days later, their company came under heavy fire and the officer was wounded and cut off from his troops. Through the haze of the battlefield he saw a figure coming to his rescue. It was that young soldier whom he had treated so badly. At the risk of his own life, the soldier dragged the officer to safety.

When they got to a safe place, the officer said, apologetically, "Son, I owe you my life!" The young man laughed and said, "I told you that I would make you regret humiliating me if it was the last thing I ever did." That is God's kind of revenge.

When we hear those words, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world ..." we recognize that something happened on Calvary that bridged the gap between a holy God and an unholy humanity.

Bertel Thorvaldsen set out to sculpt a image of Jesus as the majestic victor. Instead, he got this:  show picture. What happened? A sea mist had seeped into the workshop, causing the clay to dry slower. The raised head and arms, drooped.

At first, Bertel was disappointed, yet as he studied the statue, he came to see a Christ who is a gentle, merciful savior. That's when he gave it the name *Come Unto Me* and that image of the Lamb of God and His mercy has inspired millions. We want to remember the great mercy God has shown to us through Jesus.

We have considered Christ's majesty and His mercy now let's turn to the meaning of His ministry for our lives. Remember the very last words "of the world." The "Lamb of God" came for all, not just the good people. There is enough saving power in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus for the entire world.

Unfortunately, the world nor our neighbor always knows this. How shall they hear of it? God has a plan for it. We who have come to know the love and care of Jesus are called to finish the work that our Lord began two thousand years ago, the work of reconciling the world to His Father.

The great master Leonardo da Vinci had started a work on a canvas in his studio. He chose the subject, sketched the lines, shaded here and there. About half way through the work, he turned to a student and said, "I want you to finish the work I have started." The student protested. He surely wasn't worthy of such an honor. Da Vinci assured him, "Will not my example inspire you to do your best? And besides, I am right here beside you if you should need any help."

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with us to help us finish the work He began. He promises to be with us and help us do that. We need only take that first step in sharing the love of Jesus with another person.

"Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world." See Him in His majesty. See Him in His mercy. See Him in His ministry to the world. It is a ministry that Jesus calls us to complete. May Jesus' example inspire us; His presence empower us until all the world knows the victory He has won.

Count me in: How will you use the majesty, mercy and ministry of Jesus to touch those who need to know about them?