

Epiphany 2 1/15/17
John 1:29-42a A

BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!

Why would God do that? Why would the Lord our God instruct Abraham to sacrifice his only-begotten son? That's what the pagan gods did – they demanded the sacrifice of the first born. Wasn't the God of Israel different than the pagan gods of their neighbors? Wasn't He a God of love, not a god of vengeance and wrath like those pagan gods? But, there He is telling Abraham to sacrifice his son. And this is Isaac, the child of promise; the child born to Abraham and Sarah in their old age. If Isaac were sacrificed, how could Abraham be the "father of a multitude", with offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and sand upon the seashores?

And no one was more confused by this than 14-year-old Isaac himself. He has to ask his dad, "Hey, Dad, we have the wood for the burnt offering, the rope to tie the sacrifice upon the altar, you even have your knife to slant the throat of the sacrifice," but "where is the lamb for the burnt offering" (Ge 22:7). And Father Abraham answered his son, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Ge 22:8, NIV).

God Himself did supply that lamb for the offering. As Abraham took the knife into his hand to slay his only-begotten son, the angel of the Lord called to him not to do it.

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The LORD will provide'" (Ge 22:13-14a).

REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN THAT, DEAR CHILD OF GOD, FOR YOU, LIKE ISAAC, ARE ON A JOURNEY, A JOURNEY THAT WAS TO END IN DEATH, BUT GOD HAS SUPPLIED A LAMB FOR THE OFFERING.

Yes, yes, you are. But, the last thing you want to think about is your rendezvous with death.

You are pre-occupied with today. The meditations of your heart and the thoughts of your mind are about today. The weather outside is frightful, but you have a furnace to keep you warm and cozy. You have running water in your home, and you even have a hot-water heater to heat that water in your home. You have doctors and medicine and therapists to treat and strengthen and heal your mortal body. There are soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, police officers, fire fighters, EMT's to make your life peaceful and free from harm. You even have the wonderment of entertainment on your big screen TV. And, every night, you cuddle into your Carson Wentz jama, and fall fast asleep under the warmth of your Green Bay Packers blanket. Life is good, right? You enjoy these blessings today, because your Father in heaven opens His hand to satisfy the desires of every living thing.

But, make no mistake that your earthly journey will end in death. The Bible tells us why: "the soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:4). And again, the Bible says, "the wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23).

That's right, you die because you are a sinner. The words of your mouth and the meditations of your heart are living proof that you have not loved the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind and that you have not loved your neighbor as yourself. And for that, you will die.

But remember Isaac. Abraham's promise to his son is God's promise to you: "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son".

My Dear Christian Friends, God did supply that a lamb for the offering – His only-begotten Son, Jesus. He came to us at Christmas, very God of very God, took on human flesh and bone and blood, and lived among us. Last Sunday, as we remembered Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, we remembered again that SUBSTITUTION is the heart of the Gospel. The ram caught by its horns in the thicket took Isaac's place in death, and at His baptism, Jesus is now your substitute, the sin-bearer, carrying the sin of all the world, the sin of every sinner, including you.

Just as that lamb took Isaac's place in death, the Lamb Jesus took your place in death. He journeyed from the waters of the Jordan to Jerusalem. There, He was betrayed, arrested, beaten to a bloody pulp, whipped, crowned with thorns, then nailed to the cross of Calvary. But unlike Isaac, God the Father abandoned His only-begotten Son and allowed Him to die on that cross. His death upon that cross has done a most marvelous thing – it has taken away the sin of the world, your sins included. Jesus died as your substitute, for the wages of your sin.

One of my favorite Martin Luther quotes is from a sermon he preached on the words of our Gospel lesson,

"There are only two abodes for sin: it either resides with you, weighing you down; or it lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. If it is loaded on your back, you are lost; but if it rests on Christ, you are free and saved."

Rejoice and be glad, your sin is not on you. It is on Christ and He has died. You are forgiven. "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin," St. John teaches us (1 Jn 1:7)

St. Augustine once said, “O Lord, our souls come from Thee, and they know no rest until they rest in Thee.” True rest for our weary souls comes only from the forgiveness of sins. We need to be continually reminded, assured, and comforted that our sin is on Christ, and not on us. That is because we all daily sin much and our sin is ever before us. Our merciful God forgives our sin because Jesus has taken it all away. God Himself says to you, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Je 31:34).

But, that great Accuser, Satan, keeps a good record of your wrongs and he continually whispers in your ear, reminding you of them, “Remember when you; remember that time...”. You’ve heard his whispers, haven’t ya? You now the guilt and shame of past transgression. You can say with the Psalmist, “my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long ... there is no health in my bones because of my sin” (Ps 32:3 & 38:3). You know what it’s like to have your bones ache because of the guilt and shame of sin, don’t ya?

David’s prayer is your prayer, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (Ps 51:7, NIV). In the Old Testament, God used the hyssop branch dipped in blood for cleansing. We are perhaps most familiar with the 10th plague upon the land of Egypt. Every Israelite household was to kill a lamb at twilight, take hyssop branches and dip them in the blood of the lamb, and mark the lintel and doorposts of their home with that blood. That night, the angel of death went through the land of Egypt, but when he saw the blood of the Lamb, he “passed over” that house.

God doesn’t cleanse us with hyssop anymore. As New Testament Christians, God washes you with the water of your baptism and you are

clean. He washes you with His body and blood that you eat and drink at His table, and you are clean. He washes you with the word He speaks into your ear, and you are clean. "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven" (Mt 9:2). You are cleansed by the blood of Christ, you are forgiven and that means death "passes over" you.

In our Collect, we pray, "Grant us Your peace through all our days." There is only one thing that gives us peace in our earthly day -- Jesus, the Lamb of God, who has taken all of our sin away.