

Epiphany 2 1/15/23
John 1:29-42a A

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

“It’s not polite to point.” You’ve heard that, right? You’ve probably been taught that. The sentiment behind those words is that the pointing finger assigns blame; it accuses; it condemns. In fact, in some pagan cultures over the centuries, pointing at someone was to actually put a curse on them; so powerful was the accusing finger.

In our Gospel this Sunday, John the Baptist points. He points us to Jesus, who came to be the “Lamb of God,” to take away the sin of the world.

It is good for us to remember and cherish that, My Friends in Christ, because you know who is really good at pointing? Satan. "Satan" is the Hebrew word which means "Accuser." Pretty appropriate, isn't it? The old, evil foe, blames you, accuses you, condemns you day and night; never do we enjoy even a brief respite from his constant, relentless accusations. The Accuser most certainly does not want you to believe that Jesus is the Lamb who has taken away your sin. The Accuser would have you believe your sin is still on you. Remember, if your sin is still loaded on your back, all of its wages of death are still on you, and you are lost! The Accuser wants to rob you of the peace and contentment that comes only from believing Jesus is the Lamb who has taken away your sin.

You know all-too-well how the Accuser does it. He points you to yourself, so that rather than looking up to the Lamb of God in faith, you naval gaze.

Like when that lump, that cough, that pain, finally leads you to the doctor who says the C-Word. You come home one day to discover that your spouse has packed up and moved out and on; and he/she was nice enough to empty your bank account before they left. That job, that wonderful job with the 401K and health insurance, is no more. Your loved one lies in the hospital bed and there you sit, helpless to do anything.

The Bible tells us that we are “More than conquerors through Him who loved us (Ro 8:37).” So let me ask you: Do you always feel like the conqueror that you are in Christ? Jesus promises us, “I am with you always (Mt 28:20).” Do you ever doubt that Jesus is with you? God promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you (He 13:5).” Have there been times when you sincerely thought that God did indeed abandon you? St. Paul writes, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good (Ro 8:28).” Have you ever found yourself wondering, “Ya right! How is this going to work for good?”

Oh, that Satan, that Accuser, is rude, isn't he? It's not polite to point. And it's not polite to point us away from Jesus Christ. The GOOD NEWS for us is that God is not like the Accuser at all. God so loves you that He sent His only-begotten Son to save us and He sent John the Baptist to point us to Jesus, the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

Last week, we talked about the ram that took Issac's place in death on Mt. Moriah; just as the sin of all Israel was placed on the scapegoat; just as the Passover Lamb was slain and marked the children of God so death passed over them; the sin of the world was placed on Jesus, He took your place in death; His blood marks you so that death passes over you.

Yes, at our Lord Christ's Baptism, all your doubt, your despair, your worry, your sin was laid on the Lamb Jesus. As a sheep is silent before its

shearers, so our Lamb was silent as He was unjustly accused and tried and beaten. That Lamb was led to the slaughter of the cross. He was nailed and pierced to the altar of the cross where He suffered and died the death you deserved. Three days later, He rose from the dead. He lives. His lives to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus said to the two disciples of John, "Come and you will see (Jn 1:39)." Come, Dear Child of God, and see Jesus in the means where He has promised to be found.

"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life," our Savior promises (Jn 6:63). Consider creation: God makes a mud pie and breathes His life into it and it becomes a living thing in the image of God. Lazarus is dead and buried in the grave. What brings Lazarus to life? The same thing that made that mud pie a living man -- the Word of God. God's Word gives what it says. When the Word says, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven," it gives forgiveness (Mt 9:2).

And God takes that Word and joins it with water so that it becomes a life-giving washing of new birth. Hear the words of Peter, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Ac 2:38)." And God takes that Word and unites it to bread and wine, making it the life-giving body and blood of Jesus, "this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28)." And, where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation.

God points us to these means because these are the means where He has promised to be found, to make the forgiveness, life, and salvation the Lamb of God won for you, your very own forgiveness, life, and salvation. And that's why we sing, "My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary" (*LSB* 702:1).

But, that Satan is rude. The old accuser still tries to rob you of your joy in Jesus by trying to put all of your doubt, despair, worry and fear, guilt and shame, back on you. But your faith looks to the Lamb of Calvary, who took it all away, never to be remembered again. When death draws near and the Accuser tries to make you fear, you in faith look to the Lamb of Calvary, who saved you and gives you that blessed assurance, “Because I live, you also will live” (Jn 14:19). And when the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death closes in around you and you cannot even begin to make sense of it with your human reason, in faith, you look to the Lamb of Calvary who gives you that sure and certain promise, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27).

Just as John pointed you to Jesus, the Epiphany light of Christ reflects through you so that you can point your neighbor and friends to the Lamb of God, inviting them to come and see Jesus. For those who are alone, speak to them the Lamb’s promise, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). When they are anxious or facing an uncertain future, share with them the Lamb’s words, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on...Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Mt 6:25-26). When death draws near, point them to the Lamb who comforts us, “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11:25).

You’ve heard it said, “It’s not polite to point.” John didn’t listen and pointed you the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. Let us

learn from John. It's most polite to point to Jesus, for He is the Lamb of God who has taken the sin of the world.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.