

John 1:29-41

Epiphany 3

January 19 & 20, 2020

I have a very important announcement to make this morning. St. Paul's athletic teams will no longer be called "*The Hornets*." From now on, they will be known as the "*St. Paul's Lambs*." Sounds good, doesn't it? It would be unique. I tried to google sports team's names last week, and you know how many teams that I found were called the lambs or the sheep? None. I realize that it wasn't an exhaustive search, but I couldn't find one. When we hear the word *lamb*, what kind of picture comes to your mind? Lambs are cute. They are cuddly. They are not a picture of strength and power. Imagine how the gym would look with a little lamb painted on the floor. I would imagine it would cause people to laugh. I don't think it would portray a picture of greatness. The *St. Paul's Lambs*.

When you read the words of our text this morning, a person could wonder: *Why does John use the picture of a lamb for Jesus?* After all, lambs are not the smartest of the animals. They are slow learners. They are a little pudgy. They get a little confused. It seems like the negative list is longer than the positives. I'm not sure that if you looked at all the qualities of a Lamb, you would want to be compared to a lamb. Yet, that is the picture that John uses to describe Jesus. He could have used a more macho term to introduce Jesus to the crowd. He could have called him the Almighty Creator of the Universe. He could have told the crowd that Jesus was the "*wisest man that has ever lived*." He had almost endless possibilities, and what does he choose? A Lamb?

I suppose all those other terms would fit better if John was introducing Jesus before a sporting event. But John wasn't. John had one goal in mind – to point everyone's eyes and ears to Jesus and away from him. This was the only picture of Jesus – "**The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**"

The fact that John used the picture of a lamb, showed that John had a grasp on God's Old Testament messages to his people. The people to whom John was speaking to would have understood the picture of the Lamb. It would have sent a powerful message to them. Probably more vivid than what we can think of when we hear those words: "**The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.**" Perhaps, they would think of the ram that was provided so that Abraham would not have to sacrifice his son. They would think of the countless animals that were sacrificed to cover their guilt and sin. They would think of the Passover Lamb – whose blood had been painted on the doorframes of their homes so that the Angel of Death would pass over their house and spare the life of their firstborn child. Maybe they would think of the words of Isaiah in chapter 53 when we are described as sheep who had gone astray and the lamb that would be led to the slaughter.

Animal sacrifice seems so foreign, maybe even cruel, in our day. Yet it was God's way of helping people to realize just how costly and serious their sin was to God. God demanded sacrifice. When the people would have to take a lamb from their flock, something that was precious and of great value, it cost them. It opened their eyes to the seriousness of their sins and failures.

But when it came time for God to redeem his people, to deal with sin once and for all, he didn't ask us to offer something that was costly to us. No, he furnished the sacrifice at great cost to himself. **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** He sacrificed his Son, Jesus. As Jesus was now beginning his ministry, John's words say exactly why Jesus had come into this world. His words say exactly what Jesus was about to do. He came to save, redeem and ransom us from sin. This is the Lamb of God.

In 3 years, Jesus' blood would be shed on a cross. He would be THE SACRIFICE for sin. All of my sins, all of your sins, all the sins of this world would be placed upon Jesus. We should have been on that cross. But we weren't, and we aren't going to be. You know what is even more amazing about this picture of Jesus being a lamb led to the slaughter? The Lamb of God goes willingly. I cannot imagine all the animals that were sacrificed for thousands of years in the Old Testament went willingly. But this Lamb will. For Jesus had come to do the impossible. He would be the perfect **Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.** That was what John was telling the people that day long ago as he pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God.

How did people react? They wanted to learn more. John tells us: **“When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).”**

They wanted to learn more, so they spent time with him. We want to learn more so our actions can be the same. We too can spend time with Jesus. We can spend time in his Word, time with his sacraments, time in prayer. We can go back to his Word and have the encouragement of his perfect life, his suffering, his pain and his death so that we can have the joy of heaven. Jesus wants us to know that our sins are forgiven because John was right – Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Because the Lamb of God sacrificed himself for us, he now calls us his sheep, his lambs to follow him all the way to heaven.

If you think of it that way, then *“The St. Paul’s Lambs”* doesn’t sound all that bad does it? It’s a pretty great picture of Jesus being the Lamb of God who gave his life for his sheep. May God help all of us to always trust this **Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.** Amen.