

Epiphany 2: John 129-42 (Lamb of God) Seeing and being seen?

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Why does John the Baptist use this strange language? Only a chapter later in John's Gospel, we hear that it was nearly time for the Passover (John 2:13). The Passover Feast celebrated the ancient Jewish story, when the blood of the slain lamb protected the houses of the Israelites on the night they were liberated from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:11-13). The story goes that the Angel of Death passed over the houses of those with doorposts smeared with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. Death passed over and liberation followed.

I love the idea that as John the Baptist is speaking, he is watching the hillsides in the distance, with flocks of sheep being driven towards Jerusalem to serve as sacrifices for the Passover Feast. And seeing Jesus he proclaims to his followers: "Look! The Lamb of *God*." Being the son of a priest (poor chap), John would have known all about the rituals of the Temple and its sacrifices. Every morning and evening lambs were sacrificed in the Temple for the sins of the people. So, it's as if John the Baptist is saying, "here is the one true sacrifice who delivers us from death and leads us into freedom." No longer must we endlessly strive to bring peace between ourselves and God through our ritual offerings, for now, in Jesus, we see that *God* has offered *himself*. In Jesus life, death, and resurrection *God* brings peace, death is passed-over, and we are liberated from sin.

But despite these ancient resonances, it is still a strange concept to grasp. The Saviour of Israel, the Saviour of the *world*, not the "Lion of God," or the "mighty warrior of God," but the *Lamb*. Fragile, weak, vulnerable.

Jesus comes among us and reveals his love for us in powerlessness and weakness, precisely so that we can be assured that even at our weakest points, our most broken, and in our greatest failures, God is with us, and has not abandoned us.

This is perhaps most beautifully illustrated in the life of Peter. The impetuous Peter who continually gets things wrong. He's irritable, erratic, but most tragically abandons and denies Jesus at his trial and crucifixion. Yet, this same Peter is the one whom Christ says "you are the rock upon which I will build my church."

I don't know about you, but that gives me huge hope! If Peter, in all his failures is who Jesus trusts with the good news for the whole world, then maybe I can be a follower of Jesus too.

Contained in this proclamation, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" is not just the promise of God with us in our weakness, but the promise of transformation, the promise of new life!

God comes among us not only in radical solidarity, entering into our weakness and vulnerability, but in doing so, transforms our humanity— restoring us to our intended image, removing the sin that enslaves us, which mars the image of who we are made to be. Returning the imagery of the Passover, in Christ we are liberated from the bondage and slavery of sin, into the true freedom of his image. For this Lamb of God is also the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, who knows us, and cares for us, seeks us out when we are lost and carries us home.

Again, we see this in the life of Peter. Jesus sees not just who Peter is in that moment, but who he can become— he saw him not only as a Galilean fisherman but as Cephas, the rock on which the church would be built.

When Michelangelo was asked “what he was doing?” as he chipped away with his chisel at a huge shapeless piece of rock, he replied, “I am releasing an angel imprisoned in the marble.” So too, our lives become new in responding to Jesus, who liberates us and releases us into who we are called to be.

In Jesus, we see that God is radically with us, but also that we are invited to be with him. That just like, Andrew, Jesus’ invites us to “come and see”, and remain with him, so that we might discover a new life. Never in a straight line, and never without failure again and again, yet in Jesus we come to the fullness of who we are made to be.

I remember on a visit to Rome as part of a cricket tour... a hard life, I know... we had the privilege of a being shown around St Peter’s Basilica. At the central altar, we were taken below it via some steps and showed some bones that are believed to be the actual bones of St Peter. Church tradition holds that during the persecution of Christians under Nero after the fire in Rome, Peter meets the risen Christ as he flees Rome to avoid execution. According to the story, Peter asks Jesus, “where are you going Lord?” And Jesus replies, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again". Peter then gains the courage to continue his ministry in sharing the gospel and returns to the city, where he is crucified and martyred. This is the same Peter who fled for his safety when Christ was arrested and denying any association. Yet, here, changed and transformed, through many failures, yet always persistently, doggedly turning to Christ, again and again, finds himself at the centre of the Roman Empire, sharing the

same good news that had been once shared with him, of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!

Amen.