

2 EPIPHANY JANUARY 16, 2011 CYCLE "A"

TITLE: LOOK THE LAMB OF GOD !

READINGS: Isa. 49:1-7, Ps.40:1-11, 1Cor.1:1-9, John 1:29-42

How do you discover Jesus? How do you recognize him? This is the question John the Evangelist wants his readers to ask themselves in the very first chapter of his Gospel. Even the great John the Baptist didn't truly recognize Jesus as his Messiah for the Baptist confesses, "I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." Jn.1:31. And in this revelation, this manifestation of the Lord to John the Baptist, when Jesus came to him in the Jordan, John himself received his understanding of who Jesus was. Even though Jesus and John were cousins and grew up in families who did things together, he did not really know who Jesus was until the day Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized. It was then that John the Baptist received his dramatic act of revelation. For then the heavens were opened and the Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Jesus. "And I myself have seen and have testified," says the Baptist, "that this is the Son of God." Jn.1:34. Now John's eyes were opened and he recognized his Savior. Sometimes it happens that way. Something very dramatic happens in our lives as well and we are transformed. For John the Baptist this Epiphany this revelation of his Messiah leads him to cry out to the crowd and to all mankind, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Jn.1:29.

This proclamation of John the Baptist even before Jesus had begun his ministry is unique to the Gospel of John. In contrast to the other Gospel writers, John was not so much interested in writing about history as in writing theology. He wanted us to know not only that Jesus came into the world but also that he was "the Word made flesh" and "the light that shines in darkness" and that he is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." As John the Evangelist puts these words on the lips of John the Baptist, we see the prefiguring of that very dramatic scene in the Book of Revelation when millions of angels and the twenty four elders bow down before the only being that is worthy to break the seven seals and open the sacred scroll. Together they sang, "Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing." Rev.5:12. We need to ask ourselves, have we found him? Have we recognized him? Have we accepted him into our hearts, our lives?

When John cried out to us, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” he didn’t know it, but he was pronouncing a death sentence on Jesus. Jesus would be sentenced to death, not for what he was and the ultimate good he had come to accomplish, but simply because his preaching tended to be against the best interests of the religious establishment. It took three years to do it, but Jesus was finally executed by the combined efforts of the religious and political leaders in Israel. They didn’t realize that they were carrying out the will of God when they sentenced Jesus to death, any more than John knew he was pronouncing a death sentence on Jesus when he called him the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” But John the Evangelist knew it when he wrote it in his Gospel, and this is the theology he wants us to see, believe and accept. Recognize your Lord and Savior he says, know him, accept him, for he has saved you.

In a cathedral in Copenhagen, Denmark there is a magnificent statue of Jesus by the noted sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. When Thorvaldsen first completed the sculpture he gazed upon the finished product with great satisfaction. It was a sculpture of Christ with his face looking upward and arms extended upward. It was a statue of a majestic, conquering Christ. Later that night, however, after the sculptor had left his fine new work in clay to dry and harden, something unexpected occurred. Sea mist seeped into the studio in the night. The clay did not harden as quickly as anticipated. The upraised arms and head of the sculpture began to drop. The majestic Christ with arms lifted up and head thrown back was transformed into a Christ with head bent forward and arms stretched downward as if in a pose of gentle invitation. At first Thorvaldsen was bitterly disappointed. As he studied the transformed sculpture, however, he came to see a dimension of Christ that had not been real to him before. It was the Christ who is a gentle, merciful Savior. Thorvaldsen inscribed on the base of the completed statue, “Come Unto Me,” and that picture of the Lamb of God in his mercy has inspired millions.

It is that humble, submissive Christ who came from the Father to save us. “This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased,” says the father. I acknowledge and accept the offering of himself in total obedience and submission as my servant who will take your sins upon himself. There is enough saving power in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the entire world, if only the world knew. If only your next door neighbor knew. If only I knew. Then our lives would be changed forever for the better. We need to know that our names have already been selected to receive the greatest gift ever awarded to anybody, the gift of eternal

victory over sin and death. All we have to do is acknowledge and claim it. Our eternal love relationship with God through Jesus Christ is ours simply for the asking.

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

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," see him, recognize him, believe and accept him. He has given you his own brush; paint your portrait of love. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney