

“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”

“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” The marketing gurus would probably scratch their heads over this approach. Sure, there are bold words – but no spotlights, advertisements on the side of a building or bus, or social media deluge.

No, the Lord breaks into this world’s darkness with messengers out in the countryside, a star settling over a house, a dove descending – and now, as Dr. Korby would say – with the “boney little finger” of John the Baptist.

All the world it seems has been flocking to the Jordan River to see this spectacle of a man – but with a “boney little finger,” John points us to Jesus – “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Not just “see that man over there” – but BEHOLD – take it all in, understand what it means that He is “the Lamb of God.”

Walk around the church and you will see a lot of “lambs” that are cute and cuddly – but when the people of John’s day heard about “the Lamb” – they would have thought of something else. You see, lambs were more than just part of the livestock – they were a vital part of the worship of God.

Hearing about a lamb would remind them of the Lord’s promise given to Abraham – that He would provide another lamb – just as He provided one to be sacrificed in the place of Abraham’s son, Isaac.

They would think of the Passover lambs whose blood marked the houses of Israel as they feasted inside on the roasted lamb – while the Angel of Death passed over. And then there were all the lambs sacrificed each morning and evening in the Temple – day after day – to atone for sin.

Talk about a “sensory worship” experience – imagine taking a lamb to the Temple, cutting its throat, and handing it over to the priest to be burnt up on the altar. The sight, the sounds, the smells – all driving home the point that sin is serious, deadly serious! A cute and cuddly lamb put to death – all because of your sin – so that you might live.

If John the Baptist were here today – he might point his “boney little finger” at the baptismal font, or the lectern, or the pulpit, or at this altar – and proclaim to you, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

And we can handle that. We wouldn’t cringe, or be repulsed – because we don’t see a drop of blood – we don’t hear the Lamb crying out – or smell the smell of death. Unlike the altar in the Temple, drenched with blood – ours is quite sanitary – and we like it like that.

We don’t like the preacher to be bloody – we don’t want to think of Baptism as being washed in the blood of the Lamb – and when we come to eat of the Supper, it’s really easy for our senses to tell us that we are only feasting on bread and wine.

The sight and smell of blood makes us queasy. Killing another living thing reminds us that life is fragile. And the thought of death frightens us. And to make matters worse – a preacher who tells us that we are responsible for the shedding of blood, for the taking of another’s life – crushes us with guilt.

The upcoming anniversary of Roe v. Wade – and the overturning of this Supreme Court decision which legalized the killing of unborn children – reminds us of this horror. Despite all the lies we are told – abortion is the taking of a human life.

We don’t like being reminded of this great tragedy. We don’t like to think that living human beings are still being put to death, by choice, through abortion. For some, it hits harder than for others – because they know personally the pain involved with abortion. For all of us, it is a reminder that we have failed to speak up – that we have failed to provide for these children, and for their mothers and fathers.

Trying to impose greater restrictions on abortion creates some space for us to live in denial. Calling the young child a “fetus” sounds scientific. “Terminating a pregnancy” seems benign. And focusing on the health of the mother (which IS important), distracts us from the health of the child.

Like every other sin, abortion is bloody. You might not think so – but your gossip is just as bloody – and so is your greed, your pride, and your lust. Your sin has led Jesus to Calvary – where His blood was shed – and life was drained from His body.

There is a reason why this bloody Lamb of God hangs over our altar. It is an effective advertisement of God's love and mercy. "The wages of sin is death" – and so God provides His very own Son as the Lamb to be sacrificed – so that His blood might be shed to pay the price for sin, rather than yours.

In Jesus, God BEHOLDS YOU! He lives, suffers and dies for you – so that you might not die, but live. The blood of Jesus, shed once and for all on the cross, now flows to you, covering all your sin.

The blood of the Lamb flows into the font where you are washed, and where you live in daily contrition and repentance. It is sprinkled on you through absolution and the preaching the Gospel. It is poured out "for you" in the Holy Supper – so that death now passes over you.

No matter what your sin is – "Behold, the Lamb of God!" For your sin of living in denial, and apathy – for all the guilt and pain which you endure from past sins – Jesus has taken it all upon Himself, to suffer the wages of your sin – and to declare to you today, "I forgive you ALL your sin."

Dearly beloved – "Behold, the Lamb of God" – who has taken away your sin, and remembers your sin no more. In Jesus Christ, you are restored to your Father in heaven, you are set free to live with Him, and one another, in His grace, mercy, and peace. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.