

Sunday, January 19, 2020 - Second Sunday after the Epiphany
“Look, the Lamb of God!”

John 1: 29-42a

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Frame and Refrain

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

What are you looking at? If one asks that question emphasizing the *you*, it is a challenge - maybe even time to drop the gloves. But ask the question this way: “What are you *looking* at?” Now the emphasis is different. Now you are challenged, but not to a fight. You are called to give account. Now someone wants to know what it is that has captured your attention. It might be a teacher. It might be a parent or a child. It might be the Lord. Oh, yes. Was it really so different a question when he asked his disciples, “But who do you say that I am?”

“What are you looking at?” Someone who is searching might ask that question. It might not be put in exactly those words, but that is the question they are asking. They want to know what our life is about. Like the comic bit in a movie where someone stops and stares at the sky, drawing everyone else’s gaze heavenward, our lives can be lived in such a way that people notice, stop, and ask, “What are you looking at?” Who, me? Oh, I look to the Lamb!

John the Baptist is back today, we saw him last week. He is shifting attention away from himself. “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Last week John said the Christ was greater than he. This week he says it again. Like the prophets of old, disciples had gathered around John. They must not look to him. They must look to Jesus.

What an amazing ministry, the ministry of John the Baptizer. How much we tend to like the spotlight. Even when we feign humility, we can enjoy the attention that gives us the opportunity to be humble! That’s the way we are wired this side of Genesis 3. Sin is, in the final analysis, abject self-centeredness. Yet here is John—look not to me, look to the Lamb!

Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus gives back life itself, which sin has stolen. The Father breathes back in the wind of the Spirit through the

Good News of Jesus. Like the lamb on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, Jesus was sacrificed for the sins of the people—all the people of the world.

John knew that we must start here. John's ministry is not as abrupt as the proverbial slap on a baby's bottom to force a cry that draws the breath of life into infant lungs. Still, that is the impact of his words, "Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" We draw the breath of faith, and it brings forgiveness. Now we are really alive.

John emphasizes the nature of his ministry, matching the need of humankind to look to the Lamb. "The reason I came baptizing with water was that he [Jesus] might be revealed to Israel" (Jn 1:31). John's gaze was toward Messiah. That must be where his disciples look as well.

The world is full of "eye candy for the human spirit." Bogus spirits like Ramtha; the false nirvana of drugs, alcohol, even sex; the myriad of self-help books as you browse a bookstore or Amazon's "Recommended for you" section; on the cover of supermarket checkout magazines or sports heroes on a box of Wheaties—they are all offered, every one, as evidence of what can be ours, as suitable goals for the energies and dreams of the mind and soul. Each, without exception, is empty. They cannot give us life. They will not see us to death, let alone into eternity. The voice of John cries to us today, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Come back today to the first things, people of God. Come back from wherever your eyes have wandered. Look to Jesus. John said to his disciples, and to us today, "I have seen and I testify to you today that Jesus is the Son of God" (Jn 1:34, paraphrase). Look to the Christ of the cross and empty tomb. Look to Jesus, who forgives and gives you real life. Gaze on him with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. People are watching us. Like John, our lives can say, "Look to the Lamb."

A second time John, in the company of his disciples, sees Jesus. What he sees he wants his disciples to see. John sees that Jesus is more than a man. He is the Savior. Again, John says, "Look, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). Advertising folks today tell us we need to

encounter information six or seven times before we begin to pay real attention. John seemed to know that already in the first century. It is as though John grabs them by the robes, looks them in the eye, and says, “I am not the point. I want to point you to the one who is. Look, there is Jesus!”

John’s disciples take the first step from John to Jesus. They follow after Christ. One can imagine their timid, tentative gait. Jesus turned and spoke. Last week we encountered Christ’s first words in the Gospel of Matthew. Today we hear his first words in the Gospel of John. Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, speaks life into being in the souls of humankind.

“What are you seeking?” (Jn 1:38). They were seekers. It is not just a twenty-first-century concept. From crystals in New Age shops to the growing popularity of eastern and pop-culture spirituality in the present age, there is evidence all around us that people are seeking spiritual meaning and vitality. We are seekers also today. Others may seek that which they do not know. We seek that which knows us and has swept us up into life. We look to the Lamb.

Jesus wanted to know what those disciples of John were about. He did not just ask what they wanted. “What are you seeking?” There is more than desire behind the answer to such a question. There is absolute need. There is the yearning of the human spirit. They sought the Christ, and we can sense their timid hope in the words of this Gospel.

That timid hope is betrayed in their lame response, “Where are you staying?” (Jn. 1:38). Was this the real, burning question that John’s twice-insistent “Look!” had created in them? Aren’t we the same? Can it really be? Dare we allow ourselves to believe? Do we really know the full import of that for which we have hoped? Are we always really clear what it is we are looking for? Even in Christ?

This seems to be where these proto-disciples are when Jesus turns and confronts them. He likes to ask questions, this Jesus of ours. He likes to challenge us. He likes to breathe faith into us, then draw it out of us again so that the words formed by faith are in the air for our ears to hear, our hearts to be comforted, and we say the yes of a graced faith

again and again and again. Sometimes we fumble, and we say something silly like, “Where are you staying?” What spiritual seekers are these!

And with us, as with these first disciples, Jesus takes us where we are. He does not reprimand. He does not belittle the lack of theological sophistication or ineloquent speech in their response to his question. No, instead the grace of God thunders in our ears in the soft voice of Jesus, “Come . . . and you will see” (Jn 1:39). Christ drew them to himself with such simple words. He did not say, “What’s wrong with you? Really?” No... just a gentle, “Come, and you will see.”

Jesus sweeps us up into community with himself, the Father and the Spirit. We see much more than where he lays his head at night. We see evidence of his presence everywhere in our lives. We see his forgiveness. We see and taste of his meal of life in communion. We see his handiwork around us in the world. We see Christ in one another. We hear Christ in the voices of his children. We see life everlasting, sometimes very clearly and with vision bold, sometimes timidly like these first disciples. And still Jesus invites and promises, “Come, and you will see.” Look to the Lamb!

These first disciples joined Jesus at about 4pm. Immediately their lives took on the nature of proclamation. Andrew did not wait for someone to ask, “What are you looking at?” We are told that the first thing Andrew did was find his brother Simon and tell him, “I have been looking at the Messiah!” We have found the Christ!

Remember Christ’s first words in this Gospel? They were in the form of a question, “What are you seeking?” The response of the disciples doesn’t fit. But now we learn what they were seeking—the Christ—and that faith’s goal had found its mark. They were not seekers any longer. They had found him!

This is what looking to Jesus does. Faith transforms our lives. We become disciples. The Scriptures are full of words such as born again, rebirth, regeneration, renewal, transformation. When you look to Jesus, you are never the same again. One whom Christ invites to follow is changed by the invitation. He’s found us!

Now this is not theological theory. This is the fact of what has happened to you and to me through faith in Christ Jesus. Look no farther. Look to the Lamb. God has marked you in Baptism - chosen, adopted, forgiven. Believe it when he says he loves you. Trust him when he says he is with you always, to the end of the age. Look to the Lamb today and tomorrow and every day.

This is what the world needs—the people of God living by looking to the Lamb. This trusting gaze will show in our lives this coming week. People will notice. How many lives will be touched by those of us here today? How many eyes will see evidence of something in us that causes them to wonder? How many opportunities will we have these next seven days to say, “Look to the Lamb! Come, and you will see”? God will use our heart’s gaze, our soul’s fixation on Jesus, to proclaim to the people in our lives, “Look to the Lamb!” In Jesus’ name, Amen.