

"Take Away"

John 1:29-42

Epiphany 3A

JAN 20 2008

"Here comes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world". That's what John the Baptist says when he sees Jesus coming near. Let's repeat it together, "Here comes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world". "The Lamb who takes away the sins of the world". What's that mean? Well, let's start with sin. If Jesus takes away the sin of the world, what exactly is he taking away?

Do we have any sinners here this morning? Are you bothered by sin, troubled by sin, hurt by sin? Well, then, I suggest you pay very close attention.

So let's get right into it, let's talk about sin. It's not a popular subject, because to begin talking about sin in any way we're going to have to reveal some difficult but honest truths about ourselves.

There are entire books written on the subject, but I want to keep it simple. So - quick - what is sin in a sentence or two? Sin is when I hurt other people and when I hurt myself. Sin is when other people hurt me and in doing so hurt themselves. Sin is all the ways that hurt is done, it can be done with words, it can be done with just a look, it can be done in very damaging ways with punches, kicks and weapons.

Sin happens because of what is going on inside of you. Yes it can be found in lots of other people. It is also found in you. But I have noticed that sin especially happens in groups. I noticed this one afternoon when I drove by the middle school in Rochester to pick up kids for a youth group. My kids weren't waiting on the corner like usual. Instead they were in the middle of a huddle across the street from the school. It wasn't a group hug. There was a fight happening in the middle of the huddle. All of the other kids were egging on the two fighters. I managed to pull my kids away, and on the ride to the church we talked about it. They said that they were not the ones fighting, and that it was just two kids, and they were only watching. But it was very evident that to me that the fight was happening because there was that crowd encouraging it to happen. Not one of my kids, I thought, would start fighting another kid on their own, but in that large group something else took over, something we can call sin.

Sin happens when one person takes a poke at another person. Whenever I get poked, my immediate wish is for that person to be fried by a lightning bolt. Of course, whenever I've poked someone, I hope that God didn't notice, or if God did notice that God would be quick with forgiveness. Being honest about sin is

pretty hard for most of us to do, and, mostly, we blame other people for sin. But let's be honest this morning and admit that sin also happens because of you.

Sin may be the most damaging when I do something that hurts someone I've never seen and will never know. For example, do you remember how Bishop Dulce told us about hungry children in the Philippines? It was a very sad story she told, and I'll never forget how she said some children are so hungry that they eat dirt. But did you know that hunger in Philippines may be caused by the what I buy in the grocery store. What? How could that be? Well, the wealthy landowner in the Philippines makes more money selling sugar to Americans than by growing food that hungry Filipinos need to survive, so every time we buy something with sugar in it we are hurting the poorest people in the world. We don't know their names, we don't know where they live, and we don't even know we are doing it when we shop at the store, but it is sin nonetheless.

I wanted to give a simple description of sin, but it gets complicated very quickly, and it not only includes what others do to me, but also what I do to them. It involves what I do, and it involves groups. It can involve actions we think are completely innocent but that may hurt people we don't know in terrible ways that we never realized.

So let's get back to our story. What did John say about Jesus? "Here comes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world". When we think about all of the ways sin happens in the world this becomes an incredible statement, Jesus has the ability and the desire to take away the sin in you, and everyone around you, and the whole world.

How is he going to do that? Sin is very powerful, so Jesus needs something real powerful to get rid of that sin. What do you think he uses to get rid of sin? A monster vacuum? A frightening grizzly bear? Bombs and missiles?

But look at what John says - what does he say? - "Here comes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." That's right! John calls Jesus a lamb, not a lion, tiger, or grizzly bear. A cute, gentle, cuddly lamb. And so this sin is going to be taken away not by force, or threat or violence, but by something very different. Jesus is going to love the sin out of us. Is it possible? Can he really do it?

Whether you believe it or not, Jesus is going to try and try, loving us in every way possible. Loving you on good days, loving you on bad days, loving you when sinners hurt you, loving you when you hurt others, loving the best people, loving the worst people, loving the youngest, loving the oldest, loving those who deserve it, and loving those who don't deserve it, loving you and loving people you'll never meet on the other side of the world.

The Lord's Supper is for all of the people Jesus is loving in the world today, the bread and the cup remind us of the dangers and risks that Jesus faced in order to love people like you. Sharing the bread and the cup makes sense to us, because we want to share in his love, and to show our desire to live in a world without sin. What was it that John the Baptist said? "Here comes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world".