

**JOHN 1:29–41.** (EHV)

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’ I myself did not know who he was, but I came baptizing with water so that he would be revealed to Israel.” John also testified, “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.” The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, **“What are you looking for?”** They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” He told them, **“Come, and you will see.”** So they came and saw where he was staying. They stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated “the Christ”).

“Take him away.”

For those of you who watch crime investigation shows on television, those are familiar words. Whether it’s at the beginning of the show, when the investigation team is examining a crime scene and they have gathered all the evidence they can and have no further use for the dead body, or at the end of the show, when after careful investigating they are able to make an arrest, the words are basically the same: “Take him away.”

And of course, we just assume that the person to whom those words are directed immediately does his job and all is well. But can you imagine what that person’s job is like in real life, the person whose job it is to “take him away” or to “take it away”? The person whose job it is to take away the dead body has to confront another ugly example of human corruption and mortality up close and personal. The person whose job it is to arrest a criminal and take him away to jail has to endure a long string of expletives and complaints and resistance or the depressing silence of a sad and guilty conscience.

Taking away is not an easy job.

Today John points us to Jesus and says, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” If you think taking away a dead body or taking away a criminal or taking away the trash or taking a toy away from a child is a dirty or difficult job, friends, think again. Taking away the sin of the world is the dirtiest, most difficult job there is. Yet it is a job that has to be done, a job that *was* done by Jesus. “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” It’s a message worth listening to. It’s a message worth sharing.

**1.**

John the Baptist had already baptized Jesus, and Jesus had probably already been tempted by the devil in the wilderness for forty days. John was continuing to preach and baptize on the

east bank of the Jordan River. One day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and so he pointed at him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

How much more clearly could John have said it? “Look to Jesus,” he said. “Do not look to yourselves. Do not look to other humans. Do not look to Jesus’s forerunners or ministers. Look to Jesus alone, for he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The Jews were familiar with lambs. We think of lambs as cute and cuddly. To the Jews, lambs were a constant reminder of their sin. In the celebration of the Passover, God called for a burnt offering of seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. He told the priests to sacrifice two lambs for a burnt offering every day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Lambs, lambs everywhere, every day. Sin, sin everywhere, every day.

“But here,” John says, “here is one lamb, God’s lamb. This is not one of your lambs, so that you will have to keep replacing it day after day for your sacrifices. This is God’s lamb, and so he will only need to be sacrificed once. And unlike all your thousands and thousands of lambs which never really took away even one of your sins, God’s lamb *will* take away the sin of the world.”

Think about that! With every lamb that was sacrificed, it was as if the Israelites were loading up their sins at home and bringing them to God and piling them up next to his altar. But not one of those sacrifices took them away. Each one rather caused God to be forbearing in his judgment by reminding him of the Lamb who was to come. And so Israel’s sins kept piling up.

And all the while God was amassing another pile next to another altar—a pile that consisted not only of all the Jews’ sins, but of the sin of the entire world. Think of each sin as a piece of molded, rotten fruit that has been sitting in your refrigerator several years too long. Sin is something abstract that we can’t see in all its gruesome reality, since sin has to do with the spiritual realm and we are physical beings. But they are as real as molded, rotten fruit to God, because God is a spirit being. And so, starting with Adam and Eve, he saw those sins keep piling up higher and higher.

We usually think of men like Judas Iscariot and Hitler and Stalin as the worst sinners, and so perhaps we might think of their molded, rotten sin piles as the largest. But St. Paul, even after he was converted, confessed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that he was the worst sinner. And if we are honest with ourselves and examine ourselves like Paul did, we will confess that we can match him.

The truth is, every one of us has a Judas or a Hitler pile of sin. Theirs were obvious because they did them in the open. But to God the sins of our hearts are in the open just as much. And so take your Judas pile of sin—and I’ll take mine—and let’s multiply that by the 300 some million people currently living in the United States. Quite a pile, right? What about the roughly eight billion people currently living in the entire world? Now let’s multiply our Judas pile by the sum total of the countless billions that have ever and will ever inhabit this world. ... Enough to crush any lamb, right?

Wrong. Just one drop of the blood of the Lamb of God shed from the altar of the cross was enough to clean up and take away the entire mess. That’s a message worth listening to.

“Lamb of God.” We often listen to and sing and say these words mindlessly in the liturgy, and recite them mindlessly in catechism instruction, with no idea of the endless depths of God’s grace in them. Don’t listen to them or speak or sing them mindlessly any more.

And just because you should stop saying them mindlessly doesn't mean you shouldn't say them. Say them again and again, and listen to them again and again. That's what John did, and what he led his audience to do. The very next day Jesus was passing by again and John again said, "Look! The Lamb of God!"

And what do his disciples say? "Um, John, that was your sermon theme yesterday. Quit being boring. Can't you be more relevant?" No. Not a word of that. With a sin pile like theirs, what could be more relevant? What could be more worth listening to? "The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, 'What are you looking for?'"

"They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying?'"

When we listen to the good news about the Lamb of God, friends, we receive comfort, comfort that leads us to have no other desire than these two disciples. "What are you looking for?" Jesus asked them. Think of the myriad of things people are looking for today, yet when Jesus gave these two disciples carte blanche to tell him anything they they were looking for, they could only think of one thing: "Where are you staying?" "Jesus, you're the Lamb of God. You take away our sin. We are only looking for this, to be with you."

"Come," he replied.

"Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" is a message worth listening to.

## 2.

It's also a message worth sharing.

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The *first thing* Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)."

We do not know if this was the first time Andrew heard Jesus described as the Lamb of God, or if he had also heard it the day before. But after hearing it only once or twice and after being with Jesus for one day, the only thing on his mind was, "I need to share this with my brother."

How many times have we heard about the Lamb of God, friends? How many sweet days have we spent with Jesus? And where is our burning desire? Do you have a to-do list at home? What's the first thing on the list? "Tell my brother or sister about the Lamb of God"? "Tell my friend"? "Tell my neighbor"?

If it's not our first, most burning desire, then we need to ask ourselves: Do I realize what a sinner I am? For if I don't, then I will never appreciate the Lamb of God who takes away sin. We need to ask ourselves, as our red 1993 hymnal led us to do in the "Personal Preparation for Holy Communion": "How well have I carried out my responsibilities as a husband or wife or single person, as a parent or child, an employer or employee, a teacher or student? Have I loved God with all my heart, gladly heard his Word, and patiently endured affliction? Have I been disobedient, proud, or unforgiving? Have I been selfish, lazy, envious, or quarrelsome? Have I lied or deceived, taken something not mine, or given anyone a bad name? Have I abused my body or permitted indecent thoughts to linger in my mind? Have I failed to do what is right and good?"

And as we ask ourselves these questions, and begin tallying up the sins, we realize again, as if we were all Andrews hearing it for the first time, how wonderful it is to know the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Like little children, we can't help but confess with joy to everyone we know that spending one's days with Jesus is the best way to spend them. We want to tell brother and sister and neighbor and friend, "We have found the Messiah. He is not just a fictional character in some movie. He is real, and he takes away sin."

God has examined the evidence. He has concluded his investigation. The whole world is guilty. He turns to his Son, "Take it away." Not, "Take *him* away." Not, "Take *her* away." "Take *it* away, Jesus. Take all the sin away." He did it on Good Friday, brothers and sisters, and now all is well. "Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" It's a message worth listening to. It's a message worth sharing. Amen.