

**Sermon: 2021/01/19 (ALTERNATIVE - 2nd Sunday after Epiphany - Baptism of our Lord) - *Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 40:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; &, Luke 1:29-35\_BTR***

[Invite children to the front. Beard; dove printed on cardstock.]

[Ask for volunteer to be Jesus. Put beard on them. Re-tell the story of Jesus' baptism; at the moment of the Holy Spirit's descent, produce the dove, "fly" it over the head of the volunteer-child, scrunch it up, and shove inside of clothing. ]

Jesus was now ready for His mission of saving the world:  
the Spirit had empowered *Him* to be the perfect, miracle-working Savior we need.  
And that *same* power - the Spirit - is living inside of anyone who has been baptised - you and me!  
What an amazing thing that is.

Let's pray:  
Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

[Dismiss children.]

So, John the Baptist, seeing his distant cousin, "Jesus," standing at the water's edge (of the Jordan), among a *dense* crowd of people, identifies Him - that is to say, *distinguishes* Him; *singles Him out* from those gathered there - as "*the Lamb of God.*"

- this was a clear, *Spirit*-inspired prediction of Christ's principal purpose for coming into the world; a foresight of the events of Good Friday:  
that He would die as a sacrifice, to deflect; to turn aside the anger of God, as the Passover lambs shielded the Hebrews in Egypt from the Angel of Death during the final plague against the House of Pharaoh.

And then, having dropped this "bombshell," John shuts up.

He leaves the phrase - *the label* - "hanging in the air."

To be pondered by those who heard it.

To be *puzzled over*.

Because at *that* time it made little sense.

What a *strange* thing to call a grown man!

In His thirties, with a beard, and carpenter-muscles.

A "lamb."

Only after Easter does the description's significance; *its accuracy* come *fully* into view for the early Church.

And for John *the Evangelist*, in particular.

He is the *only* one (of the four gospel-writers) who bothered to record it being spoken at that early stage, but then, when the prophecy proved prescient, he can't use it enough!

Thus, when he was writing the sequel to his gospel - that "sequel" which is known to us as (the Book of) *Revelation* - he - John - "throws" the metaphor around *liberally*:

it just conveys sooo(!) much - so much theology.

It is *too* useful *not* to use - in nearly every chapter of that book, in fact.

And he uses it *instead* of "Jesus," which was, after all, a common first century Jewish boy's name.

There were *many* Jesuses, but only *one* "Lamb" who takes away the sin of the *whole* world.

One "Lamb" who offers all of humanity the very best gift they could ever hope for - a "do-over."

A "second bite at the cherry" - life-after-death.

*Perfect* happiness.

*Perfect* peace.

Perfect relationships.

In a *perfect* place called the "New Jerusalem."

In return for such a gift, *the least* that this "Lamb" - *Christ* - could expect is a faithful companion to share it with.

That is to say, a *grateful* companion to share it with.

And so he - John - supplements his favoured metaphor for Jesus with another, for the Church, calling it His "bride."

For the "Lamb" has offered Himself to humanity as a man offers himself to a woman when he makes his proposal to marry her - that is to say, *everything!*

His body *and* worldly goods;

his reputation *and* talents.

Everything. - Ideally, at least.

And, for the marriage to *really* work; for it not to flounder but flourish, *she* reciprocates with everything that she has *and can be*.

This is what Christians are.

The Lord is our "Lamb."

We, in return, are His *bride*.

So, how's that going?

Your "marriage" to the Savior?

Are you in a good place?

Or "a rut"?

On the wedding day, of course, it was wonderful!

The world was your oyster.

This was the day of *your* baptism.

And we all start out with such hopes and plans - I'm going to pray every day.  
I'm going to go to worship every Sunday.  
I'm going to give to everyone who begs from me (like it says in *Luke* I'm supposed to).  
I'm not going to be a mindless consumer just like everyone else.  
I'm not going to fall into any "traps" of idolatry, elevating and privileging other stuff over my church commitments.  
And then you wake up.  
On Monday.  
And what happened?!

Reading Paul's opening paragraph to that young congregation in Corinth, you might think that they were still "inhabiting" that first flush of post-baptism discipleship. He certainly commends them and compliments them, gushingly, for improvements he has heard them make as they went from being "just-like-everyone-else" to becoming 'saints.'

He singles out their 'speech and knowledge' as one area that they seemed to have made great "strides."

What does he mean, *exactly*?

We don't know.

But we can make some reasonable guesses, however:

By 'knowledge' he almost certainly had in mind their 'knowledge' of the (Holy) Scriptures;

that they had deepened their familiarity with the preaching of the Old Testament prophets and so on; that they were learning to sing the Psalms, and so forth.

As to progress in 'speech', well Corinth was a *major* port-city in central Greece, so we can assume it was a place frequented by many sailors, and you know what they say about having a mouth like a sailor..I - crude, sexualised, "gutter" talk - innuendo and misogynistic jokes - that sort of thing, which "rubs" off on others.

Those sort of ugly speech habits are infectious.

We are constantly both *absorbing* culture *and* producing it ourselves.

And we need to be mindful of that!

So, perhaps, the common parlance in that place was..."colorful."

And maybe, in the Church, those Christians were doing really well at cleaning up their language.

Well, *whatever* he meant, Paul, we see, was pleased.

For those things he had in mind were the very things he *expected* to see from the "Lamb's" bride.

But the picture of those people isn't static.

It doesn't stop there, in chapter one; *just* as our lives of following Jesus *evolved* and changed after our baptisms had occurred, and maybe not always for the better.

We might feel ourselves *growing* in holiness in one behavior - greater generosity

to those-in-need, a less "sharp" tongue in response to criticism from others, etc. - but somewhere else find that we seem to be "stuck."

And, if you read on - which I encourage you to do this afternoon - you see that there were some *awful*, tawdry, sordid goings-on in that same Corinthian church, by, presumably, some of the *very* same folks that Paul begins his epistle by congratulating.

And I take heart from this!

We don't *immediately* become saints *in practice* simply because we've had a priest or pastor wet us with some water.

But we *do* have the potential inside of us:

'[Y]ou', the people of St. Matthew's, 'are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

*So, unleash it!*

This is the Apostle's message for us today.