

Jesus Lamb of God: The Servant King and our call to be a servant-hearted Church
(John 1:29-42 and Isaiah 49:1-7)

Good morning- for those of you who don't know me and have managed to avoid me so far, my name is Sam and I'm one of the Trinity College ordinands on placement here. I have loved my time here so far and am very much looking forward to getting to know you all over the next 3 years.

This morning's gospel reading was taken right at the beginning of John's account of Jesus' life and ministry. And straight away we are given an insight into the shape that His ministry will take, as John the Baptist proclaims: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'

The Lamb of God- an intensely rich and powerful phrase to use- particularly to his Jewish audience- which contained priests and Levites who had been sent to find out more about John, this rogue, rural, preacher (verse 1:19).

"Lamb of God" would immediately conjure up images of the Passover Lamb sacrificed in Israel's escape from Egypt in Exodus. Here the blood of the lamb was the means by which death and destruction *passed over* (clue in the name) the Jewish households in Egypt. According to this account, by marking the blood of the sacrificed lamb on their doorposts, the Israelites were spared God's judgment on the land of Egypt (as all the firstborn in the land were struck down).

Exodus 12:13- "The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt"

So when John the Baptist proclaims: Here is the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world- you can see what this would have implied for his Jewish audience.

Some have suggested that this imagery was particularly pertinent in the fact that as John saw Jesus, he would have seen in the hillside flocks of lambs being driven out of the countryside towards Jerusalem to be slaughtered as sacrifices for the Passover Feast that was approaching.

The prophetic insight from John the Baptist here in proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God, recognised early on that the shape of Jesus' ministry was to echo this- as His life too was to end up in Jerusalem, as a sacrifice- on behalf of not just the Israelites but the whole world!

Just as the Israelites were liberated from Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb, so too is the world liberated from sin, death, and darkness by the sacrificial life and love of Jesus Christ.

Last week Mikey spoke about how God works in the opposite way to which we might expect- that a tiny baby might be savior of the world. Similarly today we get the same sense.

Although the disciples aren't usually the quickest to catch on- in this reading we see that they have a profound insight into who Jesus is "We have found the Messiah!" (verse 1:41). This Lamb of God- the one who is to be a sacrifice, is also the Messiah, the Christ, God's chosen one!

My girlfriend Lily is now my fiancé Lily, as we recently got engaged on New Year's Eve! However, our first date was a total disaster!

We were meeting nearby to Lily's house, which was also nearby the church I worked at and Lily's home church and it started off with myself being late to arrive (a trait that those who know me will tell you is frustratingly common, but one I'm hoping to address- God willing!). Not a good start.

However, when I did arrive Zidane, one of the young people from church, had turned up with his mother and younger sister an hour early for the youth camp, which was leaving later that day.

I tried contacting the youth worker at the time but he was nowhere to be found. I then tried taking Zidane into the church to ask the director of music to look after him until the youth worker arrived, but he said he was finishing soon!

So here we were, Zidane, Lily and I in a very awkward situation. We then all went to the church hall to wait with Zidane for the youth worker to arrive, and I was left trying to multitask- playing table tennis with Zidane and holding a conversation with Lily... a situation that none of us wanted to really be in.

Eventually the youth worker showed up, but along with his wife, a couple of youth volunteers and a group of young people all from the church. So having wanted to remain relatively discreet on our first date.. it had hardly been a success! We were then thankfully able to go to the park and salvage the remaining time we had and laugh about the situation- but it certainly wasn't the best first date!

However, I remind you that we *are* now engaged! And so the point of this (aside from avoiding your first date starting in the church hall!) is that what may seem like very, *very* humble and small beginnings can turn into the most wonderful thing.

And we see this in the way that God chooses to liberate us. It is not by an almighty display of power and force, but rather in the humble, self-sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

John does not say- Look here comes the Mighty *Lion* of God, who will vanquish our enemies- but rather he describes Jesus Christ- Saviour of the world- as the Lamb of God- *a lamb!*

Perhaps this is a challenge for us to think about how God might be working in ways and in places that we least expect it?

I think of Syria, and sometimes wonder if God hears any of our prayers for that country- is there any point in praying for this place? Or maybe it's closer to home, asking God to heal the illness of a friend or family member- or maybe a

personal struggle in facing temptations or challenges that seem impossible to overcome?

Is God *really* at work here? Even in the darkest places in the world and in our lives? How could He possibly be??

Indeed, in the slaughter of this Lamb, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ on the cross it seems to be the very point at which darkness has overcome!

Yet, we know the reverse to be true- that in *this* death, abundant light and life is poured out.

In Jesus Christ, God announces that death is not the end of the story and just like Exodus, promises to liberate us, and the world, from all darkness. Unlike the Exodus account however, it is God who offers Himself up as the Lamb- it is God's firstborn who bears the cost to ensure that darkness does not overcome.

So in reminding ourselves that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is the Lamb of God, we are reminded that God is faithful- often when we least expect it, often when it seems least likely.

But what should our response be?

As followers and disciples of Jesus Christ, the humble Lamb who serves the world by offering Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of the world- we too are called to mirror and reflect this humility and service to the world in our own lives.

We see this same calling to humility and service in the people of Israel in the Isaiah passage read earlier. Here the Israelites, God's chosen people are called to be 'a light to the nations' (49:6).

However, this small nation is not the light to the world because of any great military strength or wealth and riches- rather they are 'deeply despised' and 'abhorred by the nations, the slaves of rulers' (49:7). Yet, it is this nation whom God has chosen to be the light to the world- whom He has called to be a foretaste of salvation, a community who lives differently, so that others may taste and see God.

It is precisely because their calling is to point beyond themselves and worldly power, to the God who is faithful, despite their failures, that they are able to be this light in the world.

We see this too in John the Baptist, he points beyond himself. In seeing Jesus, John tells his disciples- 'this is the one you should be following, not me!' (1:35-37)- (probably not the easiest thing to do when you have people hanging on your every word, to humbly point beyond yourself)

And this is what we are called to as a Church. To point beyond ourselves, to witness to who God is.

As a child my favourite story was Robin Hood. One time I remember my Dad being given the Kevin Costner Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves- film for his birthday.. and before he had a chance to watch it himself, both my parents came down stairs the next morning in horror to discover their 5 year old son was watching this film full of blood and gore dressed in as Robin Hood (although I think it was actually a Peter Pan costume!) playing along to all the fighting scenes!

The background to the Robin Hood story is that King Richard has left the country on the Crusade and in his absence the Sherriff of Nottingham has taken over and is ruling the country unjustly and in a way that is bringing misery and suffering to the nation. Robin Hood and his merry men rebel in the face of this, restoring justice by robbing from the rich to provide for the poor- undermining the Sherriff's reign and pointing to the true reign of King Richard, who will return and restore order.

For me this is a brilliant picture of what we are called to as a Church. Like Robin Hood and his merry men, we are called to proclaim God's true Lordship in the face of darkness and injustice, and live our lives in a way that points beyond ourselves to His coming Kingdom.

This might be in issues of social justice, but it is also displayed in our daily lives, like showing love and patience to someone who is particularly difficult, or forgiveness to someone who has hurt us.

In small acts like this we point beyond ourselves, and our need to win an argument or to protect our pride, and instead we witness to something beyond ourselves and this world.

We witness to the true reality of God's Kingdom, ruled by the King who is also a humble servant, Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, thank you for your love for the world and for us. Help us and mould us to reflect who you are in our own lives- to be your humble servants, who show the same sacrificial love to the world as you did in your Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.