

Sermon for Holy Trinity Geneva on Sunday 18 January 2026
The Second Sunday of Epiphany

Texts: Isaiah 49. 1-7; 1 Corinthians 1.1-9 (9h only); John 1 29-42

Behold the Lamb of God

If you had to choose three words to sum up today's Gospel, which would you choose? I'll give you a clue about one of the words I've chosen – I've imagined we've used the Authorised Version of the Gospel which has the words, "Behold the Lamb of God" rather than 'Here is the Lamb of God'. Just spend a minute thinking about this (*allow a minute's silence*).

I'll be interested to find out at coffee after this service which three words you chose and why. My three words are '**Behold**', '**Follow**' and '**Stay**' and I hope to explain the reasons for my choice to you in this sermon.

In a nutshell, I choose these three words because I believe each one of us is seeking meaning in our lives. At some point, we all face the fundamental question, 'What is the ultimate purpose of my life?' In our Gospel today, St John the Evangelist points us to where that ultimate meaning lies, how to find it and how we should live our lives guided by and rooted in that meaning.

So let's explore now how John does this. The context is John the Baptist speaking to his disciples about the Baptism of Jesus. In St John's Gospel we don't have a narrative account of Jesus' Baptism as we do in the other three synoptic gospels. But what we do have is John the Baptist's personal testimony of the experience and what a testimony it is!

As John the Baptist sees Jesus coming towards him, he declares to his disciples, "Here is the Lamb of God" or, as it appears in the Authorised Version of the bible, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". 'Behold' is a strong word – John is saying to his disciples, "Look at Jesus. Really look at him. Understand who he is – this is the one who takes away the sins of the world".

He says this because for him the Baptism of Jesus was a life-changing moment, perhaps *the* life-changing moment in his life. John had a strong sense of his calling from an early age and discerned that he was being asked by God to help his people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by leading them to repentance and renewal of their lives through baptism. To do this, he committed himself to lead an austere life in the wilderness, telling them of the forthcoming Messiah the one who would save Israel and calling them to repentance.

John's life-changing moment occurred at the point when he baptised Jesus in the River Jordan. He already knew Jesus, who was his slightly younger cousin, had no doubt encountered him at points throughout his childhood. John was already aware by the time that Jesus came to him seeking baptism, that he was an exceptional and deeply holy man. But it is at the point when Jesus descended into the waters of the Jordan and then rose out of them, that John witnessed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah as the Holy Spirit as a dove descended upon him.

But John also glimpsed at this moment, what kind of Messiah Jesus was called to be. That is why he proclaimed to his disciples as he saw Jesus coming towards him, "Look, here is the Lamb of God".

What did he mean by this? John the Baptist's use of the term is in a way unique to him. However, it was also deeply rooted in Israel's history and above all, with their relationship with God. Remember the role of the lambs in the first Passover when God led his people out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. God tells Moses that that the people must kill and prepare a lamb to eat before they set out on their flight to freedom. They must also smear its blood on the lintels of their houses so that the Angel of the Lord would pass over that house and not strike down its inhabitants but only those of the Egyptians.

And in the book of the prophet Isaiah, the image of the lamb is linked to the Suffering Servant, that prophetic figure who will bring redemption to his people through his suffering. Last week, we looked together at references to the Servant in Isaiah – the Servant who may be a reference to Israel itself as God's people or, a remnant of this people. But in Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant is clearly an individual who suffers for his people. He is described as:

*"Oppressed and he was afflicted,
Yet he did not open his mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
And like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth".
(Isaiah 53.7)*

So John the Baptist when he proclaims Jesus to his disciples as "the Lamb of God" may well have been drawing on his people's understanding of God rescuing his people through the Exodus and also the Suffering Servant who offers his life sacrificially. But John is going beyond this – glimpsing prophetically that Jesus will not be a powerful political leader or king who will overthrow the Romans by military force but rather one who will offer his life to redeem not just his people but the whole world.

We now come to the second word which I chose to sum up the Gospel message today, '**Follow**'. John the Baptist didn't tell his disciples to follow Jesus, but he emphatically points them towards him. On two days running, John proclaims to them when he sees Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God". Two of his disciples take note - they see Jesus, they 'behold' and they follow him, at a slight distance.

Jesus becomes aware that they are following him, stops and asks them directly, "What are you looking for?" It isn't a casual question such as I might ask a stranger whom I encounter in the street to find out if he is looking for a hotel or the Co-op. No, Jesus is asking them a fundamental question which is, "What are you really looking for in your lives?" "What has driven you to leave John the Baptist, whose disciples you were, and instead follow after me?"

The response of the two disciples appears enigmatic even quite peculiar. For instead of telling Jesus what or who they are seeking, they instead ask him a question, "Rabbi, where are you staying". And yet their question makes perfect

sense, for if they don't know where he will be so that they can find him again, how can they be with him and how can they learn from him?

The disciples remain with Jesus and almost immediately, start to reach out to bring others to him. So, Andrew goes to seek his brother Simon, telling him that they have found the Messiah. He comes and is greeted by Jesus who straightaway accepts and commissions him, giving the new name of Cephas (Peter).

As the disciples remain and travel round with Jesus, their lives change radically. They witness so much and so quickly over a period of just under three years – hearing Jesus teach, witnessing his acts of healing and the miracles which he carries out, noticing that all he does is rooted in daily prayer to God. They sacrifice a lot to follow him, leaving their occupations, families and friends to the point that at one stage Peter exclaims to Jesus, “Lord, we have left everything to follow you”.

Yet despite this, Jesus' disciples don't grasp the full significance of why John the Baptist greeted Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' whilst they were with him during his earthly ministry. Right up to the point of his arrest, they keep hoping that he will be the triumphant political Messiah who will redeem Israel through power, bringing them also access to that power and status. After his arrest and crucifixion, they run away and it is only John, the beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus who remain at the foot of the Cross. Only after his resurrection, ascension and as the Holy Spirit is poured upon them at Pentecost, do they come to see that the Lamb of God is indeed God's Son. They realise that he has offered himself for the life and salvation of the whole world and they, in turn commit themselves to be his witnesses on earth.

As we reflect today about the meaning and purpose of our own lives, I urge you to hold onto those three keywords of the Gospel: '**Behold**', '**Follow**', '**Stay**'.

Behold Jesus as the Lamb of God who has come to save each one of us. Notice Him not just here in church but as you go out into the world this week in the people you meet and the situations you face.

Follow him, keeping your eyes firmly fixed on Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life and let him be your compass to guide you.

Stay with him, which means committing ourselves to trust Jesus and to root ourselves to Him in prayer, even when life feels uncertain and challenging. We can do so knowing that God is faithful, even though, like the disciples, we may waver and be fearful.

And finally, like John the Baptist, may we learn, in all our encounters with others, to point away from ourselves and instead point towards Jesus, the Lamb who brings salvation.

Amen.

Canon Daphne Green