

## **St Mary's Eversley**

### **1 Corinthians 1:1-9 We are not lacking in any spiritual gift**

### **John 1:29-42 John proclaims 'the Lamb of God' and Jesus asks 'What are you looking for?'**

One of my early and abiding memories of church as a child, is the day the lambs came. Real live lambs, in a real live congregation, in a real live church - which doesn't have carpet ;-) !

40ish years on, I can still remember being sat on the floor of the church by the font, cuddling a very wriggly (orphaned) lamb. I do remember that we were learning about Jesus, Jesus as the Lamb of God. It is one of the childhood moments which has had a distinct impact on the pattern and priorities of my calling to ministry. This morning you probably ought to be grateful that a) we have a carpet in this church, b) it's a little early in the year for many lambs, and c) I don't currently know anyone local with sheep!

In our Gospel this morning, John the Baptist is very clear as to who Jesus is: he is the Lamb of God. In keeping with the whole of his Gospel, the author - the other John, St. John the Evangelist - is focussed intently on portraying the divinity of Jesus. He doesn't want us to miss the fact that this earthly Jesus is God's Son, without sin, holy and filled with humility. We're going to reflect on these three things this morning; Jesus being without sin, his holiness, and his humility. Their significance was designed to transform how the people of Israel related to God, and indeed transform the world's relationship with God.

Firstly, John the Baptist is adamant that the **Lamb of God is the one who is to take away the sin of the world** (John 1:29). God had a purpose for Jesus, and that was to create the mechanism by which we could have the stain of the things we do wrong, lifted from us. As I have been reminded having struggled with a spillage of bright red candle wax across my cassock alb on Christmas morning, it is very difficult to remove from our lives the stain or impact of the things that we do wrong. I had to find pristine brown paper and make sure I had a very clean iron to remove it, and even that has not been completely successful. For Jesus to be able to take away the sins of the world, he had to be even cleaner than that; completely without wrong-doing in the eyes of God, having done no violence, nor having any deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:9 cf 1 Peter 2:22) as the prophesy of the 'Suffering Servant' foretold. Only by being without sin, despite his humanity, could Jesus be the one to take away the sins of the world, i.e. of you, of me and of our neighbour (Hebrews 4:15).

What of the transforming purpose of Jesus today? In whom and in what can we see a lack of sin, of wrong-doing, of evil words, of injustice? If we see people, or organisations fulfilling the purposes of God with the minimum number of flaws and errors, there we should recognise and celebrate the work of Jesus, the Lamb of God - and join in. Or perhaps more importantly, can we live our lives in a way that shows we too have been transformed by Jesus, and thus find that people want to know who or what has changed us?

Secondly, John the Baptist bears witness to the basic holiness of Jesus when he declares that he saw the Holy Spirit come and remain on Jesus (John 1:32). Holiness is an important attribute of God, highlighted in the Old Testament including in stories like that in the book of Ezra. Returning from exile in Babylon and at the dedication of the restored Temple, the dwelling place of God, male lambs are offered as a sacrifice (Ezra 6:9, 17 and 7:17). These were not a sin-offering by people focused on their own wrong-doing, but a gift or sacrifice of praise, acknowledging the holiness and authority of God in all things. John the Baptist is underlining for the Jews who were used to the traditions and teachings of The Temple, the connection between Jesus' purposes, and this image of him as the Lamb of God, the one without-blemish. The **holiness of Jesus the Lamb**, points to his relationship with God, making him the only one qualified to transform their relationship with God.

Unlike Jesus, we are only human. We have no divinity, and must always remember that - we may wish otherwise but we are not God; only he is perfect. And yet, we believe that following the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came and rested on those who obediently awaited this companion to their next steps of faith (John 14:26), setting them apart for works of holiness. This is true for our lives as well. The transforming purpose of the Lamb of God is to set us apart (1 Peter 2:9) to seek holiness, because we are called to conform as closely as we can to the character of Jesus. That is why we too are offered the power of the Holy Spirit to guide us on this path of holiness.

Thirdly and lastly, in this image of the Lamb of God, we find the power of weakness or humility, that makes him the perfect sacrifice. At Christmas the significance of the royal lineage of Jesus offers a connection between the stories of God in the history of Israel, and the revelation of the new Kingdom of God in Jesus. From the Angel Gabriel's assurance to Mary that Jesus would receive the throne of his father David (Luke 1:32) to the journey of the Magi to worship the new King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2) who had come for all the world, there runs the metaphor of the majesty of God revealed in Jesus.

But in the image of the Lamb of God inspired in John the Baptist by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15 and John 1:33) we are shown God, through Jesus, choosing what in human eyes might be seen as weakness, the humility of the one that will be sacrificed to obtain the freedom of Israel, the Passover Lamb. Here is the King of Kings, not setting aside the power given him in his divinity, but using it as the source of wisdom and strength which enables him to accept the powerlessness of his humanity to die on the cross. It is ***the humility of the Lamb of God that will enable the transformative power of forgiveness, and resurrection.***

How often do we recognise humility as a trait to be acknowledged? Perhaps it is rare. It is difficult to exercise humility in our own lives. The battle of wills between our desire to boast about what we are doing and God's desire for us not to crow about it, is something that requires personal reflection in the quiet places of our own spiritual practices. The need for humility is one reason why it is so important to know we are each created and loved by God, for we all need his assurance that we are valued in his eyes. We can only do it by quietly setting aside our desire for recognition in an effort to transform the lives of others.

"Who are you looking for?" Those are Jesus' first words in the Gospel of John. They are spoken to John the Baptist's inquisitive disciples when they turn to follow Jesus. What they are looking for is the Lamb of God, or perhaps more precisely what it is that makes the Baptist so certain that Jesus, is the Lamb of God. Their lives will be transformed by seeking, understanding and following the purposes of his sinless sacrifice, his humility, and his holiness. We too would do well to follow afresh the example and purposes of Jesus, for by them we too will be changed, transformed into those who can better recognise and proclaim in word and deed, the presence of the Lamb of God.