



## Epiphany 2: St Hilda's Sechelt January 15, 2017

### John 1:29-42

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

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From the beginning of John's Gospel:

"John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

And from the moment that we break the bread in our Eucharist today:

"Jesus Lamb of God, have mercy on us.  
Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us  
Jesus, deliverer of the world, grant us your peace."

I don't know about you, but sometimes when my parents were on their last nerve with me or with my siblings they would use the word "sacrifice." It would go something like this: One of us kids would be fooling around not taking care of or appreciating something we'd been provided with. In response to this one of our parents would pose this rhetorical question: "Do you have any idea what we've sacrificed so that you can have that coat, those expensive shoes, that special book bag?"

To their credit, my parents did not say this a lot, but, as we all know, some things said just a few times can make an impression. And so my impression was this: sacrifice was something that someone did, maybe begrudgingly, because they had to. And also sacrifice was something we would remind others of to make them feel a little guilty, a little more likely to appreciate what we had done for them.

Anyone who has been around church for a while has heard a fair amount about sacrifice.

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" says John the Baptist when he sees Jesus. To John's audience, these words evoke the idea of the Passover Lamb whose life was sacrificed as a way to mark the Jewish people's freedom from bondage. O Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. We say or sing these words when we break the bread—because the bread, Christ's body broken, is a token of God's own sacrifice of God's self for our freedom from the bondage of anything that would hold us in thrall.

But this is not the only place we hear about sacrifice, is it?

We hear about it in the news when a firefighter loses his or her life to save another. We hear about it on Remembrance Day as we honour those who gave their lives in war. We hear about it in connection to athletes who lay aside everything in order to follow their dedication to their sport. In other words, we hear about it in extraordinary circumstances in which people literally give up their lives for the sake of someone else or something else larger than themselves or completely redirect their lives for a singular purpose.

But what does the idea of sacrifice have to do with you and with me in our everyday lives? If the sacrifice of God for us and for all is central to who we are as Christians, how do we think about sacrifice in our lives in some way that comprehends what it is at its most profound Christian level? And also how do we draw on this idea as we ask ourselves toward what or for whom are we willing to pour out our life, pour out our time our attention and our energy?

Let's start first with our Christian understanding of sacrifice, an understanding of sacrifice that looks to Christ for its meaning.

Recall that in John's Gospel, Jesus' crucifixion occurs on the day of preparation, that is, the day leading up to the Passover meal. What this means is that the moment that the Passover lambs would have been slain is the very moment of Jesus's death. What I take from this is that John wants us to see that when we think about sacrifice, it's Jesus we should be looking at. And who is Jesus in John's Gospel? He is the paradigm of what sacrifice is all about and at the same time Jesus is a person of great dignity and power, a person who does not cry out

at the moment of his own death but instead declares “it is finished,” meaning “it has been completed” or “it has been consummated.”

And so what this image of sacrifice tells us is that sacrifice, that is, pouring out ourselves, giving up something that we could keep for ourselves is fundamentally something that comes from our strength, that comes out of our freedom, that expresses our power and our dignity. For sacrifice is a conscious giving of our lives, our time, our attention and our energy toward something or someone we have come to value or love more than we love our own self-protection and our need to count the cost. And, strangely, to pour ourselves out, to give ourselves away is our completion, is our consummation.

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Behold the people of God whose sacrifices give life to the ones they love, give energy to the vocations they say yes to, that give fulfillment to the one who makes such sacrifices.

But how do we know who or what to give our lives to, who or what to pour out our energy toward? For what purpose is our living sacrifice, the giving of our very lives, to be offered? In my experience, there’s a thread that emerges for most of us in our lived response to this question. But there’s a challenge too in staying attuned to the question as we change and grow over time. For what was worthy of the sacrifice of our lives early in our lives may not be the same thing later. And so staying open to the question of what we are called to give our life’s energy to now (versus five or ten years ago) is an ongoing challenge. Having the courage to move toward this thing is an ongoing challenge.

Joseph Campbell in the chapter “Sacrifice and Bliss” in his book entitled *The Power of Myth*, written with Bill Moyers, describes his interactions with students when he taught at Sarah Lawrence. Most were, of course, trying to figure out what vocations to follow early in their lives, but I believe the work Campbell did with them is applicable at any age. Campbell referred the one thing each student was irresistibly drawn to as their “bliss” and said that he knew he was getting closer to what it might be for a particular student when in their discussions about what they reading, the student’s eyes would open wider and the student’s complexion would change.

Of course, many were afraid to follow their urgings for fear that to do so was impractical or would ask more of them than they had the strength to give. To this Campbell said: “I have a superstition that has grown on me, that if you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, (so that) the life you ought to be living (becomes) the one you (begin) living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in the field of your bliss, and they open the doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don’t be afraid, and doors will open where you didn’t know they were going to be.”

Toward what or for whom are you drawn to pour out your life right now? What invisible track do you already feel yourself to be on as you follow where the Lord of your life is leading you? Who is standing there in the field of your longing waiting to assist you on the way?

Jesus’ sacrifice, the offering of his own life, was both meant to show us that nothing, not even suffering and death, could hold us in thrall, and his sacrifice was meant to show us that

that the day-to-day offering of our lives is nothing other than the consummation of our holy, human lives. And so, don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to offer all of who you are to your loved ones, to your vocations, to complete strangers who become our kin through Christ. Don't be afraid to follow your bliss. Don't be afraid, for The Lamb of God has gone before us. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep and what is more, let us *live* the feast.

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### ***Works Cited or Consulted***

Dylan Brewer's blog on the gospel for 2 Epiphany in which she relies heavily on Bruce Malina's and Richard Rohrbaugh's *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*.

Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*