

Second Weekend After Epiphany (RCL/A): "No More Lambs Killed"

Isaiah 49:1-7; John 1:29-42

January 17-18, 2026

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

"... [John the Baptist] looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'"

(John 1:36) That verse from today's Gospel is the jumping off point for a reflection I found in my *Daily Readings from Spiritual Classics* which I commend to you as great devotional reading. The piece was written by Gerhard Frost, who was a pastor, poet and professor of theology at Luther Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul. He remembered:

I was teaching a confirmation class of 16 young Navajo Christians, and we were discussing the subject of time as God's gift of opportunity. We talked about our own mortality and then discussed why we measure time. I stepped to the blackboard and wrote May 2, 1977 A.D.

I stood there for a few moments as we considered how we have divided the centuries into B.C. and A.D. Then I asked the class, "What's so special about Jesus that we measure our time from the years when he lived as a man on earth?"

During the thoughtful pause that followed, 16 pairs of dark eyes looked inquiringly at me and then at one another. Finally, one boy spoke. He formed his answer as a question: "No more lambs killed?"

The Navajo people are shepherds. All of the youths in my class had early recollections of tending sheep and goats with their mothers and older brothers and sisters. The death of a lamb held deep meaning for them, and this young boy had beheld the Lamb of God from his shepherd's perspective.

No more lambs killed. Jesus is the Lamb. To behold him and his mercy is to see universality and intimacy all at once. It is to see the red trail of thousands of sheep and goats slain in sacrifice, with no power to atone, leading up to the cross – the saving event.

Jesus was the last lamb; there will be no more sacrifices, no more lambs killed. I am grateful for that shepherd's eye as I seek anew to "behold the Lamb of God."¹

We believe John the Baptizer was thinking of the Passover lamb when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. We have a few reasons for thinking that. One of the most compelling is that in the fourth Gospel Jesus dies on the cross as the Passover lambs are being ritually slaughtered in the Temple precincts. We know this because in John's Gospel the Last Supper

is not a seder; it is not a Passover meal. Jesus and the disciples eat their last supper together on the Day of **Preparation** for Passover. Also in Exodus we read that hyssop, a Mediterranean plant, was used to paint lamb's blood on the door lintels and posts of the homes of the Israelite slaves so that the angel of death would know to "pass over" them. Then in St. John's Gospel, a wine-soaked sponge is speared on a branch of **hyssop** and raised to Jesus' mouth as He hangs on the cross....

The early church sure understood Jesus as our very own Paschal lamb. In 1 Corinthians (5:7b-8a) Paul writes, *"For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the festival,"* language mirrored in Easter hymns that we still sing two thousand years later. Let's mention, though, that the Passover lamb wasn't so much a **sacrificial** animal as a symbol of God's ability and desire to **protect** and **liberate** God's people. God "**protected**" the residents of the homes whose door jambs were painted with the blood of the lamb by ensuring that they were **not** going to be visited by the angel of death, who took the firstborn male child and firstborn male offspring of animals in the Egyptian households. The first Passover was the beginning of the "**liberation**" of the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery. It was the beginning of the Exodus, the return to freedom in the Promised Land.

Our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate Passover not primarily as **remembrance** of a **long-ago** event, but as **celebration** of God liberating them **today**, from everything that would enslave them or distance them from the Holy One. Likewise, Holy Communion isn't primarily our **remembrance** of a **long-ago** event, but our **celebration** of Jesus' coming to us again, **today**, in, with and under the blessed Bread and Wine of Eucharist. We believe that by eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ, we receive life, forgiveness, and

salvation. We believe the Lamb of God **protects** us from the devil and **liberates, frees** us from sin.

Martin Luther preached on today's Gospel and waxed eloquent about sin being transferred from our souls to the back of the Lamb of God. He preached:

... there is no atoner but this Lamb... Christ... the beloved Lamb... descends from heaven to serve me... If I had been able to earn anything for myself, then it would not have been necessary for God's Son to die for me.

... He wants to give us righteousness in exchange for the sins we have received from Adam... [This is called the Great Exchange: swapping out our sin for Christ's righteousness.] You may say: "Who knows whether Christ also bore my sin? I have no doubt that he bore the sin of St. Peter, St. Paul, and other saints; these were pious people. Oh, that I were like St. Peter or St. Paul!" Don't you hear what St. John says in our text: "This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"? ... It follows that your sins may be included... Don't you hear? There is nothing missing from the Lamb. He bears all the sins of the world since its inception; this implies that He also bears yours, and offers you grace...

There are only 2 abodes for sin: it either resides with you, weighing you down; or it lies on Christ, the Lamb of God. If it is loaded on your back, you are lost; but if it rests on Christ, you are free and saved. Now make your choice!²

Last Saturday a large group from Holy Trinity, the Manasquan Quaker meeting, Trinity Episcopal in Asbury Park, and assorted neighbors, gathered to watch the award-winning documentary *Sugarcane*, about schools for indigenous children in Canada, run by religious orders. We now recognize that the removal of children from their homes and communities in order to expunge their native culture is a form of genocide. The abuse was cultural, spiritual, physical and sexual. Sugarcane is the name of one Canadian reservation, but we learned that there were many more such schools in the U.S.

When I looked in the files for my notes on this Gospel, I found the reflection from Gerhard Frost that I read at the beginning. After viewing the documentary *Sugarcane*, the young Navajo's insight, "No more lambs killed" took on new meaning. It is documented

that many indigenous children died as a result of these attempts at “cultural assimilation,” due to punishment for failing to cooperate with their indoctrination, or failed attempts to flee the abuse. Horribly, there is personal testimony and physical evidence that some infants were “disposed of” to cover up sexual abuse of students by clergy. The folks in the ecumenical group that gathered to view *Sugarcane* were reminded that atrocities occurred not just in Canada, but also in the U.S., and that the schools were run not just by Roman Catholics, but also by Lutherans and Anglicans. There is plenty of responsibility to acknowledge, plenty of sin for which to repent.

St. Paul said, “*We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). Winston Churchill once said, “Comparisons are odious.” What are we going to say?? “Compared to Hitler, I’m a saint!”? “Compared to John Wayne Gacy, I’m a saint!”? We are all in need of the loving mercy of God and the “Great Exchange” of the Lamb of God, who has taken on our sin and given us His righteousness.

“No more lambs killed” in the Temple, in the indigenous schools, in all the killing fields of this world, by God’s grace. We may not have personally perpetrated the evils that sicken us, but let’s pray that the Holy Spirit will grant us grace, discernment and courage to acknowledge past evils, prevent current ones, and to be agents of healing. Amen.

¹Paul Ofstedal, ed., *Daily Readings from Spiritual Classics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), p. 390.

²Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 22 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), pp. 165-170.

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