

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Images of the Savior: The Lamb

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the next weeks, we are going to read through parts of 1st Peter. As we do so, we will see several ways that Peter describes Jesus. There are several different images of the Savior Peter uses. Each of these images tells us something unique about Jesus. We will see Jesus as the Lamb and the Shepherd, as the Cornerstone and the Righteous Victor. Today's Image of the Savior is the Lamb. Hear the Word of God in:

1 Peter 1:17–21 (NIV84)

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Last week, we discussed a big challenge that was beginning to face the early Christian churches in Asia Minor. Persecution had begun and was about to get more intense. The government and the members of their communities would turn against them. They would suffer isolation, hatred, loss of property and business, prison and loss of life. If you were to choose a scriptural image for Jesus to comfort the people who were persecuted, what would you choose?

Maybe we think of Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Lions are strong and powerful and feared. Jesus as a lion would certainly protect his people and scare away the enemies. Or maybe Peter could remember when Jesus walked on the water and calmed the storm. The One who is not constrained by the rules of gravity and weather surely can defend his people from angry mobs and ruthless governments. Or we could picture Jesus as Peter saw him on the mountain of Transfiguration. Jesus is the one and only Son of God. He shines with the glory of God because he is God himself. He is pure and holy and almighty. Surely there is no force on earth that can defeat the Jesus Peter saw on the mountain in all his glory.

But Peter, through the Holy Spirit, presents an image of the Savior that is not so powerful and glorious. Jesus is the Lamb. Now, he is the Lamb without blemish or defect. But a lamb? How is even a perfect lamb going to help people being persecuted? Lambs are cute, not scary. Lambs are weak, not strong. Lambs are helpless, not protectors. What good will a lamb do for the people? What comfort will this image of Jesus give to a people under pressure?

The pressure of persecution and the world attempts to get Christians to live just as the world lives. A believer could avoid persecution and looking weird in the world's eyes by talking and acting like the sinful world. You can be a Christian in the secret of your home, just don't let anyone else know about it. Someone who lives in a neighborhood known for muggings and crime might want to take along a friend when out for a walk...a big, strong friend. If you don't have a big, strong friend, you could get a big, strong dog to take with you on a walk. You would have more confidence to go through a not so safe area with a big dog walking beside you. But you certainly would not take a lamb. What criminal would run in terror from a lamb?

This image of Jesus as the Lamb is not what one might expect for a persecuted people. However, this image of Jesus as a lamb without blemish or defect tells the people under persecution and tells us today how much our God values us.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Under the Old Testament worship commands, God's people were to bring him lambs for different sacrifices. Some were to atone for sin, others to give thanks to God. But whatever the sacrifice, it was to be a lamb without blemish or defect. You were not to give God a lamb you didn't really want anyway. You were not to give the least valuable lamb. You were to give the best lamb of your flock as a way of showing God thanks and showing that his forgiveness is more important than anything else in life. Our God gave even more for us than any human has given to God. The image of Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God tells us that God valued us and our forgiveness above all else, even above his own Son's life. For Christ's blood was shed to pay for every sin and bring us to God.

Our God did not buy us at a discount. He did not give just a little for us. He did not go to the warehouse store and get a bulk discount for redeeming the world. You are worth more than that. You are worth more than silver or gold. You are worth the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

When the world pressures us to think and talk and act like the sinful world, remember what Christ paid to redeem you from such an empty way of life. You are worth more than living a comfortable life in this moment. You were bought with the precious blood of Christ so you can live forever with Christ. No, a lamb does not scare away the enemy. But knowing Christ as the Lamb of God tells us how much we are worth to God. He will keep us in faith through the temptations of this world.

The first verse of the Scripture before us today presents us with another problem to be solved by Jesus as a lamb.

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

The problem is that God the Father judges impartially. This is, of course, how we want human judges to render judgment too. We want the rich to be treated just as the poor. We want the beautiful people to be treated just as the plain looking people. We want men and women to be judged equally under the law. We want impartial judges...unless we are the ones being judged. Then we have mitigating factors. We have a valid reason for driving so fast or failing to yield at a stop light. We want the judge to show a little favor to us, we want some mercy. After all, I deserve a little for how good I've been otherwise.

We want God to be impartial too...except when dealing with us. He should punish those bad people out there, but I'm one of the good ones. God should show me some favoritism. I'm usually kind but this staying at home has me a little stir crazy so I snapped at my family. I'm only mean to the retail clerk when they are idiots. I can be patient but not when I'm stressed about finances. We ask God to overlook our unkind words and facial expressions and impatience because we're not normally like that.

Have you ever heard a public figure apologize for something by saying something like, "That's just not who I am as a person." But it is how we all are as sinful human people. We are trying to defend ourselves in the God's

courtroom and that is not going to work out well for us. He is impartial. God will not be influenced to overlook the evil we have done and said and thought. Don't be your own defense attorney in God's courtroom. Turn to the Lamb of God. He will defend us.

What an interesting defense it is. For Christ does not claim that we are innocent. He does not float theories that we were framed or misunderstood. He does not say that we were tricked by the devil or influenced by the bad people in the world. He does not produce character witnesses to tell God how good we are most of the time. None of this. Christ, the lamb without blemish or defect, can simply point to what looks very much like a blemish and defect. He shows his Father the nail marks in his hands and feet and the wound in his side from the spear. For these marks show where the precious blood of Christ poured out to pay for every sin. And the Father's judgment is "not guilty" for the debt has been paid in full.

John describes Christ in Revelation as the Lamb looking as if it had been slain (Revelation 5:6). For though he once was dead, he is now alive forever and ever. Those marks in his hands and feet and side are not sources of pain but proof of his payment for every sin. The impartial Judge cannot count any sin against us because of the precious blood of Christ.

So how will we live? *Live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.*

The Lamb of God has opened heaven and made us heirs of eternal life. So we live here for a while, always knowing that our forever home is heaven. The Lamb of God gave his precious blood to redeem us so we can live boldly as believers in this world. He who did not spare his own Son for us will certainly do what he has promised and bring us to eternal life. The Lamb of God has forgiven every sin so that our fear of God is not terror but reverent fear, holy awe. We marvel at the grace and mercy of our Savior, the Lamb of God.

Amen.