

Sermons at Christ Church

Building Relationships Through Love.

Epiphany II

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“*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” John proclaimed to his friends. Today is a solemn day for many reasons. **First**, it is a solemn day because we read about John revealing Jesus as the lamb of God. The idea of Jesus as the lamb is a profound thought because it tells of the value, gentleness, purity and innocence of the lamb. It also tells of the helplessness of the sheep and its reliance on the trustworthiness of the voice of the shepherd.

John’s introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God was probably inspired by the Prophet Isaiah’s vision of the suffering servant of God “*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*”

The prophet compares the innocent Suffering Servant to a sheep, and tells us that in the face of affliction, the servant didn’t open his mouth, and when he was confronted with being slaughtered, he remained silent. From this, we learn about the non-violent nature of Jesus-the suffering servant of God.

It is therefore not surprising that John sees Jesus in the same light-the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world-not through violent means but by being as compliant as any lamb. To John, this lamb carries the world’s sins on his shoulders, this is the lamb that fights, not for self but for the world, and this lamb only uses non-violence to fight.

And so, whenever we come to the Lord’s Table, and hear the words “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, happy are those who are invited to the Lord’s banquet”, we are reminded of the sacrificial love of Jesus and the non-violent nature of God. We are reminded that this table has never been about violence nor will it ever be about violence. It reminds us of the nature of the lamb, helpless, gentleness, value, purity and innocence.

I had the opportunity of visiting the Tower of London, and there in the museum, visitors could see all the different fighting tools and armor that the soldiers and kings of England had used in wars over centuries. You and I can only imagine the number of people who have been slaughtered by these armor. In a very revealing way, they tell us of the nature of violence and how the world had survived a violent culture.

Second, today is a solemn day because we have learned about the inadequacy of violence. We have therefore been invited to we turn our spears into plowshares because violence in and of itself doesn't solve any one problem. It may establish supremacy and authority, but it doesn't solve any problem of human value.

Over the past several weeks we have seen violence on the streets of Minneapolis and other cities around the country. Last week, Renee Nicole Good was fatally shot in the face by an ICE agent. Depending on who you ask, the circumstances are not entirely clear. One the one hand, we believe in the work that federal agents have to do. But the question on the other hand is, do they have to use an approach that comes off as being violent? Absolutely not, because violence creates hatred and hatred only perpetuates itself.

Third, today is a solemn day because we take a moment to remember a man of non-violence. We take a pause to reflect on the life of a man who neither campaigned, asked for, advocated for nor coerced people for any honor, but who won the Nobel Peace Prize because of his dedicated desire for peaceful coexistence of Whites and the Negro. Hear the words of Dr. King "We must live together as brother (and sisters) or perish together as fools." He knew the cost of violence, and he knew that violence would get us nowhere because it brings out the worst in people.

Despite the horrific nature of Slavery and the life of the enslaved in these United States. Despite the detrimental policies of segregation, Jim Crow, redlining and many other ills which were being perpetrated against the African American, it would have been perfectly reasonable for Dr. King to have advocated for violence. In fact, there were some who preferred violence, but he would have none of that.

When I first saw the movie Roots as a kid in 1986, I cannot believe that the enslaved African American was treated like that. My question has always been, why? But a much deeper question is, why shouldn't the African American pursue violence as a path to freedom?

For the millions of the enslaved who sang this sacred song 'We Shall Overcome', they did so not because they didn't believe in violence but because they believed that the enduring symbol of their faith was a lamb-a man, who like a lamb was led to the slaughter and did not say a word because this man knew that God is trustworthy.

Fourth, today is a solemn day because it is a day of dreams. We dream of a different future with God. We dream of a different life. We dream of a life and a world similar to the dreams of Dr. King who said "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" This is a dream that upholds character as the primal indicator of how a society should organize itself. It is a dream that rejects the violence of racism and bigotry. It is a dream that brings all of God's beautiful creatures together. It is a dream of peaceful coexistence where we all thrive on each other's character as a lamb-value, gentleness, purity and innocence.

A Rabbi once said "If everything around you feels dark, it is God's way of telling you to be the light." Dr. King felt that darkness, he lived that darkness, he saw millions live through that darkness. Recognizing the darkness, he felt the need to be the light, and that meant surrendering his life for the sake of the light.

It isn't the case that there is no longer any darkness. There is still darkness because we find ourselves surrounded by those who seek violence as a means to an end. But ours is to continually re-echo the voice of Dr. King, the man who like Jesus the lamb, believed in non-violence and invites us to be the light in the dark places.

Fifth, today is a solemn day because we have been invited to search for our true humanity. There is a Middle Eastern folklore about Nasrudin. "One night Nasrudin was approaching his house when he realized he had lost his key. He tried to look for it, but the night was so dark he could hardly see anything. He got down on his hands and knees, but it was still too dark to see. Moving back toward a streetlamp, he again got down and began to search the area under the light. A neighbor came by and asked what he was doing. Nasrudin told him he had lost his key, so the neighbor also got down on his hands and knees to search with him. After a while, the neighbor asked him, "Are you sure you lost the key here?" "No, I didn't lose it here." Answered Nasrudin. "I lost it inside my house." Then why are you looking for it out here?" his bewildered friend asked. "Because" answered Nasrudin, "the light is so much better here."

We tend to search outside of ourselves for our missing key, we look outside of ourselves where the light seems good. But the key is within us, inside of us. To find our true humanity, we must go deep inside of us. For it is within us that we come to know that we are connected to both heaven and earth, and if we are to find our place and fulfillment as human beings, we must live life in a way that honors both heaven and earth. Anything less than that guarantees that we cannot honor our fellow men and women with whom we share the dust of the soil and the breath of God.

Saadi, a Persian poet once said “You, who feel no pain at the suffering of others, it is not fitting for you to be called human “ To acknowledge the suffering of others, to feel the pain of others is part of being human, and to do something about the suffering and pain of others is what makes life fulfilling.

Henry Drummon chimes in with these words “You would find as you look back upon your life that the moments you have truly lived are the moments you have done things in the spirit of love” That is to say, the moments when you have lived as a lamb, and like Dr King, have sacrificed your life for others, is the moment you have responded to human suffering.

There is a story of a pastor and song leader who weren’t getting along that it started to spill over into the services. One Sunday, the pastor preached on the importance of being a giver. Afterward, the song leader got up and led the song ‘Jesus paid it all.’ The next week the pastor talked about ‘Not gossiping and watching your tongue.’ The song leader got up and led the song, ‘I love to tell the story.’ The pastor was so frustrated he finally resigned; he told the congregation ‘Jesus brought me here and Jesus is taking me away’ The song leader then led the song ‘What a friend we have in Jesus.’

Today is a solemn day because you have not only found the key to being human, but you follow the examples of purity, innocence, value and gentleness of the lamb who through non-violence takes away the sin of the world. **Amen.**