



A World of Forgiveness – Touchpoint for January 11, 2023

John 1:29-42 (NRSVUE) ²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ 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.’ ³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ 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?” ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² 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).

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

It is such a familiar phrase, a familiar verse. It rolls off our tongues and through our lips, whether we are speaking it or singing it during the communion liturgy.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

At first, I wasn't too sure what to do with it. This verse, this phrase.

For some, the phrase doesn't work for them anymore. The whole idea of sacrifice and the sacrificial system of paying a debt doesn't make sense. If someone or something has to die, pay a penalty, in order for us to be forgiven, then how is that forgiveness? If you have to do something first in order to receive forgiveness, then how is that forgiveness? Forgiveness is something that is undeserved, unearned, I was always taught.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

I am struck by the phrasing of this verse as I look at it. Because it turns on its head the way I often think of sin and my relationship to God.

I usually think of me as having these many sins, these things I do that I get wrong... kind of like getting the wrong answers on a test. And then God forgives them, doesn't count them against me. It is all so business-like, bookkeeping-like, scorekeeping-like.

I have many sins that God doesn't hold against me.

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

This verse is just the opposite of that. And I don't mean that God doesn't forgive. I mean that in my understanding of sin and me and God, it is my sins that are multiple and I am the singular recipient.

And yet...

Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The wording is so interesting. Because in this verse it is sin that is singular and the recipient that is multiple, so to speak – the world – *Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin (singular) of the world (multiple people).*

Is there something going on here more than just scorekeeping on my life? Is there something that is going on here that involves more than just me?

I think one way to get a different perspective on this verse is to look at the word 'sin' in the Hebrew and the Greek. Now I am not one who likes to do word studies during a Touchpoint, but it might be worth it in this place. In Greek, the word refers to brokenness. Sin is not so much an individual event, but a relational occurrence. Something that is broken has two parts. Two parts that need to be brought together, healed. In the Hebrew, the term means something like 'missing the mark' or 'going wayward.'

In both languages, there is a sense of relational disharmony, discord, disconnect. This is something much more than individual failing or falling short. There is something in our systems, our structures that is broken and leads us astray.

There is this sense that the "whole creation groans in pain," to use Paul's imagery.

So Christ, as the one who takes away the sin of the world, is therefore the one who heals that which is broken. And Christ, as the one who takes away the sin of the world, is therefore the one who reaches out to the wayward and brings them back.

Now, all of a sudden, I can't think of just 'my sins,' focus on those little things I think I did wrong. This phrase, this verse, now forces me to look beyond myself and to my relationship with others. 'My sin' is not just my sin. It is not just individual failing and falling short. It involves others. It affects others. It impacts others. My sin is part of the world's sin.

And what holds true for 'my sin' also then holds true for 'my forgiveness.'

My forgiveness is not an individual thing as well. Because my sin is not limited to me, but affects others, so too must my forgiveness. If I am forgiven... the world must be forgiven. What is forgiven in me is also forgiven in others. My trespasses are forgiven just as those who trespass against me are forgiven.

Forgiveness is not something I possess, something I can divvy up, parcel out. I don't hold on to forgiveness, forgiveness holds on to me. And the whole world.

I don't know why, but why do we... OK, I will speak for myself here... Why do I constantly reduce God to fit into my world, my sphere, my perspective? Why is it so hard for me to move outside of myself and into God's world, God's sphere?

Maybe Luther had it right when he defined 'sin' as being 'curved in on oneself.'

I curve everything, even God's grace and forgiveness, into my small little world... make it about me, primarily if not totally.

Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the WORLD.

The lamb who takes away the sin, brokenness, and waywardness of the world is then also the lamb who constantly is at work in the world to heal, restore, and unite that which is broken or has gone astray.

Is this what John is trying to tell us in the second part of this passage? *"He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."*

God isn't just content to take sin away, as we might understand it. Sin isn't just removed. That which is broken is healed. That which is wayward is sought out and found. This is much more than a bookkeeping, scorekeeping adjustment. The Spirit is at work healing, restoring, uniting.

God isn't just one who negates, as in our sin. God is one who rebuilds, through the Spirit.

This is the invitation that Jesus gives to those who wish to follow him. To follow him in this Way, this Truth, this Life. To reduce forgiveness to simply a negation of sin's guilt or punishment, without tying it to a restoration, is to reduce it to pure individualism, which only sets me free of the guilt and the shame that has burdened me.

Forgiveness, for Jesus, is focused on the WE. It brings about a peace that encompasses the world, not just my individual self. Forgiveness, for Jesus, provides the space to plant the seeds of a better future for the whole community.

Perhaps that old saying isn't too far off the mark, "Please be patient, God isn't finished with me yet." Or perhaps, in light of this passage, we should say, "Be patient, God isn't finished with the world yet."

And isn't that what is happening in this meal? Yes, *"This cup is the new covenant in blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin..."* But then this: *"Do this for the re-membering of me."*

This is something more than just the negation of sin as we might understand it. This is a re-connecting, a re-joining, a re-membering. Of God to us and us to God. And us to one another.

This is the Holy Spirit being poured out on us, or quite literally, poured down our throats. A continual, ongoing baptizing of the Spirit. Placed in us and on us.

So be patient with yourself... God isn't finished with you yet. And not just you, but the world as well.

"Behold, the lamb of God at work in the world."

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Dwell Among Us

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us
You dwell among us...
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

Benediction

Sevenfold Amen

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen.