

“That’s a Lot of Sin”

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John 1:29-42

This is the congregational participation part of the sermon to make certain that none of you have nodded off already. I’m going to repeat a familiar nursery rhyme that you’ve heard many times. I’m going to say the first three lines, and then I want you to say the last line.

“Mary had a little lamb;
His fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went...”

Congregation: “The lamb was sure to go.”

There is a wonderful story about a little boy, not a little lamb. This story was from another time, another age. It was a time when there was not indoor plumbing. I’m not going to ask if any of you remember that time or if any of you have engaged in the practice of going to an outhouse, but this little boy hated going to the outhouse. It was cold in the winter - can you imagine going to the outhouse on a day like today? It was hot in the summer. One day, as this little boy and some of his friends were playing, they learned, to the little boy’s surprise, that the outhouse was moveable. It was not attached permanently. So one night the little boy snuck outside, and by himself (he didn’t remember it being that heavy with his friends) tilted the outhouse over. The next day his father said to him, “Son, you’re going to be punished. You know what for, don’t you?”

The little boy thought for a moment and said, “I know what you’re talking about, Dad, but remember when George Washington’s father talked to him about cutting down the cherry tree, George Washington told the truth, and his father didn’t punish him.”

The father said, “Son, when George Washington cut down the cherry tree his father wasn’t *in* the cherry tree.”

I’m not sure if what the little boy did was a sin, but that is the subject of the sermon today, and I’m not talking about just the individual acts, the little mistakes, the “boobos” that we all make, I’m talking about Sin with a capital “S” - the condition of Sin, the condition of feeling estranged from God, the sinful human condition.

There is a man by the name of John Alex who has written something about this. John Alex said, “Sin is the best news there is ... Because with sin, there’s a way out... You can’t repent of confusion or psychological flaws inflicted by your parents – you’re stuck with them. But you can repent of sin. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy.” The condition of sin.

One man said, “There is a little Watergate in each of us.” You might expect that to be a political-type person who said that, but instead it was Billy Graham, the minister

to presidents, who said, "There is a little Watergate in each of us." He was speaking of the human condition of sinfulness. But, as this writer said, "Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy."

I believe that John the Baptist must have known something of that hope and joy the day that he saw Jesus. At the Bible study this past week I said, "This was both the happiest day and the saddest day in the life of John the Baptist." He was obviously happy to see Jesus, but did you hear in the scripture, "That day two of John's disciples decided to follow Jesus." Close friends of John, they had followed John for quite some time, but now they would follow Jesus. But John was happy about that also. He knew that he had been true to his mission. He had pointed the way and shown others. Someone remarked to me recently that they had read something about John the Baptist, and in what they read it said, "John the Baptist reminds us that second fiddle is the hardest instrument in the orchestra to play." John pointed the way, so this day was both the happiest day and the saddest day of his life.

And then John called Jesus the "Lamb of God." It is an interesting phrase. In the Bible study last Wednesday evening, I asked those who were present to share names we have in the scripture for Jesus. We filled a white board with over 75 names for Jesus. You can imagine some of them: "Lord," "Savior," "King of Kings," "Rabbi." My personal favorite was this: someone said "Everlasting Something or Another." I'm not sure what verse that is, and I won't tell you who said it, but her initials are Susan Rorschach. Names for Jesus.

But one name, "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - you might be sitting there thinking, "A Lamb of God who takes away sin, but I don't know if this lamb can take away my sin." I know this: In a group this size there's at least one person who this past week said or did something that was unkind. Chances are you said it to someone who is close to you – a spouse, a brother or sister, a friend, a parent, a child. That's a part of what it is to be sinful.

When we talk about one spouse being unfaithful to their spouse, that doesn't always mean that they had some kind of affair. When we are unkind to each other as husband or wife, we are being unfaithful to each other, and that's a part of what it is to be sinful.

I am sure that in a group this size there is at least one person here who is struggling with some kind of sin that you committed years ago. Years and years ago you committed this sin and you still feel guilty about it, and you really wonder if God can forgive your sin. I know that in a group this size there is at least one person who is carrying some kind of grudge because of something that someone said or did to you years ago, and you've never been able to let loose of that. Maybe that kind of unforgiveness might be the worst kind of sinfulness.

Do you really believe there is a Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? That's a lot of sin! All the sin that has ever been committed and all of the sin that will ever be committed, this sinful nature – can there be a Lamb of God who takes away all

of that sin? Learn this lesson from Simon Peter: It's no coincidence, I believe, that John included the story of the naming of Simon at this time. Jesus named Simon "Peter" we know, which means "rock." Think of the other names that Jesus might have given Simon: "Running Man" – that might not have been a bad name; he ran when the chips were down; "Yellow Belly" – that might not have been a bad name for Peter; "Lying Coward." But Peter was named "the Rock." What is your name? What name would Christ give to you? Most of us might say, "Well, he would surely name me "Stumbling Sinner," but that's not right. Your name is not "Stumbling Sinner"; your name is "Forever Forgiven." That's the name that Christ gives to you.

There is a way for us to believe that Jesus is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, which means believing that he takes away our own sin. It has to do with the fear of God. As I prepared for this sermon this past week, I did not intend for the sermon to go this direction. But one of the list of things that I have included on my check list for the sermon every week is "What does God want me to say about this?" Time and time again I came back to this: the fear of God. It's not a popular subject. Some might say, "Well, you know, preacher, perfect love casts out fear. We don't need to fear God."

But the psalmist said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and remember what Paul said? Paul said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Do we need to fear God? What is it about God that we should fear? I have some things for you to consider. The first thing is this - the power of God. I sought for a way to illustrate this, and this is certainly not the best illustration, but one thing I thought of was this: I've shared with some of you before that we have this old dog named Buck, a German shepherd who weighs 110 pounds. If you don't realize it, a German shepherd who weighs 110 pounds is really strong, and he is. I'll tell you how strong. One day Suzanne and I were walking with Buck on the walking trail. I keep him on a leash with a choke chain. A dog like that, you need to be able to jerk on that choke chain that tightens around his neck, and that's how you restrain him. Buck got excited, I jerked on the chain, and he went the other way and just broke the choke chain – a steel choke chain, with his neck! So I got two choke chains. Now when we go for a walk he has two choke chains around his neck; in case one breaks, the other one will hold.

Have you heard the story about the girl who goes out with an ugly guy on a blind date? The guy is called a "two bagger." She has a bag to put over the guy's head because he's so ugly, but she keeps another bag in case the bag falls off of his head; then she can put a bag over her head so she doesn't have to see him, he's so ugly.

Buck has two choke chains. That's how strong he is, but there are other things more powerful than that, certainly. Have you ever seen the power of water? You can go out, even by Grand Lake where the water goes over the spillway, and you can see how just the power of that water has carved a channel in the rock. That's what happened in the Grand Canyon with frozen water, glaciers that cut through the rock.

There's something even more powerful than water. Have you ever seen a tornado up close? Not far away or on television, but have you been close enough to a tornado to hear the sound and see the debris flying in the air? You know how powerful that is. Or an Oklahoma thunderstorm when that lightning hits and strikes, how loud that sound is. There is something more powerful than that. How do those things compare to the power of God?

I can imagine that when we come into God's presence we will be scared almost to death simply by the power of God. You see, if you're afraid of God, it means that God matters. There is a world full of people who don't fear God at all because God doesn't matter to them. God means nothing to them, so why be afraid of God?

We can be afraid of God because of the consequences of sin. Let me tell you one of the scariest things about God. God has created us to be free, which means we can do anything we want, good or bad; and because we are sinful, we choose that which is bad. What a scary thought that is, to believe that God has created us with the ability to hurt each other, to hurt any of God's children. Be scared because of the consequences of sin.

That is not the best reason, I believe, however, to fear God. This is the best reason to fear God: Do you realize that if you fear God you don't ever have to be afraid of anything else in your life again? My mother, God bless her, was afraid that she would get cancer. She never did get cancer. She got four or five other things that were just as bad as cancer, and one of them eventually killed her, but she never did get cancer. I know some people who are so afraid they will get cancer that they can hardly live their lives. I know some people who are so paralyzed by fear that they can hardly step out of their houses. I know some people who are so afraid that their spouse will leave them or be unkind to them, or that their children will grow up and not love them any more. I know that as a nation, sometimes our national policy is based on fear. We're afraid that someone is going to come into the country with a nuclear bomb in a suitcase, and so we base our national policy on fear.

If you are afraid of God, you don't have to be afraid of anything else in life. If you are truly afraid of God, do you know what will happen? You will move beyond fear to faith. You will then be able to believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There is another nursery rhyme that goes something like this:

“God had a little Lamb,
Its heart was pure as snow.
And everywhere God's children went...”

You know how that ends, don't you?

Amen