*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**John 1:29-42** (EHV)

29The next day, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’ 31I myself did not know who he was, but I came baptizing with water so that he would be revealed to Israel.”

32John also testified, “I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from heaven and remain on him. 33I myself did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ 34I saw this myself and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

35The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples. 36When John saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!” 37The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

38When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he asked, “What are you looking for?”

They said to him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

39He told them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying. They stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour.

40Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. 41The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated “the Christ”). 42He brought him to Jesus.

Looking at him, Jesus said, “You are Simon, son of Jonah. You will be called Cephas” (which means “Peter”).

*Dear Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit upon us so that we may continue to look in trust to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.*

When you think of John the Baptist, what picture comes to mind?

The camel-coat wearer?

The grasshopper and honey eater?

The grumpy prophet who delights in calling faithful people of God a bunch of poisonous snakes?

Or the man who loves to dunk people’s heads under water?

For me, I think of another picture. I like to think of John the Baptist as a signpost.

I think of him as a signpost because he never points to himself. He’s always pointing to the coming Messiah – the One who will come after him and yet comes before him. He’s forever pointing to Jesus Christ, desperately trying to get us to look toward Jesus alone for our hope, our forgiveness, and our salvation.

And so today, on the day after Jesus was baptised by John, we don’t have John the Baptist, we have John the signpost, and he tells us to look, take notice of, and pay careful attention to Jesus.

Although, he actually doesn’t say Jesus’ name.

Instead, he calls Jesus another name.

But what name should the long-promised and all-saving Messiah have? The Lion of Israel? The Lord of life and light? The eternal Word made flesh? The King of the world? Cross-Man?

No, John the signpost doesn’t use any of these names. He points to Jesus and calls him...a lamb. Ok, John doesn’t say Jesus is just *a* lamb; he’s *The* Lamb.

Now, perhaps John saw some playful cuteness in Jesus. Maybe Jesus had tight curly hair which reminded John of a lamb’s wool. Or maybe John saw gentle Jesus, meek and mild, but I doubt it. I believe John saw something else.

He saw God’s sacrificial Lamb walking toward the cross for the purpose of restoring our relationship with God.

You see, the fact Jesus is referred to as *The Lamb* points to a Scriptural image rich with meaning.

For instance, when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt calling out for their God to take notice of their misery and free them, God sent Moses to ask Pharaoh to let God’s people go. As you know, Pharaoh didn’t want to let his cheap labour go, but God taught him nine valuable lessons about who’s really the boss and that the request to let God’s people go wasn’t just a suggestion.

But then came the tenth valuable lesson. The first-born male of every family was going to die. This wasn’t negotiable. It also didn’t matter whether the first-born male was a good little boy or not. You see, this was the price of freedom. Someone had to pay, and the price was paid for by blood.

But God also gave an important set of instructions in the fine print.

If God’s people killed a perfect little year old lamb as a sacrificial substitute for the life of the first-born male, and smeared the blood of that lamb over the door frames as a sign the life of the first-born has been atoned for by the lamb, death will ‘Passover’ that family and move on to find another family who didn’t follow God’s instructions of sacrificial atonement.

So death visited Egypt that night, but where the sacrificial lambs had already paid the price of death, those people were set free to journey towards God’s Promised Land.

But here, walking down the street in front of John the signpost is the substitutionary Lamb who would die for our redemption, freedom and life. John points to Jesus the Lamb and wants us to fully understand and trust Jesus and what he’s doing for you and me.

But you might argue you’re not enslaved by anyone. Why is it so important Jesus would need to die for you when you live in such freedom and luxury? Why would you need Jesus, the Lamb of God at all?

Well, because he takes away your sin.

At this you might be tempted to nod your head and say: “Yes pastor, we know this, because this is what John the signpost tells us who Jesus is – he’s the Lamb of God who takes away all of our sin!”

But what on earth did you do that Jesus had to die for you?

Have you ever wondered about this? Have you ever thought that you’re a pretty good person who can’t remember any bad things you’ve done this last week, let alone over most of your life, and wondered why Jesus had to die for you? If the punishment is supposed to fit the crime, couldn’t he just have taken three raps on the knuckle for you and called it square?

And this is a problem for all the good, upstanding, self-righteous people who consider themselves to have no serious flaws, weaknesses or guilt. For the self-assured and upright people, the title of Jesus as their Lamb who takes their sin away, is meaningless, pointless, and irrelevant.

But this type of thinking indicates spiritual blindness. You’re not looking carefully enough. You don’t see yourself clearly and you don’t see Jesus clearly. You also don’t see the Word of God clearly, because the Word says Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But did you really pick up what John said?

Did you notice he didn’t say ‘sins’?

He didn’t just come to take away your sins, but he came to take away sin!

Sins are all those little thoughts, words and actions you do which don’t meet God’s standards, but your sinful thoughts, words and actions come from a deeper source called ‘sin’. They come from your sinful condition.

In a sense your sins are the fruit. Sin is the tree the sins hang from.

For example:

Those new toys or gadgets or cars or household goods you didn’t really need but you nagged and carried on about them anyway and strained your relationship with those around you? That was the fruit of sin. The sin behind it is that this indicated you weren’t content with what God has already given you.

That juicy bit of gossip about someone else and what they did that you passed onto others without defending them, speaking up for them, or explaining their actions in a kind way? It showed the sin that you don’t love and them as God loves you.

That time you hurt someone back for what they did to you, even by using silent treatment as a way to show them they didn’t deserve to be part of your life? It shows you don’t want to forgive as you’ve been forgiven by God.

All those times you were afraid of what people thought of you instead of what God thinks of you? All those times you spent more energy and time on all the things you love instead of spending time with God’s Word and God’s people? All those times you took matters into your own hands and sought to manipulate the people around you so they would do what you want? Those sins revealed the deeper sin within you that you didn’t fear, love or trust God.

In fact, every time you have a broken, strained or unhealthy relationship with those around you shows how your relationship with God is also broken, strained, or unhealthy. The symptoms of all your sinful thoughts, words and actions which affect your relationships with others, and with God, have a deeper source. You can’t just learn to control yourself better because you can’t control the source of your sin which is deeply imbedded in your heart.

Jesus didn’t just come to take away the fruit of sin and leave the root. He didn’t come just to heal the symptoms of your sins, but he came to take away the cause of sin. He didn’t just come to take away your guilt and shame. He came to cleanse your heart and renew it – not so you would be sinless from now on (because that won’t happen this side of the grave), but so that you would learn to trust him more fully.

You see, this isn’t just a once-off action of Jesus to take away the sin of the world. The word ‘takes’ is a present active participle. This means the taking away of sin is still present and always active.

For this reason you could argue John the signpost is still pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God who continues to take away the sin of the world.

So then, have you mouthed off at someone this week? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away your sin!

Have you failed to give that word of encouragement and love to your wife, husband, child, or parent? Have a closer look at the Lamb of God who takes away your sin of neglecting to love and care for those around you!

Have you neglected to meditate on God’s word or pray for those in need? Pay attention to the Lamb of God who has taken away your sin of apathy and indifference!

Have you failed to forgive someone for what they did or said to you? Check out the Lamb of God who has paid the full blood price for their sin, and who also takes away your sin of unforgiveness as well!

Have you been abused by those around you and their sin defiles you? Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin from you so that you become pure and holy once more.

Today you’ll be invited to once again come forward to kneel or stand before God Almighty and receive the body and blood of the Lamb of God who not only takes away your sin, but he also gives you his innocence and purity to cleanse your hearts, fill you with his nature of mercy and forgiveness, and renew your faith.

And when next week comes around and you’ve failed to love as you’re loved by God, you’ll come back to look once more to the Lamb of God who continues to take away your sin.

In other words, this declaration by John the signpost is at the heart and centre of the good news of Jesus Christ; that he removes all the sin which would hinder the relationship between God and the world.

All those who look to Jesus and believe what he offers have exactly what is promised. All those who look to Jesus in faith have their sin taken away and they’re free to love and serve as forgiven and cleansed people who belong in his kingdom.

Then, as you go from this place with your hearts cleansed and renewed, you also become signposts.

This means, whenever people sin against you, you don’t point to yourself as the one they have to answer to, but you point them to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away their sin as well.

In this way you can forgive your wives, husbands, children, parents, friends, and even your enemies. You can forgive them because in this way you’re living out the truth of what Jesus does as the Lamb of God who takes away your sin and their sin and the sin of the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I might see John as a signpost who constantly points to Jesus, but the more important question is this: what do you see when you look at Jesus?

*And may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig

Bethlehem, Wagga Wagga

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

19th January 2020