

**ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως**  
**Epiphany 2-A; 19 January 2020**  
**St. Thomas', Glassboro – Todd Foster**  
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**Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.**

*Isaiah 49:1-7, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, John 1:29-42, Psalm 40:1-12*

## **1 The Passover Lamb**

“Behold, the lamb of God!,” says John. Where have we heard that line before? It’s a phrase made holy by our repeated use, many weeks out of the year. We often use it as a “Fraction Anthem,” something sung or said as we break the host, the body of Christ, as it was broken on the cross. We break the host because that’s what you do with bread in order to share it. And sharing it was Jesus’ command to his disciples at the Last Supper.

An alternative fraction that we use during some seasons, like today, is a line from Paul where we declare: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” The Passover lamb was John’s meaning when he referred to Jesus as the “lamb of God.” The Passover is the central story of the Hebrew Bible: the ultimate story of God’s redemption of God’s people. It is the story to which all the other stories refer, the event to which all God’s promises harken back.

The Passover, you may recall, was that final event which brought freedom to God’s people, the Israelites. The Israelites were living in Egypt, immigrants and foreigners. They were looked down upon, given the jobs that most Egyptians didn’t care to do. They were the laborers, engaged in the dirty work of brick-making and the sweaty labor of building cities in the hot African sun.

Yet, bizarrely, the dominant class, the Egyptians, were afraid of them. They were afraid of these people who looked different from them, ate different foods from them, spoke a different language from them. They frequently lived apart in their own ghettos. These people who didn’t seem to assimilate adequately, who stubbornly insisted on holding onto their own culture, their own customs, their own ways of knowing God. So the Egyptians treated their guests badly and abused them until finally the Israelites cried out to God. God answered them in the person of his servant Moses, and in the plagues, finally striking down many of the Egyptians but sparing the Israelites whose doors were marked with the blood of the Passover, the lamb of God.

## **2 John’s Testimony**

Jesus was not immediately recognized by others as special or carrying out the work of God. Even John wasn’t sure. Twice he says he didn’t know who Jesus, his own cousin, was! He says, “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.’” John was already attuned to God and ready to hear God’s prompting, to see the Holy Spirit remaining on Jesus. John knew what that meant – and this enabled him to tell his followers, who were less astute: Behold, the lamb of God!

John the Baptizer told his own followers that Jesus was the central figure in what God was doing. It turns out that what God did for the Israelites when they were slaves in Egypt was only a foretaste of a much bigger project that God is about! John

characterized his own ministry as one of preparing the way so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel.

“Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” said John. Not sins, as if God was concerned about all the little errors God’s people made. Sin, meaning separation, alienation, fear, and condemnation. God did not put on human flesh to live and die as one of us to accomplish something small. God was concerned about sin not like traffic tickets or petty theft, but sin like the distortion of human nature against which Martin Luther King, Jr. spent his life’s energies. Humankind was then and still is habitually enslaved in dehumanizing ideas and activities that alienate us from God, from one another, and from ourselves. The project of God is to remove those fetters that we are still all too given to denying.

### 3 Conclusion

Behold! The Lamb of God!

The church is a training ground, preparing us to behold the Lamb of God. In our rites and rituals we practice, training ourselves to recognize Christ. We receive Christ in the Eucharist and on some days all we think we’re getting is a little morsel of bread and a little sip of wine. But on other days we understand maybe a glimmer, a hint of the underlying truth that in this bread and this wine we encounter the risen Lord and we incorporate him into our own being.

This question of the treatment of strangers and immigrants, and judgement for those who abuse them, is a big deal throughout the Bible. We will not be free until we cease to hold ourselves apart from our neighbors, denying our common humanity and equal worth and dignity.

[Tomorrow][Monday] is a national day of remembrance for Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King was a friend to every American because he recognized that Jim Crow and institutional racism not only made life difficult or impossible for people of color, but such a system warped and distorted the image of God in their white oppressors as well. When *anyone* is considered less than fully human, everyone becomes less than fully human. And less than fully human means out of touch with God, who created us in God’s own image.

The mission of the Church is to heal that gaping wound we bear so that, as our Collect today puts it, we “may shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth.”

The church prepares us not only to behold, but to shine out, to make known, to proclaim God’s goodness. Like a dedicated football fan crowing about their team’s recent victory, or a proud new grandparent gushing about their beautiful grand-baby, our growing connection to Jesus prepares us to speak in real and authentic ways to those around us about the nearness of the Kingdom of God and the dignity of every human being.

Because the Lamb of God was sacrificed for us, we too can learn to hear Jesus’ invitation, “Come and see.” Isn’t that a gentle invitation? It’s not a demand. It’s not a list of things to accomplish. It’s not five impossible things to believe before breakfast. It’s an invitation to show up, to watch, to listen, and to discover what it is that Jesus is speaking into your life.

Behold! The Lamb of God!

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