

Sunday, 15 January 2017

The Revelation of the Lamb of God

[Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

[Psalm 40:1-11](#)

[1 Corinthians 1:1-9](#)

[John 1:29-42](#)

We have entered into the season after Epiphany. It is a time of revelation. The sheet is drawn back and we see something we didn't see before. It is revealed to John the Baptist that there is something deeper about Jesus. He says, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him", which was the sign God told John to look for. This man would baptize with the Holy Spirit, which is the baptism John's Baptism symbolized. John is convinced that this is the Son of God and the Lamb of God. ... These are things that were revealed to John. They aren't things he figured out. They are things God told him.

Unless God reveals Himself to us we are hopeless to really know much of anything about God. But revelation comes with a number of difficulties. One of them is, how can we really grasp God? The way many atheists get God wrong is when they think that God is a being like superman- just a really powerful human being. They often see God as a very powerful creature that exists within the universe. The Christian idea of God is much more vast. The Christian idea of God is that God underlies the fabric of all reality. God is a being beyond matter and beyond time. To ask a question like, "where did God come from? Or who created God?" is to show that the God you are thinking about is too small. This God doesn't exist in time. This God created time itself and so isn't subject to being "before" or "after".

Questions having to do with time don't really apply to God. This God gives rise to the very fabric of existence- matter and time are His creations- He is not subject to them.

Imagine how huge the universe is. Allow your mind to drift above this town and into space. Allow yourself to see the sun and the little blue speck that is the earth. 1.3 million Earths would fit in our sun. And our sun isn't even all that big when compared to some of the stars out there. For example, you can fit 9.3 billion of our suns into the star VY Canis Majoris. Then allow your mind to drift out of our solar system. Some estimates say that the edge of the universe is 46 billion light years away. Which means if you had a spaceship that could travel at the speed of light it would still take you 46 billion years to get to the edge. And the universe is always expanding, so it would be an edge that would always be retreating. Keep in mind that calculations say that our universe is just under 14 billion years old. So you would be traveling for longer than the universe has existed. ... We know a tiny bit about our universe. So if our universe is so unimaginably vast, then what are we to say about the God that created it?

There are people who wonder what it would be like to meet an alien race, if there is one out there. Some people imagine that they might be so much more intellectually advanced that these aliens trying to talk to us might be like us trying to have a conversation with our pet dog. If that is true, then how much more is God beyond our comprehension? How could God communicate with us?

If God doesn't reveal Himself in a way that we might begin knowing Him, then we are hopeless to know much, if anything, about God. No doubt this revelation will always be somewhat strange and difficult to wrap our minds around.

God gives John the Baptist a revelation, as He gave revelation to

prophets before him. But John is just a finger pointing to the moon. The true revelation is Jesus himself. The unknowable has made Himself known in Jesus. God, the creator, has become a creature.

In solidarity with humanity, Jesus gets baptized. Jesus took on the sin of humanity as his own. I sometimes imagine the sin we have all washed off as then sticking to Jesus as he comes up out of the water. Jesus is truly in the mess with us. God did not stand far off waving his finger at us. He came to be one of us. And to deal with the sin that blinds us to the ultimate reality of God.

St. Paul had a couple of ways of thinking about sin. One is as sins, which are actions that are against how God created us and against His command. Sins are actions that violate our love for God and our neighbour. But Paul also thinks about a power that exists in the world called Sin. It is a state we live in, more than actions we do. Actually the sinful actions we do are mainly because of the state of Sin that oppresses us, as it oppresses all of humanity. Humanity is enslaved to this power and is powerless to free itself. When we think of being free from sin, I think we often think more of being freed from the guilt of our sinful actions, but the healing Jesus wants to bring us is bigger. He wants to bring freedom from our slavery to Sin. Which means that we are not only freed from the guilt of our sin, but that we are set on the road to being free from sinning at all.

When John saw Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" What went through their minds when they heard him say this?

The people of the time were expecting a messiah who would bring God's salvation. In the Bible the people of Israel are sometimes described, metaphorically, as a flock of sheep that need care and protection ([Jeremiah 23:1-4; 50:6-19; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 10-13](#)). In the book of Enoch (an extra-biblical book),

written shortly before the time of Jesus, one of the lambs from this flock rises up and becomes incredibly strong, symbolized by the growing of horns and being given a sword.[\[1\]](#) The enemies of the sheep are destroyed and the flock is protected. We see this symbolism in the book of Revelation as well- a wounded lamb against a great dragon.

So when these men heard John tell them that Jesus was the Lamb of God, this idea that one of their own would arise to defeat evil probably came to mind. But the image of the Lamb is an image with a few layers.

We read in the Book of Hebrews (9:22), that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” Dealing with sin is the major goal behind the ritual sacrifice system in Ancient Israel. But it wasn’t just Israel that did this, blood sacrifice has been a part of almost all cultures of the world. For the Hebrews, Sin is something that separates us from relationship with God. And the bloody sacrifice of a particular animal was the way to deal with sin. As Anglicans we have a tradition of Morning and Evening Prayer. In ancient Israel they sacrificed a lamb every morning and every evening, every day of the year. The sacrifice of the lamb would have been basic and common.

The sacrifice of the Lamb also has a connection to the story that defined Israel’s identity, which is the Exodus story. The people are enslaved in Egypt and the Pharaoh is refusing to let the people go. Plagues are being released on the Egyptians, which are increasingly intense. The final plague is a destroyer that will sweep through the land. The only way for the Hebrews to protect themselves is to place the blood of a lamb on their doorways. The blood protects them from the destroyer. This is the final plague before the people are made freed from slavery ([Ex 12:21-27](#)). This sacrificed lamb becomes known as the Passover lamb.

We see this image again in the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. This suffering servant of God takes on the sin of others and goes like a lamb to the slaughter. Of course, as Christians later read this they couldn't help but think of Jesus.

So the image of the "Lamb of God" would have brought many of these images to mind.

I'm not sure where our society stands with the concept of Sin anymore. Sin might be seen in the act of polluting, buying products produced in a sweat shop, or not recycling enough, or the size of our carbon footprint, or in the atrocities of the past (like the Residential Schools). Surely these are things to still be deal with seriously. But it seems like there is still a belief that we will somehow advance ourselves beyond these sins. ... Others are not so sure.

Nazi Germany was one of the most "advanced" and progressive nations of its time. And we can hardly think of a more horrifying time. It has become an icon of horror and evil. With the advanced thinking about evolution came thinking about eugenics and the engineering of the human species, which included removing undesired humans from the gene pool.

As soon as we discovered a way to split the atom we made it into a bomb. By many historical accounts Japan was ready to give up in World War 2 when the atomic bomb was dropped by the USA on two cities killing over 200,000 non-military civilians of Japan.

It seems like the more we "advance" the more we find more advanced ways of committing atrocities. We cannot advance ourselves beyond our sin. In fact, our "advances" seem to give us new ways to dig ourselves deeper into Sin. We cannot get ourselves out of this. It's beyond us. Hebrews 10:4 says, "it is impossible for

the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Human ability will not get us out of it. Our sacrifices aren’t enough.

What is being revealed- the epiphany John receives- is that Jesus is the Lamb of God. God will provide the way out. It will be the work of God made man. He will be the conquering Lamb. He will offer his blood to atone for our sin. He will stand between us and the destroyer. As God seeks to build a relationship with us, God uses the symbols and metaphors around us. Filling them with new power. We will never wrap our heads completely around God. He’s too big. We cannot grasp God, but we can begin to abide in God. Just as we cannot grasp the whole universe, but we can live in it, so we can abide in God without fully grasping God. God will open a door and issue an invitation to enter in- to “come and see”. And there God will draw us out from under the power of Sin as we more and more live under His power and in his kingdom. AMEN