

20 January 2008  
Epiphany 2 and  
Sanctity of Life Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Life in the Lamb”

Text: John 1:29-42a (1 Cor 1:1-9)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

From the Holy Gospel we heard this day, one gets the distinct impression that John just couldn't stop talking about the baptism of Jesus. His whole life and work had been leading up to that moment, and with that moment the days of preparation for the Messiah were over, for the Messiah had arrived. And so now He must increase, and John must decrease. (John 3:30) And so John proclaims “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” And not just once, it seems, but each and every day the sun comes up. Jesus is the Lamb of God. Jesus, the Lamb, is God. God with us, in human flesh. God with us, to save us from our sin.

For what else could it mean that Jesus was the Lamb of God? Any Jew who heard that title would know exactly what John was saying, for sacrificial lambs had been woven into the very character and identity of what it meant to be the people of God, so that the people's faith would be pointed to God, and to His promises. And so John, with this short but important phrase, proclaims that Jesus was the fulfillment of Abraham's faith, when Abraham said to his son Isaac, “*God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.*” (Gen 22:8) He proclaims that Jesus was God's Passover lamb, whose blood would rescue from captivity and death. (Ex 12) And that Jesus was the Lamb to whom all the Temple offerings pointed. What *they* could only foreshadow, *Jesus* had come to accomplish. Jesus had come to bear the sin of the world. To take our place, to shed His blood, and to die, that we might live. And so John proclaims, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*”

Now, to proclaim that to a people whose very character and identity were bound up with sacrificial lambs is one thing. But how are *we* to proclaim that very wonderful truth to a people whose character and identity are created and shaped by very different things? Who see God in very different terms? If, indeed, God is important

to their life at all? To a people for whom God is as relevant and important as the local librarian – nice to have around, and helpful at times, but kind of an oddity, and not very influential in what happens to me day to day. That kind of thinking can sometimes even *infect* you and me. It seems an enormous challenge.

A challenge perhaps reflected in the struggle that we remember this day also – the struggle to uphold the sanctity of life. To proclaim that life is not something to be toyed with and used, experimented with and thrown away, but is a gift from God. That life is sacred. That it is holy. To a people whose very character and identity is bound up with the sacred and the holy, we understand those terms. But many do not. For many, life is what we make of it. Life is our construction. Life is the blank piece of paper we get to write on and make something of ourselves. The problem with such an understanding is that our view of life is changed, and life is no longer seen as a gift, but as a burden. Or to put that in Lutheran terminology: for many, life is not of the Gospel, but of the Law. And so to call life holy and sacred, those who do not think as we do will hear us speaking of a God of Laws, of burdens, of obligations and demands, who does not give life *to* us, but demands life *from* us. And, well, I've already got enough to do, and already too many people to please.

And so the result is that in this life, it is every man for himself. *You* are not my ally or friend, but my competition. A foe to be overcome, whether you be a baby in the womb, an elderly parent who needs care, a troublesome sibling, the spouse I have been united to, a co-worker, a fellow student, or a neighbor competing with me for dollars from the public trough. I have needs, wants, and desires to make this life what I want it to be, and if you're not going to help me with that, then get out of the way so that I may be fulfilled; so that I may get ahead; so that my life can be **good**.

And with that we have come to the crux of the problem – **for what does it mean to have a good life?** Is it a subjective evaluation, based upon my thoughts and feelings and whether or not I think my needs are getting met and I am getting what I want? If so, then the good life is what I do and what I can achieve. And that is what we see so much in the world today. . . . **But John the Baptist today is pointing us to something else** – to look not at ourselves, but to the Lamb of God. To see the good life based not upon what I do, but upon what Jesus is doing. That the good life be not a life of acquisition, but a gift received. That it be not a subjective evaluation, but a confession of faith. That the life that God originally created good, He is re-creating good through His Son, the Lamb of God.

And so the Word became flesh. (John 1) Not to be our example, but to be our Saviour. That the sin of Adam, which had cosmic consequences, shattering the goodness of creation from one end of the universe to the other, might be overcome by an atonement with even greater effect. And so Jesus comes – to the manger, to the Jordan, to the cross – to take away the sin of the world. The Creator lays down His life for His creation to make it good again. And not just a “surface” good – a feels good, or a happy good – but a good that goes all the way down to the very depths of our being. That the same good which in the beginning echoed from one end of the universe to the other, might now also fill us. To make us new and good again. To give us life. Good life. Good not because we make it good, but good because it comes from our Father, who is good, and has promised us good.

And this is the new and good life given here. You receive it every time you hear those words you know so well: *I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* Those words are the fulfillment of John’s proclamation, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” For that is the Lamb of God, here, for you. That is the death and resurrection of Christ being applied to you. That is God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – making you good again. Taking your sin, taking your death, taking your captivity, taking your brokenness, taking all the not good in you – and giving you His good; His life. To set you free in forgiveness to live a new life. A good life.

Yet these are not words that come out of nowhere – disembodied words that come from nowhere and dissolve into nowhere. If they are, they perhaps we are right to wonder about them, and question them. But no. For us as for John, they are words that arise out of the reality of our baptism, and return us to our baptism. Our baptism where by water, Word, and Spirit, God said to you and me: “*You are my beloved son.*” (Mt 3:17) For there, in those waters, as we heard last week, our sins are washed off of us and washed onto the Lamb of God, that He take them to the cross. And every time we hear the absolution, it is an echo of that reality. For it is not one or the other, but each leading to the other. Our adoption as sons in forgiveness, and our forgiveness as adopted sons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit making you good, and giving you life. A new life. A good life.

But even that is not the end of the story, for as the baptism of Jesus led Him ultimately to the altar of the cross, so too our baptism now leads us to the altar, to eat the body and drink the blood of the crucified Lamb of God. And the life that we are given through water and Word is fed and strengthened and sustained through

the forgiveness and life of this eating and drinking. For this is not food that we transform into ourselves, but food that transforms us. That if baptism washes us from the outside in, here is the food that changes us from the inside out. And if baptism puts us into Christ, then here Christ is put into us. That is why Paul could write that we “*are not lacking in any spiritual gift*” – because we are united to Christ. United not just to *some* of Him or *part* of Him, but *all* of Him. And in Him, in forgiveness, we have life. A new life. A good life.

And so the good life is the Christ life. A life lived in His re-creating love and forgiveness. It is the life of the Lamb lived in us and through us. It is a gift given, and so we confess. We confess with our eyes, directed by John, to the Lamb, whose blood makes all things good. When we take our eyes off of Jesus, then yes, things *seem* not good. My job, my family, my marriage, my baby, my life *seem* not good. It can seem as if hate is greater than love, sin is greater than forgiveness, and death greater than life. And the devil wants you to believe that, and to keep your eyes firmly planted on yourself and what you do. To drive you to despair. To drive you to try to find your life in sin.

But today, John proclaims a different reality. “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” And in so doing, He is the Lamb who gives life. The life that we need. The life that we are looking for. The good life. Good not because it *feels* good, but because it is good. And so each and every life is sacred and holy, for each and every life was redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God. And so we confess. The good life. The gift life. The sacred and holy life. The Christ life. For this is *our* life, and the life of the world.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.