

20 March 2013  
Lent 5 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Lamb of God Who Bears Our Sins Away”

Text: John 1:29, 34; Genesis 22:1-14; Romans 5:6-11

*Lamb of God, pure and holy . . . All sins Thou borest for us, else had despair reigned o'er us.*

Despair. There's a lot of that in our world today. In our fast-moving, fast-breaking world, it seems as if more and more we live from hurdle to hurdle and crisis to crisis, the divisions among us seem greater and more entrenched than ever before, the world seems on a continuous downward spiral, and many just can't pedal any faster, yet seem to be getting nowhere. And the result is despair and often hopelessness. It's almost an epidemic. Yes, in our day and age, we know a lot about living with despair, and how hard that is.

Funny thing, though - we don't seem to have much of a problem living with sin. Our nation, our world, seems to be sinking deeper and deeper into a moral quagmire, bogged down in greed and selfishness, slogging through a swamp of pride and self-indulgence, and swimming in a rising cesspool of sexual immorality and a sinking respect for life. And sadly - sadly! - many Christians have made their peace with that, thinking *why fight what you cannot change*, whether in the world or in me. And so the message of many churches has changed. It's no longer Jesus who bled and died to remove sin, but Jesus as example, mentor, and life coach.

The season of Lent, though, sets us straight. That the solution to despair is not to ignore or make peace with the sin that causes it, but to look to our Saviour, who didn't come to help us live with sin or to just cover it up under a guise of happiness - but *to do away with sin*. Both that our sin be *forgiven* and that we live no longer in sin, but in *holiness*.

To do that took Good Friday. It took the miserable, horrible death of the cross. And on that Good Friday, and all day Saturday, and most of the day Sunday, *without a Saviour* the disciples *despaired*. Their friend was gone, their hopes were dashed, and, they thought, they were next. But hidden under that apparent defeat - as you know - was victory. Hidden under that crushing death was the answer to our sin and despair. For the One who died on the cross that day was not only the man Jesus, and not only the very Son of God, but as John proclaimed, and as we've been singing all this Lenten season: He was ***the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***. The Lamb God provided to give us hope and a future.

Which are the very two things that seemed in short supply for Abraham and Isaac - hope and a future. For Isaac was Abraham's future, and the future of God's promise, and when God told him to sacrifice this son, to not only plunge a knife into him and end his life, but then to cremate him as a burnt offering, it seemed as if all hope was gone as well. It is impossible to imagine the despair that must have coursed through Abraham when he heard those chilling words from God. *And also* when he heard those chilling words from his son: ***Father, where is the Lamb?***

It must have seemed to Abraham like God was speaking with a forked tongue, that He was being two-faced. Giving and then taking away. Was God for him or against him? *It can seem that way for us too, can't it?* God has given us so many great and precious promises, and yet what if they don't seem to be coming true in our lives? When sadness and sorrow hit us like a brick, when the trials and troubles of life overwhelm us, when doing what God has told us to do only seems to hurt and not to help, and, in fact, may seem like the very opposite of what makes all earthly sense! Is God for us or against us? *Where is the Lamb?*

God did not give Abraham and Isaac an easy out or a quick answer. Only after the wood was arranged, the boy bound and placed on the altar, the knife poised to kill, and Abraham's muscles taut and ready to move . . . did God intervene. *And then He provided the Lamb.* And so Abraham gave that place a new name. ***The Lord will provide; as it is said to this day, "On the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided."***

Of course, we now know - many thousands of years after Abraham - that what he went through was only a dress rehearsal for the real thing. When on the mountain of the Lord named Calvary, the Father did offer up His Son. ***The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***, to set us free from our sin, free from despair, free from eternal death.

And so has the Lord provided for us. And not just food and drink, clothing and shoes, house and home, wife, children, and all the things of this world and life that you need - much more than that, *He saved your neck.* For in truth, you are Isaac, the one bound in sin. You are Isaac, the one under the sentence of death. You are the one one stroke away from eternal condemnation and a never-ending cremation in the fires of hell. But for you, *God has provided the Lamb* for the burnt offering. For you, God intervened and gave His Son in your place. That's the good news St. Paul wrote about to the Christians in Rome - ***that while we were still sinners***, while we were bound in sin on the altar of death, ***Christ died for us . . . and saved us from the wrath of God.*** Or in other words, He took your place, and set you free.

That's a message to proclaim to the world, to all asking *where is the Lamb? Where*

*is our hope? Where can we find a future?* For we know: Here is the Lamb. We know that today the resurrected Jesus comes now to us in His Word and Sacraments to release and rescue sin-ravaged hearts and lives. Here is comfort for our fears, rest from our harried lives, respite for our souls, and solace in despair. Here we see that - like Abraham - what *seems to be* from our little, narrow viewpoint isn't the way things are at all! And that even if God brings us to the brink, He will not let us fall. For that knife fell upon our substitute, not upon us.

So now for us, there is not despair, but hope and a future. Jesus cleanses us from the filth that has polluted us in body, mind, and soul. He frees us from the sin that we ourselves have done and from the fallout of the sins others have done to us. For He bore our sins *away!* *Far away*, as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103), which means they're never coming back to haunt you. You are forgiven, dear child of God. Isaacs unbound and set free to now live not in despair but in faith; not in fear but in hope; and not in sin but in holiness and righteousness, both now and forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.