

4.4.21 Er1 Behold the Lamb of God!

- This year we went grocery shopping a little too late, so we couldn't find a butter lamb for Easter
 - Growing up, I had never seen a butter lamb until Mary's family had them at their Easter dinner -- if you haven't seen one, the yellow lamb that you would put on your butter plate usually has a toothpick sticking out of it with a tiny red banner attached to it that sometimes in even tinier print has the word Alleluia printed on it
 - While butter lambs are nice for us and maybe for you, they are really part of a strong Easter custom for people of eastern European Christianity
 - And it's a great custom
 - It's a great custom to celebrate the resurrection of Christ at Easter morning worship, but later when we sit down to eat Easter dinner, the butter lamb continues to remind at dinner that Jesus lives
- So why a lamb for the risen Christ on Easter?
- Today's Easter gospel reading from Saint John does not mention a lamb – BUT John ASSUMES that by the end of his gospel that we already know that Jesus is the lamb of God
 - In fact, in the very FIRST chapter of John's gospel, no one less than John the Baptist, the great prophet and forerunner of Jesus, points to Jesus and proclaims, "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD! [1:29]"
 - But how does the lamb of God take away sin?
 - Stay with me for moment now – the penalty of sin is death, and not just physical death, but even more importantly, the dying or broken relationships within all humanity, the dying or broken love not just within humanity but in our lives, and most importantly the dying or broken faith between us and our creator
 - But over 3000 years ago, when God's people were enslaved to literal death in Egypt, God sent the angel of death to kill some of the Egyptians who had enslaved them – so that night when the angel of death went through Egypt, God's people had marked their doors with the blood of the lamb, so

that the angel would see it, and pass over and keep them safe, while moving on to the Egyptian houses much to their sorrow

- And then finally, the Egyptians were willing to set the slaves free
- Then God commanded his people to eat a Passover meal of lamb every year after that, and to remember that death had passed over their homes, and that God had set their ancestors free from slavery in Egypt
- Now moving forward to the the Gospel of John, Jesus is the new Passover lamb not in Egypt, but the Passover lamb in Jerusalem
- In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the lamb not just for a few people, but the lamb for all the world
- And tucked into the crucifixion of Jesus in the Gospel of John, are words that not only tell the Good Friday story, but words that also refer to the sacrifice of the Passover lambs that were the sign for the angel of death to pass over them
- So by the time Jesus is on the cross, the Gospel of John wants us to know that JESUS IS OUR PASSOVER LAMB who sets us from our slavery
 - Jesus the lamb of God will cause death to pass over our dying or broken relationships
 - Jesus the lamb of God will cause death to pass over our dying or broken faith in the God who created us
 - And Jesus the lamb of God will set us free from slavery to sin and death
- Then on the morning that we call Easter, first Mary Magdalene, then Peter and the Beloved Disciple went to Jesus' tomb and found that it was empty
- When Peter and the Beloved Disciples saw the empty tomb, it slowly dawned on them that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and they began to believe, but then they went home
- Mary Magdalene, however, stayed longer at the tomb
 - And while she was still crying, she saw two angels in the tomb in the place where Jesus' missing body had earlier been laid.

- They said to her, “why are you weeping?”
- She said that Jesus’ body must have been moved, but she didn’t know where it had been moved to
- And then she heard another voice ask why she was crying
- She didn’t recognize that it was the voice of Jesus, but then he said her name, and then Mary Magdalene recognized him
- But then Jesus gave Mary a job to do – a task for a woman to do in a time in the world when men didn’t pay very much attention to what women said
- Yet Jesus said to Mary, “...go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her. [2:-17-18]”
- And so Mary Magdalene, a woman, not one of the twelve that we keep hearing about in the gospels – Mary became the first person to announce, the first one to proclaim, the first believer to declare, “I have seen the Lord”
- From her lips to their ears and today to our ears, the Lord whom she saw that morning – THIS LORD LIVES!
- From John the Baptist we hear, “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” – and the Easter promise is that this lamb forgives sin, this lamb brings life out of death, and this lamb begins to mend the brokenness in our lives
- And now in our lives, we hear God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit call our name – God calls our names in the promise of Holy Baptism, and there in God’s baptismal promise we are joined to Christ’s death and resurrection
- So now we look forward to an Easter meal – not a meal with a butter lamb, but an Easter meal with even more – we look forward to the body of Christ given for us and to us.
- And soon, right before this Easter meal we will hear the cantor not only sing, but we will hear the cantor proclaim in song, “Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy upon us. Amen”