

1-12-20 SERMON CCI John 1: 29-42 Lamb of God

The weekly garbage and recycling day in our neighborhood is Wednesday. Every Wednesday morning we put out our two bins. If we don't, they get overfilled and may even begin to stink in the garage. So it's important to put the bins out regularly- and not get lazy or forget. I've never wanted to be a garbage collector, but I sincerely appreciate those who so faithfully take away our garbage.

In today's gospel story, John the Baptist announced the good news of God's garbage removal system working faithfully day after day. Just 1 day after baptizing Jesus that we looked at last Sunday. John saw Jesus walking toward him again and suddenly John declared to those around him, "Look! The Lamb of God who is taking away the sin of the world!" Now lambs are cute, cuddly animals, they play and frolic, and are fun to watch. And the nursery rhyme we learned as kids says Mary had a little lamb, his fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go. Is that what Jesus is- a cuddly cute little lamb that follows us wherever we go? If not, what did John mean?

- He could have been thinking of the Old Testament Passover lamb. In preparation for God to rescue his people from slavery in Egypt, God told them to kill a lamb and brush its blood around the door opening of their homes. They roasted the lamb for dinner and then slept fully dressed and ready to leave. That night when the death angel "passed over," and saw the blood, everyone in that household was protected. It's not a coincidence that it was at a Passover meal that Jesus shared the bread and wine with his disciples we share in communion, saying it was his body and the new covenant in his blood.
- But lambs were also sacrificed for sin every morning and evening. One lamb every morning and one lamb every evening. It was a messy, but beautiful picture of God's 24-hour a day/7 day a week forgiveness.
- But most scholars believe John was referring to Isaiah 53 that describes the coming Suffering Servant, who would be "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Christians have seen in Isaiah's words, a description of Jesus being led away and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, at his trial remaining silent, and then carrying the sin of the world on the cross.

John did not say, the "sins" (plural) of the world. We tend to think of sins as individual wrong acts and words- like lying, or stealing. And it is indeed, good news that when we place our faith in the death of Jesus for our sins, we are forgiven, our sin is gone, like the garbage taken away every Wednesday at our house.

But John said the **sin** of the world, not just the acts of sin, but the effects of sin, the burden of sin, the propensity to sin, and the shame. In the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, we see the effect of sin on all of life. In the beginning, Adam and Eve enjoyed walking and talking with God in the evenings. I imagine God enjoying hearing them talk about their day, all they had discovered about God's beautiful world and each other. But after sin came, they were afraid and hid from God. The relationship between Adam and Eve changed too- from being equal partners in life to suddenly to competing to see who would be first or in charge.

Even God's perfect creation was affected; the world changed from a perfect, predictable place that God called "Good" to a place we can't count on. Pain now accompanies child rearing. Anyone who gardens knows the power of thorns and weeds that grow in competition for the soil's nutrients, insects that eat crops before we can. Increasingly unpredictable weather. Natural disasters and disease seem to compete for new ways to bring death. Is there anyone here who hasn't asked, "What is happening?" The Bible calls it sin, brokenness, the world itself no longer as God created it to be. The good news in today's scripture is that the Lamb of God is in the business of taking away sin- the cosmic effects of sin on us and our world. The verb "taking away" is a present tense verb, which means the action takes place continuously. Jesus is continuously taking away the sin of the world. It's God's garbage removal service in action.

Yet, here in 2020 we still experience the devastation of brokenness and death. Consider that over 20 million acres of land have been destroyed by recent wildfires in Australia. Think of the millions of animals that have died in the fires. Puerto Rico was hit with another earthquake yesterday so soon

after last week's, and after devastating Hurricane Maria in 2017. Hundreds of people die in this country every day- some from personal hatred-inspired acts of violence; others from disease and other tragedies. 176 people died when Ukrainian flight 762 was shot down in Iran last week. One tragic mistake brought the death of 176 people. When the person heard that 176 people died because of his decision, he said he wanted to die. That heavy burden as a consequence of sin. Not a day goes by without us seeing or hearing about the tragic effects of sin and brokenness that are pictured in the Genesis story of Adam and Eve.

But John tells us that Jesus came as Lamb of God to take away the personal sin, and the effect and burdens of the sin of the world. Like a garbage truck taking away our garbage, the Lamb of God is taking away the sin of the world until God's new creation comes.

Listen to how Rev. 21 describes that new creation:

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away."

John's declaration about Jesus is good news! Jesus is the Lamb of God who is busy taking away the sin of the world. Your sin, my sin, the sin of nations and corporations, the effect of sin on us and the entire world. There is nothing anyone has done or not done, no mistake has been made, nothing someone else has done against us, nothing that is too awful, or too global that Jesus cannot take it away and bring new life.

As I look out at who's here this morning, we've already repented of sin and committed our lives to Jesus as LORD and Savior. So what's in this scripture about garbage removal for us? No one in this room is perfect; every one of us need forgiveness and a restart over and over. Because we all continue to fall short of living the way God created us to live as followers of his Son. The good news is that Jesus' garbage truck is available anytime any

day- when we repent, forgiveness is ours. And let's not forget what happens to garbage that sits around too long- it stinks worse the longer it's ignored. And that stink doesn't just affect us, others are affected too. Like the mistake that brought down flight 762. So, Jesus invites us to bring our mess to him quickly, to not hide and let it fester.

Another thing that strikes me in this story is that Jesus very soon after this began to call people to follow him. I said earlier that I never wanted to be a garbage collector, but maybe I need to rethink that when Jesus called us to follow him, that meant more than just believing; it also meant climbing aboard his garbage truck to join his garbage removal work. But how would we do that? When we take the forgiveness we've received and then do the work of forgiving someone else, we've jumped on Jesus' garbage truck. We throw that conflict and hurt garbage on the truck, let it go, and then drive on. And in the process, the world takes on more of the fragrance of Christ. Every time we choose to protect God's creation rather than destroy or corrupt it, we join Jesus in his divine garbage removal work. Think of it- from simple recycling and reusing items, to supporting big efforts to stop the deadly brokenness of global climate change, we've jumped on Jesus' truck. Every time we stand in Jesus' name against the painful effect of sin- injustice and violence, when we share coats with those who suffer, lift the spirits of those who grieve, care for the sick, share the love of Jesus with another person, when we provide welcome to those that others reject, we join Jesus' divine garbage removal work. And the fragrance of Christ replaces the stench of sin.

So maybe we need to reconsider what we're called to in following Jesus. Garbage collection sounds messy, not very elegant, and even a bit scary. But Jesus never said following him would be safe or easy or elegant. Are we going to stay in here where it's warm, cozy, familiar, and safe? Or are we willing to risk jumping on Jesus' garbage truck, and taking the good news out there that there is no sin so big or so tough that Jesus can't take it away and bring new life?

PRAYER

