



October 7, 2012
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Did You Get the Word?

The Pointer

John 1:29-39

This summer Cyndi, Cooper and I drove through Yellowstone Park on the way to visit her mom in Utah. Shortly after we entered the park, we began to notice signs like this: "Caution: Bison on the Road." Naturally, we were pretty excited to see the famous Yellowstone bison. And we stayed excited for the first few miles. But after straining to peek around one corner after another, and seeing nothing, we kind of stopped believing. Whatever bison there were on the park, they were probably up in the high country, and these signs were just teasing us.

We stopped believing; then we came around a corner, and this is what we saw: a big bull bison, meandering along the road. Traffic was backed up, but finally we got right next to this 2,000 pound animal and did our part to clog up traffic. I pulled into oncoming traffic and stopped, Cooper and Cyndi both leaned out and began snapping shots. Cooper literally could have touched the animal. Then suddenly, he snorted and turned our way and Cyndi screamed, "Go, go, go... he's going to charge us!"

I don't know if he was really going to charge us, but I really wasn't interested in sticking around and finding out whether Cyndi was exaggerating or not. Anyhow... turns out those signs were right after all! There really are bison on the roads in Yellowstone.

Last week Pastor Jeremy preached a powerful sermon on the message of John the Baptist. A religious Truth Squad came out from Jerusalem to question this guy who was stirring things up with his preaching and baptisms in the Jordan. They wanted to know if John was the Messiah. His reply was crystal clear. Do you remember? "I not am the Christ!" He goes on to say, "I am just a water-baptizer... a nobody. But there is one who stands among you, someone you don't even know, someone who is a big deal. I'm not even worthy to untie his filthy sandals. He's the guy you should be looking for."

Like our journey through Yellowstone, John was a big sign next to the Jordan saying, "Beware! The Messiah is Around Here Somewhere!" Well, they didn't have to wait long to see him.

The very next day after John's confrontation with the Truth Squad, Jesus shows up. What does John say when he sees Jesus coming toward him? A lot, actually. Let's start with the very first word. "Look!" Other translations make it "Behold!" It is a word of excitement. Of enthusiasm! Of expectation! It is a finger-pointing word. "Oh, look. Look! It's Him!" How many of you have ever spotted a celebrity? Didn't you say almost exactly the same thing? "Look! Look!" I'll never forget sitting in a little chapel one Sunday on Kauai. Cyndi leans over to me and says, "Look! It's James Bond!" Sure enough, there was Pierce Brosnan sitting right behind us.

Take a look at this painting. [*Grunewald, John the Baptist*] It is a picture of John the Baptist at the foot of the cross painted by Matthias Grunewald, a contemporary of Martin Luther. What is the part of the picture that jumps out at you? The finger, right? His bony, creepy, pointy finger. John holds the Hebrew scripture in one hand—the scriptures that predict the coming of a savior—and with his other, he points to that very savior.

This was the moment John had been waiting for. The moment when he could point and say, "Look! Behold! There he is! The one I've been talking about. The one we've been waiting for!" I wonder; when was the last time you did that? Pointed someone to Jesus? Pointed with excitement and said, "Look! You've just got to look at this guy! He is incredible?" We don't have any trouble pointing at things that excite us, do we? We point to a new baby. "Look! Isn't my granddaughter beautiful?" We point to a new store! "Look! Kohl's is open!... Marshalls is open!... Menchies is open!" We point to our new iPhone. "Look at the huge screen. Look at the cool apps!" We point to a new movie! "Look! Rocky 27 is opening tonight!" But when it comes to the most exciting, life-changing person in all of history—our friend and savior, Jesus—we have a hard time doing just that. "Look! There is Jesus. There is Jesus at work in my life... in our community. You really ought to get to know him!"

Let's look at the rest of the sentence. "...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." If we are church folks, we've heard that phrase so many times that we may have stopped paying attention to it. Let's pay attention this morning. Before this moment, no one had ever used the phrase, "Lamb of God." It is such a central part of our Christian ethos—we even have a church in town called Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) Church—that it is hard for us to understand that when John spoke those words, it was the first time anyone had ever heard such an expression.

And it's not really what we would expect. If this Jesus is really the one John described in his prologue—if he is really the awesome, divine, eternal, creator, Logos with flesh on—wouldn't you come up with a different animal metaphor? Is "lamb" really the best you can do to describe such a powerful, remarkable god? How about Lion? Elephant? Stallion? Something magnificent and frightening and dominating, right? But "lamb?" Really? How many have ever held a lamb? So soft,

so fragile, with spindly legs—they quiver when you hold them. Not exactly awe-inspiring creatures. It's more like "awwww-inspiring" creature, right? "Awwwww... isn't it cute? Isn't it precious?"

It is an image of something that is gentle, accessible, approachable, non-threatening. That's how John describes the God who comes to us. But more than that—more disturbingly than that—if you were a Jew and heard the word "lamb," it brought all kinds of Old Testament images to mind. How about the Passover Lamb that was slaughtered and eaten by the Jewish family on their last night of captivity in Egypt. Its blood was daubed on the outside of the door so that the angel of death would "pass over" that house.

Or how about the daily sacrifice at the temple? Do you remember that every single morning and every single evening, a one-year-old lamb was slaughtered and burned as an offering to God. Every day, twice a day, a lamb was sacrificed at the temple.

Or how about Isaiah 53? Hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet foretold the coming of a suffering servant who would save others by offering his life: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter..."

When John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God..." he tapped into a deep pool of Jewish memory. And every listener would have thought the same thing. "Lamb of God? 'Lamb' equals death. 'Lamb' equals sacrifice." What an odd way to describe God.

A sacrifice for what? Listen to the rest of his announcement. "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Notice, it is "sin" singular, not "sins" plural. He is not talking about all of the trillions of things we do to break God's heart. He is talking about the underlying disease that makes us spiritually rotten... and the overarching guilt that consumes us. Jesus doesn't just forgive all the bad stuff I do; Jesus forgives me and makes me God's child! Hallelujah!

Now put it all together. "Here comes God in the flesh who will offer himself as a sacrifice so that He can remove both the cause of and the guilt from our rebellion as human beings." And how sufficient is this sacrifice? Big enough for the whole world... Any who believe, any who receive this sacrificial gift can have their sin—both the root and the fruit of their sin—taken away. Look! Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Wow!

What is terrifying for us is this: we get bored with this message. "Ho hum... Jesus is the sacrifice that takes away the sin of the world. Yeah. Old news. Give me something new." But John wasn't bored. John was astounded! "Look! *[He pointed]* Behold! That is the God who lets himself be killed to save our lives... to deliver us from the guilt and shame and power of sin." Have you ever done anything that

shamed you? Do you have anything in your life that haunts you? That if you could do it over again, you would change in a heartbeat? I do, and not one thing but many things. How about you? I know a man who, in the course of his service to our country, killed many people. He cannot believe that God could ever forgive him. Our lives are full of shame and regret every single day... over and over. "Oh, if only I hadn't said that. Oh, if only I had said something. Oh, if only I hadn't done that! Oh, if only I had done something." Our whole lives are littered and scarred by things said, done and thought that shame us... and things unsaid, undone and unthought that shame us. Who can deliver us from that failure? Who can deliver us from that guilt and shame? Who can give us a new start? "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Isn't that something worth getting excited about? What would happen if we just learned to point as a Church? Just point to Jesus! No clever arguments. No deep theological debates. What would happen if we just got re-excited about how Jesus takes away our sin and guilt and pointed others His way? "Look! Behold! You have no idea the difference this guy could make in your life. No idea the difference He made in my life!" What would happen if every Christ-follower here did even that much... and then let Jesus do his thing? We were always taught, "It is not polite to point." I beg to differ. Here, in this, I want us to be a church full of pointers! Look, look, look at Jesus!

That's what this meal does. It points to Jesus... to His life, His death, His sacrifice, His salvation, His atonement, His resurrection, His life again. It points to the good news about you and me: that we are no longer "sinners". Our sin has been taken away, and we have been made children of God. Today, when you receive these elements, I want every server to say the same thing to you: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" And I invite you to reply "...who takes away the sin of the world." And if you are the person who cannot believe God could ever forgive your sin... believe it. Come, receive, believe and be saved. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**

1. For a second time, John says, "Look! The Lamb of God!" This involves both excitement and pointing. How excited are you about Jesus, honestly? And when was the last time you pointed others to him in some way? Describe that experience and, if not, why not?
2. There are three different kinds of "good news sharing" in our story today. Can you identify them? Which seems most comfortable to you? Least comfortable? Why?