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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
18 January 2026

Sermon on John 1:29

Worship Theme:

JESUS IS THE LAMB OF GOD

For centuries Israel offered sacrifices to God for sin. Over and over, a substitute shed its blood to earn forgiveness. Then Jesus appeared, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. He died as the substitute for sinful mankind. Connected to him by faith, you have a new perspective and new motivation for living a Christian life.

Sermon Theme: **“Look – the Lamb of God!”**

1. A Substitute for Sinners
2. A Savior for Sinners

If somebody super famous came to our area, we would probably recognize them pretty quickly. We live in a day and age when almost anybody can be found online, often including pictures and details about their lives too. Of course it hasn't always been that way. Many of us can pretty easily remember a time before smart phones, the internet, or any computers at all. Some of you might still live that way! But none of us are old enough to remember a time before pictures. The first camera was invented in 1816 – 210 years ago! Cameras have improved immensely since then of course, but maybe you have a collection of really old pictures of relatives who are long gone as well as countless pictures of family and friends today.

John chapter 1 takes us back way farther than 1816 though. There are no computers or smart phones, no internet, no cameras. So if someone famous came along, there were only two ways to know – either you had seen them before so you recognized them, or someone told you.

Jesus had recently been baptized. At his baptism, God announced to the entire world that this was the Chosen Messiah who would be the Savior of all. But almost nobody knew what he looked like yet, so nobody recognized him. He looked like an ordinary person, the same as everyone else! The Prophet Isaiah said, *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.* (ch. 53) So how would people know who this Savior was?

It's hard for us to truly imagine what a world like that must have been like. But God was more than capable of figuring out how to announce the Savior to the world without the help of cell phones and social media. This is still the world God made and God is still the God who has been taking care of it since the very beginning, so he knew exactly how he would introduce Jesus to the world. Doing so was critically important because everyone needed to see and know Jesus.

That's where John the Baptist entered the picture. God chose him to be the person who would announce Jesus when it was time for Jesus' public ministry to begin, telling people “this is what he looks like and this is who he is!”, and most importantly, “this is why he's here.”

Everyone who heard John's words that day would have understood the importance of a lamb. Lambs were a huge part of Jewish worship for a very long time. Whenever the people brought a lamb to the temple, it was for one purpose: sacrifice. God had clearly declared that the punishment sin deserves is death. Sin never leads to life; it only leads to death. The people knew they sinned – they had prophets, judges, and messengers of God constantly reminding them that they had disobeyed the Lord by running after other gods and worshiping idols, they didn't follow God's commandments, they tried deciding for themselves what was right and wrong, and so much more. There were certainly no perfect people in Israel.

So they needed lambs. God commanded them to bring lambs for the priests to sacrifice at the temple in order to receive forgiveness. Hebrews 9 explains, "*Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness.*" The people were sinful, therefore blood needed to be shed. Lambs needed to die.

But as painful as it was watching lamb after lamb lose its life (not to mention the price of constantly killing animals which otherwise could have been quite useful), it also brought the people a sense of peace. The blood of lambs took them back to another time in history, when Israel was enslaved in Egypt. Nine plagues had destroyed nearly everything, some of them even impacting God's people too. And then the tenth plague came. God had declared that the firstborn son in every household was going to die. Only one thing could save him: the blood of a lamb painted on the doorframe of the house. The death of a lamb meant the son lived.

But the Plagues and the Exodus and the sacrifices at the temple – all these things were thousands of years ago. What about us today? Our worship doesn't involve killing anything or shedding blood. Some of us know what it's like to kill an animal, others maybe don't. Whether we do or don't, we would probably all agree that we wouldn't dream of doing that in a church building, right?!

But why not? Is it because we're not as bad as Israel was? Have we learned the commandments of God in Sunday School and Catechism Class so well, read our Bibles so much, and spent enough time studying God's Word so that now we perfectly obey and follow it in our lives every single day?

No that's definitely not it. Just a quick glance in the mirror will tell us that much. Because there in the mirror is the face of a disobedient rebel, a sinner. Someone who has shown on a daily basis that they have no regard for what God says – couldn't care less! You do what you want and nothing God says is going to stop you, because nobody tells YOU what to do! So if it makes you happy, do it! The laws of God are old fashioned and outdated and this modern world is different now. So live your life however you choose and don't let anybody tell you that you can't. And if you do ever happen to decide you want to come back, God will be waiting and you'll have nothing to worry about. Everything will be just fine.

At least, that's what my sinful heart says to me. I'm guessing yours says something like that too. We don't sin less than Old Testament Israel. We have just as many idols in our hearts – sports, politics, outdoor activities, money, jobs, sleep, food, you name it! We've broken all God's commandments in one way or another. Based on what God has said, we should all be lining up every Sunday with a lamb

in our arms ready to shed its blood because we really need forgiveness!

And even if we did that, do you realize what a BLESSING it would be? Yes, you heard me right. If our worship were all about shedding the blood of lambs, it would be a blessing from God. Because the blood that really should be shed is OURS. For all the times we've disobeyed God, we should be taken to the altar, laid down upon it, and have everything ended right then and there.

But it wouldn't be enough. It will never be enough. My blood is not valuable enough to pay for even one of my sins, and neither is yours. For that matter, neither is the blood of a little lamb, no matter how pure and perfect-looking it may be.

Which is exactly why God sent another. Someone who blended in and looked like everybody else, but with one major difference: he had no sin. Not one. Never disobeyed a single command, never held a single thing higher than God in his heart, never even had a naughty thought. Truly pure and perfect in every way.

But he didn't come to rub it in or show off how awesome he was. No, he came to be a Lamb. A Lamb who would stand between the sinner and the knife of judgment, laying himself down on the altar, ready to have his own blood shed. And this time the blood does have power, because this is Jesus. Jesus, the holy Lord of heaven and earth, wrapped in humble human flesh. He appeared as the Lamb of God, ready and willing to be **a substitute for sinners**. Every last drop of our blood wouldn't pay for a single sin, never mind all of them. But it also never happened – our blood was never shed, because Jesus' blood was shed instead. And there's no mirror for us this time either. It's only Jesus, **the Savior of sinners**, staring you right in the face as he lays down upon the altar, sheds his blood, and lovingly says, "This forgiveness is for you." The death of this Lamb means YOU live!

There are probably a lot of important places in your life, places that, when you see them, you remember "that's where it happened." Maybe it's a park you went to as a kid or where you learned how to do something or your grandparents' old farm. Maybe that's where the accident happened or that's the place where the loved one is buried. Maybe it's the place you first fell in love or got engaged or whatever other major life thing it might be.

Those places are all important, but don't forget the cross. That's where IT happened. No, nothing you did; what Jesus did. There Jesus showed you just how deep God's love for you is and how far he was willing to go to save you. Jesus' blood was spilled on the altar of the cross so that all of your guilt and shame would be taken away forever. Because of Jesus, not a single sin remains attached to you anymore. Through faith in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven and free. The Perfect Lamb of God is **the Substitute and Savior of sinners**. *Without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness*; but Jesus did shed his blood for us, so God has pronounced full pardon and free forgiveness for us in his name.

That's a message we all need every single day. It's a message people have always needed. Which is why we give thanks to God for all the people in our lives who have loved us enough to share it with us. People like John the Baptist who pointed eyes that did not yet know Jesus right to him, saying, "**Look – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**" Rejoice at this good news! It is real, it

is true, and it is ours. In his Word, we see Jesus' priceless love for us. Because of that love, someday our eyes will get to personally see him for all eternity. And we won't need smartphones or cameras to recognize and know him, because there will be no doubt who he is – **the Lamb of God, our substitute and Savior**, who took all the suffering and punishment in our place, bringing us free full forgiveness and eternal life. So to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God be all praise and thanks and honor and glory now and forever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.