

Behold the Lamb of God

Our Moderator addressed the Scottish Parliament this week, and she made them think about the African word *UBUNTO* which means “I am because you are, I am because we are.” and she finished by saying, “Scottish Parliament, you lead us into a now and a future, I am because you are. Live that truth.”

Humanity has a problem. There are signs of it all over the world. Leaders are corrupt. Women and children are sold into slavery. Ethnic tensions and power struggles are seen in Europe – Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, tell us that all is far from well. We see it all the time, people struggle from the greed of the rich, the violence of the strong, and the cruelty of the proud.

The twentieth century was the bloodiest in human history. One academic described it as the worst century in humanity's history, he said, “Spectacular advancements in science and technology obscured by evil pure and unadorned”.

This century promises more of the same, more people, more greed, more lust, more violence.

John the Baptist was not afraid to challenge his leaders.

He knew that his world was in crisis, and so he called to them to repent, to turn from their sins and be baptised – literally start afresh.

As he was preaching, and the crowds were around John the Baptist, he saw Jesus approaching him and he cried out, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”.

John not only pointed out their problem, he identified their Saviour.

Jesus in John's eye was God's lamb.

Immediately John had his audience in a spin.

“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” could only mean one thing. Jesus was God's ultimate sacrifice.

The Lamb of God was the symbol of Israel's greatest moment, as they left Egypt, escaping from slavery of Pharaoh. It was the blood of a spotless lamb that was put on the doorposts of the Jewish houses; the blood was the protection that they had from the angel of death, as it swept through Egypt

claiming the first-born child of the Egyptians. 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. The lamb has entered centre stage.

Doesn't our world need today the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away our sin. This message is contemporary – it is for you and me this morning. It tells us that God knows there is a problem but God provides a way for us to fix the problem.

The Lamb of God would have reminded them of the sacrifice of Abraham willing to sacrifice his precious and only son Isaac, and at the moment of sacrifice, the voice of God is heard, telling him to stop, and another sacrifice is provided by God, a ram, rather than Abraham's son.

John points out that the Lamb of God is now in their midst, and this lamb is given, not just for the Jews but for the whole world. It is the lamb given to take away the sins of the world.

It is a huge claim, but if Jesus is who the Apostle John proclaims, the eternal word of God, as we heard a few weeks ago, the Word who was there before the foundations of the world, and who brought all things into existence, then this claim that the Word is the sacrifice for the sins of the world doesn't seem out of place.

John's claim ties in with John 3v16, where Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will never perish but have eternal life."

John the Baptist, was the son of Zechariah, a priest, and John knew that every morning and evening a lamb was slain in the temple for the forgiveness of sins of Israel. This continued as long as the Temple stood, and so as Jesus comes amongst them, John is announcing that Jesus is and will become the one and only sacrifice for their sins, not just of Israel, but for the world.

The two great prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah both painted pictures about the lamb that would suffer and be sacrificed to redeem his people.

I want us to pause for a moment to watch and listen to a scene from Jesus' life. It is a scene that shows Jesus has the power to forgive sins. It comes from the internationally acclaimed series the CHOSEN, which is a fresh retelling of the life of Jesus through the eyes of those who walked with him.

The Chosen...

Every Sunday we say the Lord's Prayer, words that Jesus taught, "forgive us our sins" the older version, "forgive us our debts" and the Catholic translation "forgive us our trespasses", all point to one thing, that we are in need of forgiveness.

Sins point to our moral failures, debts speak of what we cannot pay to God and trespasses speak about the times we go astray, all have a unique meaning, reminding us that we need God to forgive us. It reminds us that we need Jesus to be both the lamb and the shepherd of our lives.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and our relationship with him begins, when we go to him in faith, trusting that he is able to forgive, to cleanse, like the crippled man, we give ourselves to Jesus.

We might not have committed a serious crime, but we have all sinned in our own ways. We all need God's forgiveness and God's grace.

We cannot heal ourselves, we cannot make ourselves right with God, only God can do that, and he has given his Son to be our Saviour, he comes to us as a gentle lamb sacrificing for our sin. He died on a cross that we might be forgiven. We don't need to do anything, other than say, "Thank you Lord, I accept, I come, I come".

It is a metaphor, of course, but a true metaphor, of our unique relationship with Jesus. It's the heart of our faith. Our two sacraments baptism and communion have their roots in Jesus being the Lamb of God, dying and rising again, so that we are restored.

When we receive forgiveness from Jesus, then we are able to call him our Shepherd, because he takes responsibility for us. He looks after us, the psalmist pens it well, he leads us by green pastures and he restores our souls and he makes us lie down.

This is the relationship that we can have by trusting in the mercy and grace of God who has given for us his own Son Jesus Christ.

Charlotte Elliott in 1835 wrote the famous and beautiful hymn "Just As I Am, Without One Plea that thy blood was shed for me". The context of the hymn was that she went through a spiritual crisis in her life and confessed to the Swiss evangelist Henri A. Cesar Malan that she did not know how to come to Christ. He smiled and answered, "Come to him just as you are." And so she wrote that wonderful hymn that has inspired countless people to come to God.

Come just as you are and that's the invitation to all this morning, to come to Jesus, just as we are. Don't hide your faults, your sins, your failings, Come and let him take your sins and restore your relationship with God. This is why he came to this world. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Take a moment now, and just to listen to the music and the words of this amazing hymn, make it your own prayer and your prayer for our world which needs to hear it.

Just as I am

So, when we come here on a Sunday, we are not just coming to Church, we are coming to God, who has made it possible for us to be in relationship with him through his son Jesus Christ.

I started by saying that humanity has a problem; I believe that Jesus has the answer to our problem.

Ubuntu our Moderator shared with the Parliament. Yes, true *ubuntu* happens when we surrender to Christ and we are One in Jesus. There is not them or us, only us, for we are God's flock, loved for all eternity.

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world". Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin and who takes away the sin of anyone in the world who turns to him in faith.

Let us continue to worship God and sing together another great hymn, "I heard the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest".