Sermon on John 1:29-41
January 17–18, 2026

What Do You Want?

ECCE AGNUS DEI!

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

It was an awful day - that day—when Adam and Eve traded their righteousness for a bite of forbidden fruit; the day they exchanged innocence and holiness for guilt, shame, and fig leaves. It was on that awful day, that our first parents decided that what they wanted wasn't what God wanted. And when one doesn't want what God wants, life quickly descends into a non-stop quest for *wanting something else*.

When we were young, we wanted to be all grown up. As we age, we long for the carefree days of youth. God blesses us with children, and we immediately begin to look forward to the time when they can take care of themselves. Now, I look through old photos and desperately wish they were young again. We want a new job—better pay and more respect for our talents. We get a new job, only to realize that the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence. We envy what the Joneses have—only to find out later that the Joneses actually want what the Schmidts have. Do you know what you want if you win Megabucks? Often, people end up becoming mega-broke…

This quest for some*thing* else, some*one* else, or some*place* else is powerful proof that our earthly Eden is lost and we're a long way from our heavenly Eden. Each of us still carries a yearning in our hearts and a hole in our souls - an emptiness itching to be filled.

Author and radio personality Garrison Keillor from *Prairie Home Companion* once quipped: "Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known." Keillor, despite his funny monologues about Lutherans, is an agnostic. He speaks of *Lady Luck* giving us what we have instead of what we thought we wanted. This morning, John the Baptist, the greatest prophet born of woman, points us not to Lady Luck but to the *Lord* to fill the ache in our hearts and the hole in our soul.

In John 1, Jesus is at the beginning of his earthly ministry. The baptismal water on Jesus' head was barely dry when he was led out into the wilderness to fast, pray, and wrestle with Satan in temptation for 40 days. Now, having returned from the wilderness, Jesus urgently begins the task of gathering followers—his first disciples. And isn't it fascinating that the very first words Jesus spoke to his soon-to-be disciples, Andrew and John, were a terribly nebulous question? What do you want?

What do you want? The bigger question, of course, was whether or not Andrew and John's wants were going to line up with what God intended to give them. After all, many people in their day wanted a national hero, a champion for the Jewish people, a king like David—in short, they wanted a Messianic LORD! What God gave them, however, was a Lamb: 29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'… 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

The One who was born after John the Baptist in time is the One who existed from eternity before John the Baptist. John the Baptist, we are told, was the greatest prophet born of a woman. But God's eternal Prophet—the Word itself—was now in their midst. John's ministry existed to point others to Jesus' ministry. As John became less and less, Jesus became more. With thousands of years of people's messianic hopes, expectations, wants, and dreams piled behind them, the ONE thing John points to and proclaims is: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Jesus is a lamb. No, he's God's one and only Lamb.

What do you want? Do you want a lamb? When we think of lambs, we often picture Mary's little lamb, a cute stuffed animal, or a sweater that going to cost serious money. We might even hum the children's hymn: "I am Jesus' little lamb...". But not in biblical times! Life was tough as a lamb. Only the brightest and best lambs were killed and eaten at the Passover meal—only after their blood had been painted on Israel's doors. Lambs went up in smoke on the temple's altar every morning and evening as a symbolic sacrifice for sin. And now, THE Lamb—God's lamb—was here. Every sacrificial lamb slaughtered for thousands of years pointed forward to this Lamb, who would be sacrificed on the altar of the cross.

No matter what we think we want, God gives us a Lamb.

John the Baptist points to Jesus as the Lamb of God who TAKES AWAY SIN. This was always the saving plan. God prophesied through Isaiah: 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.... Absolutely sinless, he took our sin upon himself. And then he took those sins away by carrying them with him to the cross. There, he made the ultimate sacrifice—not for a nation's freedom, but for the *world's forgiveness*. No matter what we think we truly need, God gives us the Lamb's forgiveness.

That's right! He takes away the sin of the WORLD. The rebellion of Adam, the drunkenness of Noah, the lies of Abraham, the adultery of David, the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas, the pride of the Pharisees—all are part of the sin of the world. And 2,000 years later, the world continues to revolve around the sun and spin further out of control. Church attendance is down across America—drug-related deaths are soaring. We're told that life matters, yet murders in our largest cities are out of control. ISIS drives trucks into Christmas markets to maim and kill. Will the Lamb even take away acts of Islamic terrorism and domestic violence? Acts of spiritual and physical self-destruction? Does the Lamb really have room on his back to pay for the sins of the world? And the biggest question of all, of course, is this: *Does he really have room to pay for all the sins of you and me?*

Brothers and sisters: This is *God's* Lamb, God's Son. BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD! Not the world minus Islamic terrorists, not the world minus pill pushers, and certainly not the world minus you! You know that He appeared so He could take away our sins, and in Him is no sin. (1 Jn. 3:5 NIV) No matter who we think really needs Jesus, God gives Jesus for you - for the whole world.

But is that really the Savior we want? We see a cross. We know the facts of His suffering and death. We can even recite John 3:16. We confess our sins at the beginning of the service—and we know that Pastor is going to speak words of forgiveness. We know all of that! So, don't we yearn, just every now and then,

for a Savior who is more *practical?* One who teaches us how to manage our money more carefully, communicate more thoughtfully, raise our children more lovingly? Can't Jesus give us these things too?

Absolutely brothers and sisters! But this is key: Our Christian life was founded and flows from this one sentence: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That's not me speaking! That's the greatest prophet born of woman! In other words, Jesus isn't so much interested in providing a new perspective on managing your money as he is in forgiving your greed. Jesus isn't so much interested in modeling new techniques in communication as he is in washing away every lie we ever told. Jesus isn't so much interested in showing you how to get along better with people as he is in offering his life for every time you haven't.

To quote Keillor: Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have. We often want a life coach, and God turns around and gives you eternal life. We want a list of things to do, instead God gives you a Lamb—salvation done. Thank God that He didn't give us what we wanted, but what we truly needed: The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

You know what they say: *Second verse, same as the first!* The very next day, Jesus appeared at Bethany again. And John said the same thing: "Look, the Lamb of God!" But this time, Jesus had something to say to Andrew and John as they followed in his footsteps: "What do you want?"

What a wonderfully nebulous question: *What do you want?* Notice that Jesus doesn't lead with the three best reasons to follow him. He doesn't give them a contract: what they need to do for him and then what he'll do for them in return. Surprisingly, he doesn't even tell them the four things they need to repent of first. Instead, he simply asks, "What do you want?"

Andrew and John's answer? "Where are you staying?" Translation: Jesus, we want to spend time with you! And so they did. John remembered that this was his first time with Jesus, which began around 4:00 p.m. The things they heard that afternoon filled the hole in their souls and soothed the aching of their hearts: They had spent the day with the Messiah. Their life - and world history - would never be the same. Andrew quickly found his brother Peter. Peter would need to spend time with Jesus too. The Good News of God's Lamb has a way of changing hearts - and then opening lips to point others to the Lamb!

So what do you want from Jesus this morning? Peace for living? Comfort for dying? Strength to leave an addiction behind? Health for a loved one? Help for a child at school? Fulfillment in employment? Unity in our country? Growth in our church? All of these prayers are certainly heard and answered by our Lord, who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

But might I suggest that there is a much deeper want - no, a need - that must be fulfilled before anything else can be fixed? What do you truly want? "Lord, where are you staying?" Translation: Jesus, we want to be with you - where you are. We want to hear you - what you say. We want to touch you - to know you're real. And Jesus answers these deep prayers of your heart too: Here I am, child, right here in the midst of you where two or three are gathered in my name. Here I am, loving here, in the voice of your shepherd who proclaims my forgiveness to you. Here I am, always here for you, just as surely as I live in your new heart through baptism. Here I am, right here, as close as the tongue in your mouth that tastes my supper for the forgiveness of all your sins. Here I am - always here - in the words of life on the pages of your Bible. Here I am, all of me, always, until the very end of the age! It's no wonder that Andrew went to tell Peter!

And that Aaron told Grandma...

My dear Grandma Christie was a life-long Roman Catholic. She would not dream of missing mass. She had masses said for my Grandpa Christie's soul for decades after he died. She believed in Christ, but she struggled with the concept of Christ paying for the sins of the world: "All sins, Aaron? Every sin?" When Grandma was struggling with congestive heart failure, I quickly went home to MI to visit her a final time. In the Emergency Room, I had what was to be my last conversation with Grandma Christie. We didn't talk about the Detroit Tigers or perch fishing. Instead, we talked about the Lamb. I sang the ancient hymn of the Church: "O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world grant us your peace." Grandma looked at me and said: "*We sing that, Aaron, every Sunday*." And then, one final time, I shared with her what it meant.

Grandma wanted to see her grandson, but she got what wanted AND what she wasn't expecting: She got the Lamb. Always the Lamb. For all, the Lamb. Amen.

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