

First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, MI  
Rediscovering Jesus: Lamb of God  
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1 Samuel 3:1-20; John 1:29-39

It seems a little bit risky to ask the Pastor who went to Moo-ewe to talk about the Lamb of God. I went to MSU (Michigan State University) and often our rivals would call us Moo-Ewe because we are a land grant school. We do have cows and sheep on campus. Well, the jokes on them because it makes very cute logos especially when my fencing team made cows and sheep fencing on our t-shirts. We were happy to call ourselves moo-ewe.

It's interesting though that that was not my first encounter where sheep were an important journey piece for me. In high school I was in a Great Works class. We had to study a director for our final project and my best friend and I chose to study Tim Burton - the best excuse to just hang out at each other's houses and watch the movies. When we started watching them back-to-back we noticed something in every single movie. We started noticing the sound of sheep. We thought it was strange that every single movie, no matter if they seem like they belonged there or not, had sheep in the background.

During our project, Tim Burton came out with a new movie called Big Fish. It was only being released in select areas. The closest to Milford, Michigan where we lived was Sterling Heights. We went against our parents' permission and drove out to Sterling Heights to see this movie. We saw the movie and in that movie again was the sound of sheep. We looked at each other and thought, well, I guess that's how our senior project is gonna have to go. We're gonna have to talk about sheep.

We made a beautiful presentation about how the sheep, representing innocence, and how the world brings in its darkness around this sheep. We got all A's and our professor thought it was brilliant. Then we went to college together and the director's cut of that movie came out. In that DVD Tim Burton said the reason he uses sheep so often is because... he loves the sound of sheep. All of our preparation, all of our thoughts, all of our theories were completely wrong. They were completely made up; they were our own invention. That experience has made me very skeptical anytime I hear someone say this is what this symbol means or this is what the Bible says. If we get to a point where we only have one or two definitions of something I look around to see if I can find something new.

Similar to what we heard from Samuel's story, Eli had been in control of the interpretation, so Samuel goes to him to see what he needs every time he hears the voice. He doesn't realize that God is asking him to look at things in a new way. So today I want us to look at the Lamb of God, but I want us to be open about how we think about this.

When I looked at all the commentaries, I found one of two definitions of what the Lamb of God meant. One of them is a protector (took a shield out of my bag to show the congregation). Biblical scholars believe that the Lamb of God is in reference to the blood of the Lamb of the Passover. The way that lamb

protected the community from the Angel of Death from those evils of the world is also the way Jesus protects us. John is referencing this protector of the people of the community of the flock.

The other definition that is very common (holds up a scrub daddy sponge) is Jesus being the one who absorbs the sin, who takes away the sin of the world. This definition referencing the lamb that was given as a sacrifice every morning and evening that would be given for the sins of the community. That lamb and that sacrifice would absorb the sins of the communities as they begin their day and unload the burden of the shadow of sin. These are the popular ways to see the symbol of the Lamb of God.

But because I went to moo-ewe I know lots of people who know lots of things about lambs. So I gave them a call and I asked what their favorite thing was about sheep. Here is what I learned about sheep and possibly things we should work into our understanding of the lamb of God.

Sheep are actually very good at mazes (holds up a prayer labyrinth). They can learn a maze individually or as a group. They also remember it for long periods of time. They remember the way and they can find their way through fairly complicated mazes. Maybe the Lamb of God is in reference to the way that flocks and sheep understand the way and remember and teach the way to each other.

Another interesting fact (holds up an old church picture directory): There are probably some faces in here that you recognize, maybe some that you don't, similarly sheep are able to recognize and remember the faces of other sheep and humans. We think they can hold about 50 individual faces and remember them for two years. They have a very good recognition of who is part of their flock, who has been part of their flock and maybe gone away and come back. Maybe the Lamb of God is talking about recognizing your flock and knowing who is around you and remembering.

I also learned this week that after humans mastered agriculture they domesticated sheep. One of the very first things we did for our communal survival depended on sheep (hold up wool socks). I'm very thankful that we domesticated sheep especially here in Michigan where it gets cold. Sheep are very important to the development of human culture. Once we had agriculture we could raise flocks of sheep whose wool allowed us to live in different climates. We were able to be more comfortable. We were able to help our children survive in colder areas. Sheep are important to who we are as humans. I think it is fair to say that it is similar to the Lamb of God too.

I also learned that sheep can recognize the voices of their young (holds up a Tibetan singing bowl). Tibetan singing bowls come in lots of different pitches. I went to a retreat and was told that this is the pitch that sings to my soul. In a monastery each monk plays the bowl with their soul's pitch for meditation. Sheep can recognize the lambs that are connected to their soul, and for who they are responsible to raise and care for. If they recognize the cries of their young, maybe the Lamb of God has something to do with recognizing our cries.

This next one, I promise, is clean (holds up a workout sweatband). We think of sheep as being docile, innocent, passive creatures, but that is not entirely accurate. In every flock, there is a young ram who always takes it upon himself to fight the battles. If there is even so much of an inkling of a threat he will

run to that side of the flock and be ready to be in battle. He will head butt whatever comes into the flock. Often this is the smallest ram who gets the need to fight all the time. The reason why I brought this is because shepherds often have to tie fabric around the horns to keep them from hurting each other. They also use it as a handle to pull them out of the fight if they have chosen the wrong battle. Maybe this Lamb of God is like this young ram, the one that joins us in our battles, that joins us in our fights, that is always there by our side.

Another friend told me that sheep actually have the ability to know when plants (holds up a medicine pill bottle), that have no nutritional value to them, will solve and cure diseases. They will pass that knowledge on to their young as well. Sheep have medicine and they know how to heal the flock. Definitely something in there related to the Lamb of God.

Maybe my favorite is that sheep are great leaders and respect leaders (holds up a toy bullhorn). They trust each other totally. When a sheep sees a threat and it is confirmed to be heading their way the sheep on the other side of the flock will hear that and they'll begin moving so that there is space for the flock to move away from the threat. My niece in vet school told me this fun fact and I asked how do you become a leader in a flock of sheep, what's the protocol. She said there isn't really a protocol because everyone is expected to be on the lookout for threats. Especially if you're standing on the outskirts of the flock you're supposed to be aware. Everyone holds the responsibility of noticing when there are threats to the flock. Everyone works together when there is something that needs to be adjusted amongst them and to protect everyone. All are called to be leaders in their flock.

I looked at all these different things thinking what do I want to show to the congregation on Sunday. What do I want to say about this Lamb of God? I realized it's good for us, every once in a while, to just unpack these symbols. Unpack what we've known, what we might learn about sheep that is new, what people have said the Lamb of God is, and look at all of this and see what the Lamb of God can mean to us today.

In Samuel there is this word that we translate as "here I am" but it can also mean "behold." God calls out to Samuel, "Behold, I need you to behold who I am." This is how God signals that there is an adjustment to be made from Eli's traditional interpretation and understanding to how Samuel is to understand and lead. John the Baptist says the same thing, "Behold the Lamb of God." When we behold something in its entirety each one of us will see something valuable and it won't necessarily be what the other person sees. Something different will speak to each one of us and will affect how we operate in the world.

Are we Fighters... are we protectors... are we guides? The way the Lamb of God resonates with us influences our behavior and choices and the way we live a Christ-like life. I decided not to pair down the options of what the Lamb of God can mean so that we can all behold, maybe add to our understanding even. And so, Behold, the Lamb of God.