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John 19:30

NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LAMB

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Have you ever brought your children or grandchildren to a petting zoo? They absolutely love alligators. Some of them would play for hours with the lions and the tigers. And don't forget the wolves! We would not expect any of these fierce animals to be at a petting zoo. People and especially children could get hurt. We would however expect lambs to be at a petting zoo. Lambs are warm and fuzzy and cuddly. They won't hurt you. Children are attracted to lambs. Some might even carry around a stuffed lamb and take it to bed with them every night.

I hope that we are attracted to lambs and one in particular. As Christians we talk a lot about lambs and sheep and shepherds. Lambs remind us of God's love. God the Father sent his Lamb into the world in love. On this Maundy Thursday evening we see what that Lamb did for us. We look at that precious NAME OF WONDROUS LOVE – THE LAMB.

Jesus is called the Lamb 26 times in the book of Revelation. In our text this evening he is described as a Lamb "looking as if it had been slain." Many memories will flood John's mind. That picture takes him back almost seventy years to the banks of the Jordan River. His teacher is another man named John known for his baptizing. He points to the one approaching and loudly says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" This Lamb was proclaimed to be the very Son of God by his heavenly Father. This Lamb was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power as the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. It was now time to follow this Lamb.

Every person in Israel knew the significance of a lamb. Lambs reminded the people of God's love and deliverance. The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. They prayed that the Lord would remember his promise and bring them to the land that he had promised on oath to give to the descendants of Abraham. And so, God would send a deliverer named Moses! Moses would go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go!" God would send a series of plagues on Egypt, but Pharaoh would only harden his heart and refuse. Finally, the last plague would come. God would strike down the firstborn living in every home in Egypt. There was only one way to escape death. One would have to put the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of every home. The angel of death would then pass over the homes marked with the blood of the lamb.

The Israelites would leave Egypt. Every year they would celebrate the festival of Passover. It was the major festival of their year. Pilgrims would throng to Jerusalem and celebrate with their families. There were many facets of the meal. There would be roasted lamb to remind them of the lamb's deliverance. There was unleavened bread because they were going to leave Egypt the very next day and there was no time for the bread to rise. There were bitter herbs reminding them of the many years of bitter bondage. And there were four cups of wine reminding the people that this was a celebration of God's deliverance.

Every Jewish male was required to observe the Passover. Many brought their entire families. Pilgrims would come from all over Palestine and even other countries. Jerusalem was packed for the Passover. Jesus and his apostles would also come. The apostles wanted him to stay away. They knew how Jesus' enemies wanted to kill him. That was no secret. His enemies would try to trap him in his own words a number of times in those final days.

Jesus would come to Jerusalem because he was subject to the Law. He came to fulfill the Law. He came to fulfill the Passover. He was the Passover Lamb who was slain. That very evening as they ate the Passover meal, Jesus would bless the bread, break it, and give it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then he would take the cup, give thanks and give it to them saying, "Take and drink from it, all of you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

This was the body and the blood of the Lamb. When we hear that, we think of a helpless victim. John's vision points us to something else. "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." This lamb is not lying there dead. It is standing in the center of the throne. It is sharing all divine power and majesty with the Father at the right hand of God. The seven horns and the seven eyes symbolize his power and his wisdom. The number seven symbolizes God's covenant of grace with men. That covenant would be secured through the perfect life and sacrificial death of the Lamb of God.

Yes, this Lamb is not the helpless victim, but rather the glorious victor. You have probably seen the picture of a lamb with a banner of victory. The lamb's blood flows into a cup. This is the Lamb who was slain, but who has also slain our enemies. He has destroyed sin, death, and the power of Satan. This is the Lamb whose blood stained the cross of Calvary, but also satisfied the penalty for all sins. This is the Lamb who went silently to the slaughter but boldly proclaimed his victory as he returned to his Father, and would rise again from the dead.

We are not here this evening to listen to some sort of historical lecture that will tie the blood of Jesus with the Passover that took place 1500 years before that. That is true, of course, but that will do us no good unless we apply that truth personally to our own lives. We must say, "Jesus is my Lamb!" To say that Jesus died is history. To say that Jesus died for sinners is theology. To say that Jesus died for me is salvation.

God is a personal God. There are people out there who have such large families that one wonders how they can remember the names of all their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. God knows your name. God knows not only your name, but he knows everything about you. He knows your weaknesses. He knows your fears. He knows your sins. And he knows what you needed. You needed a Savior who would do what you were unable to do by resisting all the temptations of Satan and by keeping the Law perfectly in your place. We celebrated that in Lent as our Lord Jesus went into the wilderness to face Satan one on one. And you needed a Savior who would undo what your sins had done. The wages of sin is death. Your sins separated you from God. Jesus would pay the price for your sins by going to the cross. Tomorrow is Good Friday. You see the love that Jesus had for you by staying on that cross until every last sin was paid for in full.

We are human and we are weak. We stumble and fall. We do what we do not want to do and we don't do what we do want to do. We need strength and we need forgiveness. Jesus provides both of those in the Holy Supper he offers to us this evening. Jesus could simply say, "Your sins are forgiven; go in peace!" And he does that! But he also offers more than that.

I guess that a mother could say to her child, "I love you" once a year. I guess that a husband could say to his wife, "I love you" at Christmas and on her birthday. It might be true, but I'm assuming that the person might really have some doubts. We not only like to hear those words often and sometimes we need to hear them every day, but we also like to have physical assurance of that. We like hugs and kisses. We like holding hands. We like reassurance in every way possible that we are loved in spite of the stupid things we do and say which are many times absolutely indefensible.

God does that at our baptism. He reminds us that we are his children and that he is our Father in heaven. We may wander and stray, but we always have a father who loves us. He marked us with the sign of the holy cross and called us by name. He can't and won't forget us.

And he further assures us through the Lord's Supper. He comes to us individually. Each one of us comes up to the Lord's Altar. Each one of us opens our mouth and each one of us receives Jesus' promise individually. Yes, the God who created the universe has time for you. The God who died on the cross has time for you. The God who will return in glory to raise the dead and judge the world has time for you. He assures you as an individual that your sins, whatever they may be, are forgiven. He is not too busy to say, "I love you." He wants you to walk away from the altar with joy and confidence, knowing that your sins are forgiven.

All your senses come into play. Your ears hear his precious words of forgiveness. Your eyes see his body and blood. Your nose smells his salvation hidden under the bread and wine. Your tongue tastes the love, and your hands touch him. He is not merely symbolized in the Sacrament. He is real and truly present. We cannot explain it. We simply take our Lord at his Word.

Our sins have been washed away. Our clothes that are stained with sin have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise! Come, for all things are now ready! AMEN.