

## Minister's Jottings March 2020

Do you realise what a strange view of lambs we have in Western society? To us they are cute and cuddly. After all, we have Shaun the sheep. We think of them gambolling in spring. They remind us of life and joy. But, to most of the world it's a different story. When I was in Tunisia I saw a man leading a lamb on a lead. It looked cute. But, he was taking it to be killed in a religious ritual and used for feasting. It was food on a rope. Lambs, there, are merely useful.

So when John the Baptist says of Jesus, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' we may misunderstand what he meant. When we think of 'Lamb of God', what do we imagine? Spotless? Wonderful? Cute? Helpless? But, John's listeners wouldn't. When he mentioned lamb, they would have thought of dinner; lambs led into the Temple; lambs killed, cut, and burnt on an altar. They would have smelled blood, burnt meat; heard bleating. No shrink-wrapped stuff from Tesco's. Death of lambs was part of life.

On top of that, they would have learned, from childhood, the old stories. How God sent Moses to Egypt to rescue his people. Stories of plagues and how the last one was the Angel of Death sent to kill all first-born. How God told them to kill a lamb and paint its blood on their door posts and lintels.

So when they heard John speak, all these images came to mind. Imagine how intrigued and confused they would be to hear John say that Jesus - a man - was Lamb of God. 'What? Is he to be killed and his blood put on our posts? Is he to be killed in the Temple and burnt on the altar? What does John mean?'

But John is a prophet of God. So, perhaps they thought, 'Is there a deeper meaning? 'Two of John's disciples were so intrigued, they followed Jesus. Can you imagine their confusion? So nervous that, when Jesus asked them, 'What are you looking for?' they umm-ed. Instead of saying, 'We want to know who you are, and why John says you're Lamb of God.' they said: 'Um, um... Where do you live? ' Have you done that? Someone asks you something, and you can't think. You either dry up, or you gabble and later think, 'Why did I say that? 'We don't know what Jesus told them, but it was enough to remove their confusion and make them say, 'We have found the Messiah: the one sent by God to save us, to lead his people back to God! '

That is part of the paradox of Christian faith; the wonder and strangeness. Jesus didn't come as they imagined. He came not as a

war leader, to destroy enemies; but to destroy evil. He came not to force everyone to follow him; but to show that God loves everyone so much he would die for them. He came not as a lion, but a lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

The Old Testament talks about the scapegoat. Two goats or lambs would be brought to the altar. One would be sacrificed. The other would be prayed over, the nation's sins ceremonially placed on it, and it was driven into the wilderness. It was the scapegoat, escaping with the sins. Jesus came to do both - to take our sins away, and take our punishment, dying in our place. Isaiah speaks of a servant that will be despised and hated, yet everyone will bow before him. A paradox. Only Jesus - God himself - could do the work perfectly, do the job for us. The Lamb of God is why we celebrate Easter.

Every blessing

Duncan