

## **“The Lamb, Soaking Wet”**

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Second in a series on the Gospel of John, chapter 1

John 1.29-34

September 21, 2014

The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him.

He said, “Look! Here is God’s lamb, who is taking away the world’s sin! This is the one about whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me.’ I myself did not recognize him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, so that he might be revealed to Israel.”

John gave this evidence: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not recognize him, but the One who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, that’s the person who is baptizing with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and given evidence that this is the Son of God.”

John 1.29-34

The fire was dozing, as was everyone huddled around. Yohannan alone was awake and ablaze

Earlier that day, his friends from the investigative team had gone back to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they would report this about John the Baptizer: he was odd, brazen, and explosive. He was colouring way outside the lines, yet still on the same page. John was prophetically faithful to the Lord and his people Israel. John was the sort you’d expect in these fearful and desperate times.

His friends left to report. Yohannan stayed.

He watched the pilgrims edge into the river, and the Baptizer bury them in the water and yank them out, half-drowned and wide-eyed alive. Then John got him, and Yohannan himself went under. All day, the Baptizer fired and brimstoned, shaking the crowd with warnings, exciting it with expectation. Yohannan too.

So he was startled when, by the night fire, the Baptizer had appeared, quiet and almost unnoticed. John’s face shadowed a mix of perplexity and wonder. The prophet had spoken in a whisper, a giddy whisper.

Now, deeper in the night, Yohannan was still, his heart alight. What should he do now?

II

I'd like to think I would have noticed Jesus. Not likely.

Yohannan hadn't noticed Jesus in the crowd. Neither had John even, at first. Nothing about him stood out, except one thing. John witnessed it: *"I saw the Spirit descend on him like a dove, and it remained on him."*

With God-given sight, John witnessed the descending and remaining Spirit on the drenched man in his arms. The Spirit was God, announcing *"This is he for whom you've been waiting."*

Waiting! Hadn't the prophet Isaiah promised? *"Like a branch that sprouts from a stump, someone from King David's family will someday be king. The Spirit of the LORD will be with him . . ."*

Hadn't Isaiah told of God rejoicing? *"Here is my servant! I have made him strong. He is my chosen one; I am pleased with him. I have given him my Spirit, and he will bring justice to the nations."*

Hadn't Isaiah told of the Servant's announcement? *"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me! The LORD has chosen and sent me to tell the oppressed the good news, to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives."<sup>1</sup>*

In that river, John had held and beheld him: the King, the Servant. The Spirit rests and stays with Jesus . . . ah! . . . so Jesus can drench us with the same Spirit: good news, healed wounds, liberty and release. The Holy Spirit will fill you with life, transform you with love, draw you to God, and birth you as a newborn into God's Kingdom.

The Spirit rests with Jesus, and comes from Jesus. For you. For each of us. For us all, together.

But not yet (in the story, that is.). Before he breathes the Spirit-Dove into us, the Lamb must make his journey.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Quotes from Isaiah 11.1-2a, 42.1 and 61.1 (Contemporary English Version, adapted).

<sup>2</sup> It is only after Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection that he breathes the Holy Spirit into his disciples. See John 20.19ff.

### III

The Lamb! John the Baptizer called Jesus that. *“Look! Here is God’s Lamb, who is taking away the world’s sin.”*

Lambs were used in sacrifice.

Why is this Lamb necessary? Because before the Spirit can plant, the garden of life needs cleaning up, serious weeding. Jesus takes away sin. Your sin. The world’s sin. Every one of us, and all of us together. Sin’s weight that burdens, that crushes, that cripples. We pile it onto each other, and pile it onto ourselves. Sin sticks to us, grows in us. Even if we want to be rid of it, we can’t let it go.

That is not whom God made us to be, though. Not who God makes you to be. God makes us to reach generously beyond ourselves. Sin is us curving inward, in bent self-centredness and un-love. “Sin” is not just one naughty thing we do here, another nasty thing there. It’s the whole weight of it. A way of life. No, a way of death.

God’s Lamb lifts it off. He doesn’t just take away the poisoned fruit; he strikes at its noxious root. He has to. We need him to. You know how it is. Take on one mess you’ve made, one habitual and ongoing act of un-love toward God or another, deal with it and get rid of it, and sooner than you can turn, you’ve spilled over some more.

We need God’s Lamb to take it all away, and stop the spilling.

Go, again, to the prophet Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> (Isaiah would have been ringing in John’s ears, and Yohannan’s too.) The prophet told of the Servant Lamb of God, whom we will despise, reject, and afflict, as we pound our whole mess on top of him. Mock and curse, as we judge ourselves better than him. The Lamb suffers our wounds, not us. The Lamb is crushed, not us. The Lamb is punished, not us. And the Lamb . . . heals us. He makes us whole. The Lamb carries off our sin, and we are saved.

Could this possibly be true? Can this possibly be true?

Imagine you were there, and look at him. Look at him! He is soaked, hair hanging and tangled, clothes clinging to his drenched skin. He was just washed in a muddy river. Gasping, for the water bites cold. He’s got goosebumps, like you. The Lamb of God? Him? The Saviour who is making all the difference, and all things right? Not just us, the whole

---

<sup>3</sup> For what follows, see especially Isaiah 53.

world? Him?

The Spirit-Dove renews you. Pours into you. Gives life to you. Gives you your purpose, your beautiful, majestic purpose as a person of God, for the sake of God's world.

But before that, God's Spirit-filled Lamb must make his journey. He must remove what you need taken out, so the Spirit can flow in. The Lamb will forgive your sin, remove your guilt, and start you along new ways where the old, sick ones lose their grip on you.<sup>4</sup>

And so, from the Jordan river of his baptism in water, Jesus will go. He will continue his baptism to death and resurrection. The Lamb, for sinners to be slain.

#### IV

These were John's parting words to Yohannan, before getting up from the fire: *"I have seen and given evidence that this is the Son of God."*

God's Son. God's faithful Son. The spitting image of God. Like Father, like Son.

So whatever Jesus does, he is God doing it. The Spirit-Dove is God. So too is the Servant-Lamb.

Jesus the Lamb makes his journey of death and resurrection for you and me and the world, because he wants to. He comes to be baptized because he wants to. He gives you the Spirit because he wants to. Because he loves you. Because he is God the Son.

God loves you. How much? Look at Jesus!

When I introduced him a couple weeks ago, I said Yohannan is a character I sort of made up to help tell the story. Today, I'm going to finish with him by the campfire. Maybe we can warm up beside him. Yohannan is wrestling, and perhaps us too.

When we are confronted with the surprising, astonishing, unbidden and wondrous grace of God, what do we do? Simply say "Thanks," and carry on? "Thank you God," yes! A thousand times! Then what? Same old, same old? Really? What do you do, when such a great thing has just been whispered to you . . . about the Lamb, soaking wet . . . ?

---

<sup>4</sup> "Only when the lamb has been killed for the world's sins can the spirit of the living God be poured out on his people. Only when the Temple has been made clean and ready – the Temple of human hearts, polluted by sin and rebellion – can the presence of God come and live there." N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 13.