

**Sermon: Symbol #7- Lamb of God Revelation 5:1-14 & John 1: 13-30 September 4, 2022**  
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I spent my early summer in the hills and dales of Yorkshire in the UK. We stayed out of cities and kept to smaller rural places. And everywhere we went we met sheep and lambs. Everywhere ....

When we looked out the windows of the house that we stayed in there were sheep in the fields. When we drove through the Yorkshire dales there were sheep and lambs on hillsides. We walked by woolly flocks by the sea. There were sheep greeting us when we walked through the village where we were staying. We saw lambs scurrying to their mother's safety as we walked by on rural pathways.



Even when we stopped and went inside somehow, we were reminded of sheep and lambs...

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Over summer months we have been reflecting on symbols of faith.



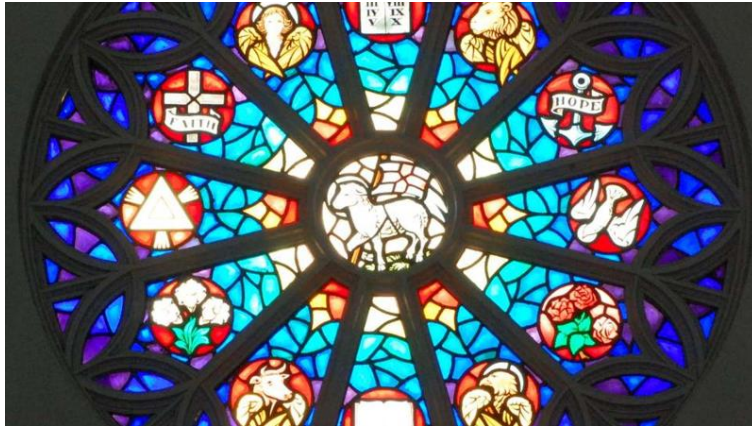
- We have looked at one of the earliest symbols of our tradition, a first century spoked wheel in which is hidden the name of Jesus, which symbolically and simply communicates the great commandment to love God and neighbor.
- We reflected on the boat as an old and common symbol that speaks of Christian community.
- We looked at Celtic High crosses, symbols that carry the story of God's love from Creation to the end of things, carved in stone
- We considered the table as symbol
  - We thought about the font that we come to for baptism as a symbol of the life in Jesus.
  - We celebrated the rainbow, a symbol of God's mercy and kindness, of inclusion and peace.

In our time and place the cross is our central symbol.

For the first 1000 years of the Christian tradition other symbols were central. In different times and places there are other symbols that lift up other aspects of our faith tradition, which put different Christian values in the center of things.

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Here in our sanctuary, there are symbols. Carved in wood we find a boat, a symbol of community. A burning bush: a symbol of holiness and covenant. There is an anchor, a wheat sheaf, a cup, an open Bible...There are symbols in stained glass



Our rose window contains 13 symbols of faith. And in the middle, the central symbol, is a lamb. An ancient prayer comes to mind: “O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Grant us your peace.” In our chapel we have a window with lambs and sheep and the Good Shepherd in the midst of them.

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In Yorkshire we saw lots of sheep and lambs. In Australia there are 8 ½ sheep per person. New Zealand? 20.7 sheep per capita...and in the Holy Land long ago there would have been many sheep- so the Scripture story abounds with sheep and lambs and shepherds.

But in Ottawa in 2022, we do not spend much time with lambs. So...the Lamb of God may not be a symbol that immediately resonates with us.



So, the Lamb of God is Jesus.

And it's worth unpacking this symbol a bit because it still might speak to us, challenge us even. Biblical scholar Walter Burghardt wrote: “we should not abandon Biblical symbols but reclaim them... stir them briskly like bland yogurt so we can get to the fruit at the bottom.”



## The Lamb of God...

In John's gospel when John the Baptist sees Jesus he says "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" and later in Chapter 1 again John sees Jesus and says "Behold the Lamb of God"

In the Epistle of Peter, we read that the saints are redeemed through "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish."



In the Revelation to John, in a vision where heavens doors open, John sees a lamb that had been slain standing in the middle of the throne of God. A few chapters on the Lamb of God wipes away the tears of all people as the saints are gathered in the life to come...

There are almost 30 mentions of the Lamb of God in Revelation

The Lamb symbol... is full of complexity.

It is a sacrificial lamb. It is innocent without blemish; it takes away the world's sin.

But it is triumphant, enthroned in heavenly places. It is honored too.

In 375CE, Saint Augustine wrote: "Why (is Jesus) a lamb in his passion? Because he underwent death without being guilty of any iniquity. Why a lamb in his resurrection? Because his innocence is everlasting. "



Think of a Lamb. It is small. Cute. Gentle. A lamb does no harm. A lamb is in no way threatening.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. And this symbol has been used in Christian art over centuries.

The way of Jesus is by this symbol a way of gentleness, meekness, self giving... It is a soft way, not a harsh one. The Lamb does not impose. A Lamb does not act by force. A Lamb does not dominate.

Right now, in some parts of the Christian movement there is an embrace of harshness, force, a move towards power.

Some Christian voices in our world have rejected explicitly the language of sheep and lambs found in Scripture. The Lord is my Shepherd. No, they are not sheep; they declare; they don't need a Shepherd - they are lions. You can get that on a t shirt if you like.

Some parts of the Christian tradition right now call for war not peace. Some use the image of warrior to think about what it means to follow Jesus, but that is an image Jesus never used for himself or his followers. Some seek to impose their way of understanding on others. They seek power to make others conform to their point of view



The image of the Lamb of God is a challenge to this contemporary Christian impulse to embrace power. In the Revelation passage from Chapter 5 that we shared, the Lion of Judah is called forth, but it appears as a lamb: “5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed...<sup>6</sup> Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne.”

Jesus is the Lamb of God. Maybe sit with this ancient symbol for a while. It has something to say to us still.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. See the Lamb of God who wipes away every tear from our eyes. May the Lamb lead us in right paths and grant us his peace.

Amen