

# Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany

*'I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'*

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A revelation has occurred, one that none of us knew of. Even the greatest of the prophets himself declares; John, who is called the Baptist, declares, *'I myself did not know him.'*

What have we seen?

*'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin the of the world.'*

This is what John did not see. A lamb, whose blood would replace the blood demanded of you.

Blood is demanded of you, for in *blood there is life*. And in your sin, your life is demanded.

*'There is none without sin, no, not one.'* For we have all committed great evil.

You children of Adam, will you claim you have not committed any evil? Will you claim that you owe not your blood? All of mankind's history is a story of the shedding of blood, because of our arrogance, because of our pride, because of our ambition, because of our dreams, these dreams we are daily told to follow; these dreams of selfish aspiration.

It was a child of Adam who murdered his brother, that his sacrifice might be more accepted, for what sacrifice is more acceptable than both grain and animal, but a man?

This murderer was Cain, and we all treasure his memory, if not in our hearts, at least in our wills, for all our wills are corrupt, and seek to offer to the world something better, something superior to simple grain, or a simple lamb.

We seek not to build small altars to offer simple sacrifices to a contended Lord; we seek to build great utopias, to offer great schemes of human imagination to a discontent world, longing for a joy; a joy in this life, which can never give joy; for joy is not of this life, but comes from the blood of a simple sacrifice, a holy lamb to a contented Lord.

I should not burden you with history, but I shall, since it is my will. You must know what your brothers, the children of Adam, your kin, have done, that they might find happiness, for they had not faith in what shall *be revealed to Israel*. They had faith only in the brilliance of their scheming.

For behold, a tower was built in Babel, reaching to the heavens; a beacon to gather all humanity, that mankind might all be one. But humanity cannot be one, for we are overcome with hatred, divisiveness, petty annoyances, jealousy, avarice, greed. God confused our languages, that we might not speak to one another at Babel, for if we were united by human machination, and we spoke to one another, we would speak words of contempt, and, even as Cain, who spoke to Abel as a brother, murder would be the completion of our desires.

Behold Rome, an empire founded upon the killing of Romulus of Remus. In his blood, even as in Abel's blood, a dream was founded, an *imperium sine fine*, an empire without end, where law would rule, and all would abide by justice. Yet this greatest of empires, which we still praise to this day, whose letters with which we and half of humanity still write; this empire was a rule of massacre, and knew only bloodshed all of its days. Indeed, the gates of Janus, which were opened in times of war, and closed in times of peace, never knew closure, for open they were all the days of the empire, for war and death were the only means mankind could dream of as an instrument of justice.

And what shall we then say of the bloodshed of our own age?

In dreams of national unity, unity which we all, even in our own country

desire, three nations began a war that took the lives of sixty-million innocents. In dreams of universal equality, equality which our own covetousness longs for, a hundred million gave their last breath. This, just in the last century, a time known to our own fathers and grandfathers.

These are our dreams. These are the realizations of our fantasies, the fantasies we share with all mankind; the fantasies of Babel; that we, by our own making, might shed blood, that we may have life. That by our arrogance, we may build a tower unto heaven, and dwell therein; in a heaven that has no place for sinful man; this mankind who cuts down its own; this mankind, whose victim's *blood is crying from the ground*.

Feel in your hand the ocean of blood we, you and I, have shed, age upon age, [washing upon a shore, thick, and lifeless], to bring forth what we hoped would be justice. See the countless wars, see the endless enmities. See how you revile your in-laws. See how you revile your spouse. See how you grimace at the man who was rude to you. See how you despise the woman who cheated on you. If you only had the power, you would add to the ocean, this ocean of blood, which would flood the whole earth, and, if God were gracious, but eight would survive.

There is one who shall shed blood; blood that shall accomplish all that we, in our bloodshed, have always desired: justice, unity, peace. John saw him at a distance, and cried out, *'Behold, the Lamb of God!'* And disciples heard his cry. *They followed Jesus, and Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?'*

They seek what all flesh has sought since the forming of Adam: peace with man, and communion with God. They seek the Church [and His altar]. They ask the Christ *'where are you staying?'*

In this season of Epiphany, when the Lord's glory shall be revealed, He speaks to our weary hearts, not with an answer, but with an invitation.

*'Come, and you will see.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Isaiah 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42.*