

John the Witness  
*John 1:29-42*

**Sermon Point:** John is a witness to who Jesus is: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is our example—one who knows the depths of sin and who shows others that Jesus is the way of healing and cleansing.

Would the children help me get this sermon started? (Hold up glass jar with water and red food coloring.) We are born with our hearts tilted away from God. That's the meaning of what we call "original sin." Because we are inclined away from God, we are selfish. Let's put in a few more drops for each time we are selfish. Because we are tilted away from God, even when we do "good" things, we often do them for selfish reasons, such as to make ourselves look better than someone else. Let's put a few more drops in for times when we are self-righteous. Can we take out all the little red drops in this water? No, we can't do it.

Jesus is the way of healing and cleansing. John the baptist calls him the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Can you repeat that with me? John is referring to something the prophet Isaiah said: that God's special servant who would be like a lamb who takes all the selfishness, all the self-righteousness, all the sin on himself (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). If this jar is like our lives colored by sin, Jesus is like this jar (hold up second jar with bleach in it)—look at what happens when we pour this in! With Jesus inside of us, we're clean!

And we still sin—but see now what happens: with each new drop, the water stays clear! Although we still can be selfish sometimes, Jesus is helping to clean us up!

John the Baptizer had no illusions about how selfish and self-righteous people could be. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he confronts some of the people who come out to see him saying they only want to be splashed with water on the outside but not change anything on the inside. He sees tax collectors who have been cheating people, soldiers who have been using their weapon to extort money, people who have more than enough to live on who refuse to help the vulnerable and weak. He confronts them with the truth: you can't accept God ruling over your life and live that way.

When John sees Jesus coming, he calls out, "here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." What a witness to who Jesus is! Even before Jesus has done anything, John believes that Jesus is the one who is going to change the selfish and self-righteous hearts of the world. And he tells other people the truth.

This is our job too. As Christians, we believe the witness of the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We trust the witness of John the Baptizer, whose words these gospel writers record. And because of their witness, we trust that Jesus is the one who heals and cleanses our souls—and who wants to make all things new.

This is the job of Simeon, who saw Jesus as a baby and said, "Here is the light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel!" He was a witness—someone who told the truth about Jesus to other people.

This weekend we remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was a witness. He was a witness to the hope that God has for this world: a hope that all of God's people will love and

respect one another, that all of God's people will have food to eat and shelter, that all of God's people will have access to education, jobs, and health care, that all of God's people may experience a day when swords are beaten into plowshares and war is taught no more. He saw Jesus—and he was a witness.

What is your witness to how Jesus has brought new life to you? Each of us do! From sharing the witness of the evangelists by sharing the stories about Jesus, to telling the ways Jesus has personally changed our life, we each have a story.

Pat has a story to tell, a witness to how Jesus has changed her life...

This is what Epiphany is all about! The Wise Men saw the star and believed—and Jesus changed their lives! They were witnesses—people who told the story of Jesus. John the Baptist saw Jesus and believed he was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was a witness—someone who told the story of Jesus changing the world. Simeon sang a song, Pat encountered Jesus, you and I have a witness to share, the truth the world needs to hear. Jesus is the one who heals and cleanses this selfish, self-righteous world!