

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE ON SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 24,
2017 BY THE REVEREND STUART LANGSHAW, LOCUM TENENS.**

FOURTEENTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT HOLY COMMUNION

Latin is not widely taught in schools these days. I was taught Latin for 4 years in high school and have found that it has helped me to understand a lot of English. There are Latin phrases and words that we use – phrases and words such as *bona fide* (*good faith*); *carpe diem* (*seize the day*); *caveat emptor* (*let the purchaser beware*); *curriculum vitae* (*a lengthy résumé*); *et cetera* (*and the others*); *post mortem* (*after death*); *vox populi* (*the voice of the people*). Many institutions have mottos in Latin. My school motto was *Tradunt lampada vitae* (*they hand on the torch of life*). You may have learned the song *Decem urnae pendent ex muro* (*Ten green bottles hanging on the wall*)

In our sermon series today we come to a section of the service that has a Latin title – it is the *Agnus Dei*. (*The Lamb of God*). “Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world, grant us your peace.”

Without looking at your Prayer Book, you will know that the words have been stamped onto page 141 with a specially-made rubber stamp, and are not printed there in the publisher’s type. That’s just a bit of St Andrew’s Walkerville tot-wottery, really. Rather, the words are published on page 146 as an Anthem that may follow the Thanksgiving Prayer and precede the invitation to Communion on page 142.

In the Gospels in the New Testament, there are only two references to Jesus as “the lamb of God,” both in John’s Gospel and both by John the Baptist. There on the bank of the river Jordan as John was baptising people, came Jesus. As Jesus approached John said, “Look – the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1.29). And the next day John used the same title for Jesus to two of his (John’s) followers. In the book of Revelation, however, there are 28 references to “the Lamb” with reference to Jesus.

[“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Now here’s a thing. In the books of the Old Testament that talk about Israel’s sacrifices, rarely is a lamb spoken about as bearing people’s sins. In Leviticus 4:32-35 a ewe lamb can be used as a sin offering for an “unwitting” sin. There’s the scape goat in Leviticus 16 that takes the people’s sins off into the desert. But that’s a goat. Then there’s the bull in the same chapter that makes atonement for Aaron the priest. But that’s a bull. There’s the Passover lamb that was cooked and eaten quickly at the start of the Exodus. But that wasn’t to bear away people’s sins. Lambs were used for daily burnt offerings (Exodus 29:38 & Numbers 28:1ff); for post-birth offerings (Leviticus 12:6-8); for lepers’ healing offerings (Leviticus 14:ff); for part of a harvest offering (Leviticus 23:12); part of Nazirites’ offerings (Numbers 6:12.14).]

This *Agnus Dei* that we say or sing just after the Thanksgiving Prayer – it sums up a lot of what the Thanksgiving Prayer has said. In the second section of the Thanksgiving Prayer we hear again the account of the institution of the Holy Communion by Jesus on the night before he was arrested, tried and crucified. We remind ourselves again of the words and actions of our Lord Jesus, as he re-told the facts of the Passover, but refocused it on his self-offering and death for us all. Most especially, the *Agnus Dei* focuses our attention on Jesus’ words, “This is my body given for you ... this is my blood of the new covenant shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” “*Jesus, bearer of our sins, have mercy on*

us.” The *Agnus Dei* is a most useful reminder for us of the purpose of Jesus’ death on the cross – to be the bearer of our sins, as he said at The Last Supper.

There are three titles for Jesus in the *Agnus Dei* – “Lamb of God bearer of our sins ... redeemer of the world.” “Lamb of God ... sin bearer ... world’s redeemer.” How wonderful it is that through his death Jesus has borne the burden and weight of our sins, and that through faith we may be right with God and be made God’s children. And not only us – but the whole world can know this relationship with God. Jesus is the Lamb of God, and is the redeemer of the world. Around the world today, there will be millions and millions of Christians worshipping God... millions of millions of Christians who have handed over the burden and weight and penalty of their sins to Jesus, who is the redeemer of the world. The *Agnus Dei* reminds us, week by week, of the universal love of God – God’s love for each of us and for each person in the world; and it reminds us, week by week, of the **universal** salvation of God – this is the salvation that **we** have embraced and that we enjoy, the same salvation that is big enough and wide enough for the **whole world** to embrace and to enjoy, if only the whole world will turn to God.

There are two prayers contained in the *Agnus Dei* – “Have mercy on us,” and “grant us your peace.”

In our hymn today by John Newton – “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear” – verse 4 gives us another lot of titles for Jesus – Jesus my **Shepherd, Brother, Friend, my Prophet, Priest, and King, my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End**, accept the praise I bring.” Three titles in the *Agnus Dei*; ten titles in verse 4. There have been various titles for Jesus and for God used in our Intercessions also.

I wonder what **our** titles would be for Jesus. It depends on our relationship with God and with Jesus ... and our awareness that that relationship varies on many factors day by day – our health, our busy-ness, the strains and stresses that we may be experiencing. Our titles for Jesus depend also on our growing maturity as Christians, having developed from the “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” of our childhood prayer. Some of our titles for Jesus would be metaphors and allusions. For us, Jesus may be our “tower of strength;” perhaps our “companion on today’s road of life.” It would be a good and useful thing to sit quietly with a cup of tea for 5 minutes and think about how we express our relationship with Jesus in the titles we use for him. We may not have as many as John Newton’s ten titles – but they would be **our** titles that reflect and describe **our** relationship with Jesus.

The *Agnus Dei* is a brief, but instructive and helpful anthem in our service week by week. It reminds us of the world-wide love and salvation of God. It gives us three titles for Jesus in relation to us and to the world. It also prompts us to consider the titles that we would give to Jesus in our life’s relationship with him.

As we come to the *Agnus Dei* this morning, let us say or sing it with great thoughtfulness and great devotion. “Jesus, Lamb of God ... Jesus, bearer of our sins ... Jesus, redeemer of the world.” And let us also consider the prayers that it contains ... “Have mercy on us ...grant us your peace.”