

## **See, the Lion; Then I Saw a Lamb: Part Two**

### **Essay 44 in the series “Encountering the Presence of God”**

In the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 5 John is told to see the Lion, but when he looks he sees a Lamb who in the new song of verse 9 is declared to be “worthy to take the scroll and to open its [seven] seals, because you were slain.” Worthy? Why? Because you entered deeply into the mystery of the human experience. Because you entered fully into being human. Because you pushed it to its limits, way beyond what any of the rest of us have ever known. You experienced and loved more deeply. You suffered more intensely. You felt greater loss and pain than we ever have. You are worthy? Why? You gave the last full measure. You identified fully with death and suffering and injustice and oppression. There is nothing we have ever experienced that you do not know. You have proved in every way imaginable, in every way possible, that you are love.

There is more to this story. There is more to this text. For instance, notice where the Lamb stands: in verse 6, “in the center of the throne,” where John had previously seen God back in chapter 4. The Lamb turns out to be God! But what I most want us to realize is that this is our story too. This is our experience too. We have been told to see the Lion. And he is a Lion, a God of incomprehensible power, a God of life and death. But when we look closer, this vision dissolves to reveal a Lamb, a God who offers himself as the sacrifice to save us from ourselves.

Drawing on my own experience, I was raised to see God as a Lion, overpowering, frightening, terrifying, the Bearer of Death, who insists on and gets his own way, devouring everything he sees, a God to run away from. As I began to read Scripture for myself, as I began to stop and look and see, I discovered God as a Lamb, the God who is love, trusting, loving, caring, infinitely compassionate and understanding, vulnerable, sacrificing even himself to win us back to love and trust, a God to run to, a God who turns out to be safe for us, in fact, our only safety, a God who turns out to be life for us, in fact, our only life.

And so we have here from the very last book in the Bible, from a Son of Thunder no less, a reminder that we have a God whom we are meant to encounter, to be with, to consciously, mindfully, be with. We are meant to not just know about this God; we are meant to know this God. And to encounter the presence of this God in a nighttime vision (as Jacob did at Bethel), in the glory of creation, in Scripture, in our deepest desires, in Magi from the East, in those who are hungry and thirsty and needing shelter, in our Christ-trained, loving intuition, in baptism and the other great rituals whereby we experience God, even in our weakness, in those “thorns in the flesh” that sooner or later come to us all, is to experience eternal life, the quality of the age to come, timeless life, life that circumstance and death cannot destroy. And it’s meant to be ours now.

It’s ours now, or it could be if we would just stop and look and see, if we would break into our preoccupations with ourselves and know God. It’s ours now, this life filled with expectancy, a sure, settled conviction that good will happen, this life surrounded by

grace, animated by trust, this transcendent life, increasingly conscious of God within us and all around us, as close as the air we breathe, no, even closer, inside us, this joyful life, often euphoric, inseparable from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

So this series of essays comes to an end for now. But this series never really ends because in this series we have come to life's central truth, that life, true life, eternal life comes down to encountering the presence of God. We were born to find our way back to our oneness with God. It all comes down to knowing God, to knowing that in God we live and move and have our being, that God moves in higher dimensions all around us and through us, to being still and aware of God's presence everywhere, to God's love pouring into us and joy and vitality pouring out of us, to feeling one with God, open to the divine flow, streams of living water flowing from within us.

Now I still forget this over and over. I have been to the mountaintop but back down in the valley I find myself distracted over and over by the countless ways we separate ourselves from God. I've mentioned good days and bad days before – how it all comes down to being connected to God, to putting God first in the morning, to remembering God often throughout the day, for short bursts remembering that every breath I take is God's. In the food I eat, the work I do, the people I meet, the struggles I face, I mindfully sense the presence of God. And that makes all the difference.

I still have a lot of work to do, old habits to break, new habits to acquire. I feel that at 63 I have only just begun. My hope and my mission now is that some of you at 23, or 33, or 43, or 53 might figure this all out a good deal earlier than me.

This is amazing truth. Don't miss it. Don't try to live another day without it. May your good days become more and more and your bad days fewer and fewer. In your preoccupations with other things, don't miss this. You may have a sense that other things are more important for you right now. They aren't. You may have a sense that you'll get to this later. Why? Why would you wait? Why would you put this off?

Choose life. Choose life now. And that comes down to encountering the presence of God, to seeking God with your whole heart, calling upon God to enter you body and soul, to fill you, to heal you in all your broken places, to feeling yourself almost transfigured, the force field of God surging through you, being washed over and over in the warmth and light of the love of God, the connecting Spirit of God all around you and deeply in you.

You will awaken to your oneness with God. You will stretch. You will grow. You will expand into all that is until you are filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is the word of the Lord.

– Dale Pauls