

Martin Luther King will certainly go down in history as one of the most influential people of the century, if not the whole millenium. ~~There's never been a world power quite like the United States, but our founding constitution permitted slavery, our first president himself owned slaves, the Emancipation Proclamation began the work of freedom, but our society remained deeply segregated and hopelessly prejudiced until the Rev. King stood forth and taught us all over again what freedom means. As a nation we thought we were living freedom, until someone said, "No, this isn't freedom over here, freedom would be that over there." The revolution was born.~~

The little episode in today's Gospel recounts that kind of revolutionary statement. The preacher this time is Rev. John the Baptist. His message is not so much about freedom as it is about God. For centuries the descendants of Abraham and Sarah had worshipped the one God under the instruction of the Torah. They thought they knew where to find God, but suddenly John says, "No, this isn't God over here; God would be that over there. I confess I didn't recognize him myself, but look," he says, pointing at Jesus, "there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." A new revolution was born.

Auguste Rodin, the sculptor who created the Thinker, also made a statue of John the Baptist showing John walking and pointing. I like the image because I think sooner or later John the Baptist walks into everyone's life and points. He says, "You thought God was here, didn't you? But he's really over there." This is never a pleasant experience. You're going along merrily with life and then suddenly John the Baptist appears: You lose a lot of money; someone you love dies; you get very sick; your child selects an unbelievable date; you turn forty; you're expecting a child whom you were not expecting; you get your report card; your taxes are audited; you total your car; your spouse ups and leaves. Any of these can make us say, "Wait a minute! I thought God was here, but now you say God's over there." It's uncomfortable because we don't know that God, and the one we need isn't there any more.

The comfort John the Baptist gives is in his title for Jesus, the lamb of God. It's a God who suffers, like the passover lamb, a God who's not in control, a God who will die. It's not the God Israel came to know; it's usually not the Messiah we want either. Jesus came not to take away the pains, but to suffer with them, and to redeem us in spite of them.

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*he helped people of the most painful region in history change their attitudes*