**Epiphany 2 Talk on 15th January by Pam Crawley at All Saints.**

The message of Epiphany is about how Jesus is revealed to the world as God’s son. Last week we saw his baptism by John the Baptist. This week we see how John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Chosen One, the Messiah, and in the coming weeks we see how Jesus will fulfil the prophecies of Isaiah.

We read in todays gospel that John the Baptist’s purpose or role didn’t finish with his baptism of Jesus. He continued to be influential as he pointed people away from himself and towards Jesus. The actual undertaking of the baptism confirmed for John that Jesus was the Chosen one. We read that the day after the baptism John introduces Jesus to those following as the ‘lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.’ He testified that at the baptism he saw the spirit descending from heaven onto Jesus, a sign that the Father approved of what was happening, and he remembered that he had been told that ‘he on whom you see the Spirit descend is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.’ He says ‘I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God.’

We are quite familiar with this title ‘the lamb of God’. However these words ‘lamb of God’ only appear in the bible once more …in Revelation. The phrase is not used in the other gospels. Despite this it has huge significance in our Christian church and liturgy, e.g we regularly sing the Agnus Dei in the Eucharist ‘Lamb of God you take away the sin of the world.’

More often Jesus is described just as a ‘lamb’. There are many references to the ‘Lamb’. And to do so was to build on the promises of the scriptures. Going right back to Genesis 22 v8 Abraham had said ‘God will provide a lamb for a burnt offering, my son. ’ In doing this and in staying Abraham’s hand, God had rescued Isaac from death. The word ‘Lamb’ might also possibly evoke the idea of the ‘passover lamb’ ( as in Exodus ) and celebrates the gaining of freedom from slavery and death. In Isaiah the ‘suffering servant’, whom the Christian church sees as an image of Jesus, is described as ‘a lamb to the slaughter’.

John the Baptist succeeded in his attempts to lead his friends to follow Jesus as not one but two of them became followers of Jesus that day. We read in todays gospel that first one friend, who was not named, might it have been John the writer of the gospel? and then Andrew, his friend, followed Jesus. And then Andrew went off to tell his brother Simon all about Jesus. He later became Simon Peter, with the nickname the Rock. So these early recruits became stalwarts! And Andrew was seen as the first missionary to bring someone to Jesus.

Those who seek, are met by the one they seek. St Augustine has said that we cannot begin to seek God unless he has already found us. When we seek God we do not go searching for one who has hidden away from us but to one who has always been there seeking us and who comes to meet us. Jesus asked these disciples ‘ what are you looking for? Was it knowledge? Security? Purpose? Peace? Or was it a relationship with God? Faith grows from having a relationship with God. These two friends John and Andrew wanted to stay with Jesus, they asked where he was staying and wanted to spend time with him.

Do we want to spend time with Jesus? When we go looking for him do we find him waiting for us? Do we try to point others to Jesus like John the Baptist did? Jesus wanted to gain as many followers as he could. John the Baptist wanted everyone to become Jesus’ friends. We can all influence the lives of others, we can all point others in his way.

It is sometimes said that the Church is suffering from a crisis these days here in the west, a shortage of priests and ministers, reduced numbers in the congregations. And a shortage of money to support the church. But this gospel reading today shows it was the ordinary people Jesus wanted to follow him, you and me to spread the message to our friends and families, not just the hierarchy of church leaders, although of course we need their guidance and encouragement. But Leaders alone will not secure the future of the church. We each need to strengthen our relationship with God to give us the confidence we need to be able to reach out to influence others.

The church grew from those 2 to then 12 disciples at first, and then to a huge number. We may worry currently that numbers are reducing, and yes that may seem to be so at the moment for a variety of reasons. However this Christmas Dave and I attended the Christingle service. I have only attended this once in 2010 when the snow and ice was particularly bad that year. So I was not sure what to expect. It was a joyous service, and the church was FULL, yes FULL of mostly children and their families. A joy to behold! The church is NOT Dying, it is very much alive. It might manifest itself in different ways, and the world is definitely a different world these days, but if only half of those present return in the future there will be a church! We may need to go to meet them, as Jesus did in those early days, to meet them where they are, respond to what they are seeking. We have a new family service starting in the next few weeks. let us pray for its success, that we may reach out to those seeking God, in whatever way they do.

Let us finish with a prayer: Lord God, to live without you is to walk in darkness; to live in awareness of you is to live in the light. Help us to know and reveal your love and light through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.