

- I hate shopping! Unless, that is, it involves long hours looking at eye candy in a bike shop or comparing the various merits of a new gadget in a camping shop.
- We all have our enthusiasms. And it is very clear that Paul's major enthusiasm was talking about Jesus.
- His first letter to the Corinthians is full of it. We heard just the first nine verses today. You get the feeling the whole thing was written at breakneck speed so keen is he to extol the virtues of being a Christian. Just listen to one small section from the middle, verse 4, and feel the breathless urgency and excitement with which he writes. *'I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,*
- He knew to be true, what we had discovered about Jesus last week from his baptism reading. That Jesus ~~was~~ the Son of God. That the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus at this baptism and therefore fills us at our baptism, too.
- But more on St Paul later. Meanwhile return to the somewhat easier Gospel reading, where we are still at the River Jordan with Jesus and John the Baptist but this time looking at it from St John the Evangelist's perspective rather than St Matthew's.
- Right at the beginning of our small section of this beautifully crafted prologue we get a nickname for Jesus. *'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*
  - I don't know what your mental picture of lambs is, but for me, they are usually gambolling about in fields, nibbling fresh spring grass. For more grounded Jews however, *'the Lamb of God'* would only have implies one thing. Sacrifice in the temple. The lamb would be unblemished, perfect. The sacrifice would atone for the sins of the person offering it as the best lamb they could find, to God.
- *'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'* Jesus, the Son of God is the best sinless offering God, his Father can give us.
  - His death John reports as happening on Good Friday, the afternoon of Passover, that great feast when God saved his chosen people from slavery in Egypt and brought them to freedom in the promised land
  - The great feast of Passover when Jews had just finished a special meal, unleavened bread, wine and lamb, the blood of which had saved them from the angel of death in the tenth plague on Egypt, as they painted their doorposts to signify they were God's chosen people.
  - The great feast when unblemished Passover lambs were slaughtered by the high priest each year as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the Jews. An offering to show it was the best gift they could offer.
- And here is Jesus, the Lamb of God, taking away not just the sins of the Jews but the sins of the whole world. The best gift God could offer. A human being, the Son of God, perfect and unblemished and without sin. A loving gift, more loving than anything else could be.
  - There is nothing hard-hearted or merely functional here.
  - Dying for a complete sacrifice. There is nothing half-hearted or symbolic here.
  - Rising on Easter Day to show that forgiveness has power even over death.
- So when you sing Lamb of God, in a few minutes time, remember that.
- This Jesus is the one who invites us to *'Come and see.'* That's what he said to the two disciples. *'The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.'*
- *'One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.'* But who was the other? One of the popular possibilities and quite possibly the most likely, is that is it John, the writer of the Gospel, at that time a young man. But the fact that this unnamed disciple crops up time and again throughout the Gospel gives him or her a bit of an everyman aspect to his personality. He could be you. He could be me!
- Jesus calls you. And invites you to come and see! And you are here. You have come!
- So in this season of Epiphany we have discovered more about that great Epiphany question, 'Who is Jesus?'
  - Jesus, the Son of God, come to share the whole of life with us, is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And he invites us to *'Come and see.'*

- And as I said, that's what we have done. So what difference does it make?
- And for this we have to go back to Saint Paul, who in 9 short verses, gives us 6 different ways
  - Because remember, St Paul was very definitely invited by Jesus to follow him. In a very dramatic way. A way which would brook no opposition. On the Road to Damascus. He knows what he is talking about.
- First, we are sanctified. *'To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus'*.
  - To be sanctified, means to be set apart, to be made holy, different, distinct and special. We're sanctified, set apart, for a special purpose, and we're expected to co-operate with that. Whatever it is that God has set you apart for, chosen you for, sanctified you for, created you for, we are invited to discover with the help of the Holy Spirit received at baptism. Paul spends the rest of the longish letter discussing what this means to the frankly wayward Corinthians, but I bring you back to the question coming out of last Sunday's readings, 'What has God chosen you for? What are you created for?'
- Second, we are not alone. Whenever anyone tells you that you do not need to go to Church to be a Christian, tell them they are missing the point. If you want your faith to make any difference to your life then it is highly likely you will need to go rather a lot.
  - Paul did not write many letters to individuals. He wrote the vast majority to communities. Communities of Christians. Churches in the towns and cities around the Mediterranean where he lived.
  - These small Churches, usually full of very different personalities and nationalities, were bound together by one thing, *'those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'*. We are part of something so much bigger than ourselves. And that brings huge security. Especially when we consider who the head of the Church is, Jesus Christ, the one whose name unites us.
- Third, there is a glue which sticks us to Jesus, *'the grace of God that has been given you'*. Do you find grace is one of those words you read all the time in the bible and never quite stop to think about what it means.
  - Perhaps a good definition is the undeserved love which God showers upon us. We don't deserve it but he does it anyway. If we think we do deserve it, we can't usually see it because we think it is our right.
- If we admit that we are not at all perfect, then it is much easier to see God at work in our world today. Through your wellbeing. Through your ability to say thankyou first. Through the sudden realisation that God is present in your life all along, perhaps especially when you thought you were most alone.
  - And most of all of course, in the decisive way he has acted through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Fourth, *'in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind'*. This then is one of the major benefits of a communal faith. Of being part of the Church, the community of people who *'call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'*. We encourage one another. We build one another up. We discuss together and learn together. All though the power of that same Spirit of Jesus received through baptism.
- And this means that, fifth, that we are *'not lacking in any spiritual gift'*. And spiritual gifts are many and various. St Paul lists some of them later on in this letter. It might be encouraging with words of wisdom, it might be praying from healing, it might be a deep and abiding faith, it might be a hundred other things. What is your gift?
- And sixth, is the underlying excitement of talking about Jesus. Paul does not state this explicitly but lives it throughout the whole of his letter as we mentioned at the beginning.
- The great thing about St Paul's letter to the Corinthians is that he is writing to a troubled Church. You only have to read a little bit into the letter to discover there were factions in the Church, arguments were common and people had very human failings like greed and power cravings which of course had an effect on their Christian lives.
- So when you think that Paul is writing to perfect super-Christians and this letter can't possibly apply to you, think again. You are no different from any other Christian, and yes, all this is yours too.
- You and I are far from perfect, but Jesus still loves us and calls us to follow.
- There are huge benefits to living a Christian faith with other Christians around you.
  - So when Jesus called you to come and see, what did you discover? Amen!