It is so nice to be back at All Saints’ this week. I have really missed being here with you. It’s been a busy few weeks and I am so happy to have this Sunday mark for me a return to a somewhat normal routine. This past month has been far from normal! Lot’s of goings on and changes. General Ordination Exams are over! I went to Baltimore for the ordination of a dear seminary friend. We said goodbye to the Obama’s as our First Family and witnessed the Inauguration of President Trump. There is undoubtedly a lot going on for all of us.

There’s much happening in our scripture reading today as well. John the Baptist has been arrested. Jesus has made his way to Galilee and this is the place and the time that marks the beginning of his public ministry. He begins preaching the message of the Kingdom which we will hear more and more of in the weeks to come. And Jesus begins to call others to walk with him on the journey.

I really love Matthew’s account of the calling of those first men to be disciples and companions and friends to Jesus in his ministry. I love that they are “just folks”. These aren’t people of means. They aren’t worldly or particularly skilled at what might be needed in developing and getting the word out to people of a Kingdom being manifested in the midst of them. No training or certificates or degrees in marketing or communications to be found.

So what is it that Jesus sees in them? And what is it that they hear in his call to them? If you remember, there are plenty of people in the Christian scriptures that offer to follow Jesus, only to fall back when they find out what is required of them. But these Galilean fisherman don’t even ask any questions. The fishermen don’t even want to know the basics that most of us would ask– *who, what, when where and why*? If you’ll pardon the pun – it all sounds a bit fishy to me. Do you even think they knew what “fish for people” meant?

And I am astonished by the way it plays out. But there it is…”Simon Peter and Andrew…Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” And, immediately, they left their nets and followed him! “You there…John and James….leave your father and come with me”. And immediately, they left their boat and Zebedee their father, and they followed him. See ya, dad!

Just imagine that….Jesus called and they went. They left their work and their lives behind them. It’s a bit intimidating, don’t you think, to be “called by God” in that “immediate” way.

I know for me, there was nothing terribly immediate about the path my own journey has taken. It was more like God was present and became revealed for me in the everyday-ness of living. A gradual sense of *being and doing* what I was “supposed to be being and doing” developed over time within my vocation as a nurse and healthcare consultant, well before I felt a broadening toward ordained pastoral ministry. It felt kind of like that story where you can boil a frog gradually by starting with nice warm comfy water and turn up the heat little by little. Supposedly the frog doesn't notice she’s being cooked until it’s time for toad soup.

One of my very favorite Episcopalians is Verna Dozier. Verna was an influential teacher, lay bible study leader and theologian who lived in Washington DC. I am energized and inspired by her writings and I appreciate how she is not shy about challenging clergy and lay alike when it comes to “*following Jesus and not merely worshipping him*.” In her book, *The Authority of the Laity*, she articulates well the opportunity of answering God’s call in our everyday lives:

*“If I believe that there is a loving God, who has created me and wants me to be part of a people who will carry the good news of the love of that God to the world, what difference does that make when I go to my office at 9 o'clock Monday morning? What difference does it make in my office that I believe there is a loving God, that God loves me, and that God loves all human beings exactly as that God loves me? What different kinds of decisions do I make? What am I called to do in that office?”*

*What difference does it make?* It’s such a simple question, and it pulls us up short! *What difference does it make?* Asking it pulls God right into the center of the everyday of our living and uncovers for us the *Grace filled* nature of our relationships with each other. It places before us the real truth of who we are *first and foremost called to be*; the beloved children of God. If that awareness is first in our hearts and minds, then the rest begins to fall into place.

I was feeling like that would have been a good question for Paul to ask of the Corinthian community. *What difference does it make?* The different alliances and factions and personalities are pulling the entire community off balance and away from its center in Christ. He pleads with them to keep themselves in the same mind and purpose. I can’t help but compare our own divisions in the here and now with those fledgling Christians. I believe Paul is not naïve in believing that there would not be disagreements or differences in social standing, income, status and roles in the community. All of those challenges are certainly present. And all of those things are potentially divisive in their own rights.

It is the same with us, even in the best of times. Most often we do not speak with the same voice, we do not hold the same views, even if we might have relatively the same hopes and dreams for our families and communities. Even within the same denomination or political leaning, we often have multiple views and positions. And In the Episcopal Church, we don’t shy away from a good debate. But, we do have the same center in Christ, in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

We have heard over and over in the past weeks from so many corners, and perhaps even in our very own voices that “everything will change” after this event happens or that event takes place. Undoubtedly, things will be changing; that is a fact of each day of our lives. And today we are reminded in Paul’s words to the church in Corinth that the message of the cross *is what makes the difference*.

No matter what takes place today or tomorrow there is *nothing, nothing* about our call from God that has changed; Love God with all our hearts, and love others as ourselves. We have received our commissioning ,which is manifested in the light that breaks through our brokenness and gives us hope this day. We will hear it echoed today in our post communion prayer – *“continue in that holy fellowship and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.”* (Rite I) *“send us out into the world in peace and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart”*. (Rite II)

There’s a beautiful song called *The Summons* that comes from Scotland’s remote island Iona community. The lyric is beautiful and simple and is inspired by our reading in Matthew today.

*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?*

*Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?*

*Will you let my love be shown?*

*Will you let my name be known?*

*Will you let my life be grown, in you and you in me?*