

This week we read about the calling of the first disciples from the point of view of Matthew. Matthew writes his Gospel to an audience of Jewish people who are forming one of the first Christian communities in Syria. The most important message for Matthew's community is that Jesus calls disciples to build up the Church, to seek others to be part of that church – to preach the Gospel – to make a community. The Great Commission -- those last two verses in Matthew's Gospel that tell disciples to go into all the world to teach and preach the Gospel and baptize others into the faith -- begin here and are further explained throughout Matthew's Gospel, climaxing at the end with that Commission. Matthew isn't just telling this story so that his early Christian community would know that those 12 big "D" disciples were called to build up the church. Matthew is telling the story this way so that his ancient community and our modern community – little "d" disciples—will know that we are called to build up the church, living in community and preaching the Gospel.

Peter, Andrew, James and John, who Jesus made fishers of people, weren't highly educated people with theological degrees. They weren't super teachers or great orators. They were regular people – fishermen. The other big D disciples were regular folk, too, tax collectors and various tradesmen. Although certainly hearing the Word preached by folks with theological degrees hopefully inspires and educates, ultimately that's not what builds up the church.

John Wesley said Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell, and set up the kingdom of heaven upon earth.

It's the preaching and teaching done by each of us – regular folks – that began setting up the kingdom of heaven on earth in the early Christian community in Syria and it's the preaching and teaching of regular folks that will accomplish it here.

How do we preach and teach the word of God? We do that by using the

gifts we are given. Some of us have been given the gift of being great speakers or super teachers. Some of us have been given the gift of knowledge or theological education. God expects us to use those gifts, if we've been blessed with them. But most of us have been given other gifts, those of compassion, of administration, of being strong intercessors, of being peacemakers, of being musicians. All gifts are given for building up the church. All gifts are used to teach others about Jesus, to bring them to be baptized, to bring others into our community.

Another way we preach and teach the word of God is through our actions –how do we live out our faith to make a difference in our secular community and do we live in love with one another in our Christian community. The church is to be a light to the darkness of the secular world. The Isaiah passage tells us:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.

We discern as a local Christian community – St Johns or St Andrews – exactly how we should shine that light. What ministries are we called to continue? Which new ones are we called to start? To whom are we called to reach out to first? How do we best use the resources God has given us to build up the church, here, in this community to be that light? Jesus calls us as a Christian community to wrestle with these questions, to discern the answers within our Christian community, providing opportunities for all members – long time members or new ones – to discuss what they feel the Holy Spirit calls us to.

Finally, we teach and preach the Gospel through how we live with each other. Unfortunately, the Episcopal church and Anglican communion as a whole haven't always done a great job of living well together. Bickering and taking sides actually had its origins in the early church, too, as we see from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. As long as you have two Christians in a room, you'll have at least three opinions. Differences of opinion are good, because they challenge us to pray about and become firm in our own

beliefs. The problem lies if folks start taking sides against each other, forming divisions. This can happen over major theological issues, such as the blessing of same sex unions, or it can happen over everyday slights -- one person's feelings get hurt and other people jump into the fray, making a small disagreement into a major split. Divisions within our Christian community create challenges for us reaching out to the secular world because it keeps us focused inward and because it doesn't demonstrate the love of Christ we preach. Fortunately, most people come to know Jesus because of the ministry of their local parish church and through the people they are see every day. Our Christian unity --- our One Spirit -- can build up the church, despite what happens at Lambeth or in the global communion.

Jesus calls us to be disciples, to fish for people, to build up the church. Because Jesus has called us, the Holy Spirit equips us for that task. And in that work, Jesus is with us always.

Amen