This is an exciting – and tender – time in the life of our cathedral and the life of our diocese. For starters, are engaged in the calling of a new bishop. This is the bishop’s official church where the bishop’s ceremonial seat, or “cathedra,” as it is called in Latin, is located behind me. We call ourselves a “cathedral” because this chair is here. God willing, our diocesan clergy and delegates will elect our new bishop next Saturday.

We will also soon be engaged in the calling of a new cathedral dean, the senior priest and pastor of this cathedral congregation. It is the singular honor and joy of my life to serve for a time in the dean’s seat. I love this cathedral, I love all of you. Thank you so much for having me with you for whatever time we are given to be together. I feel very called to be with you in this time of transition.

The biblical lessons we hear this morning feel heaven-sent, for all of these passages are about calling. But before we get to bishops and deans, I want to start with the calling of each of us.

All of us have a calling in life. Sometimes it takes a lifetime to find it. Have you found yours? Has your calling changed through the years? Do you remember your calling?

Calling is more than a job. Calling is more than a vocation. Your calling is your God-given passion that brings life and love into the world, and fills you with life and love. Your calling brings out the best in you, especially when you face difficult challenges.

The tools and venues of your calling might change, your understanding of your calling might grow and evolve, and you might have more than one way to live out your calling.

But, the older I get, the more I am convinced God calls to us to do something with this one amazing life each of us is given.

I have long understood my calling to be a bearer of the light of truth into darkness. How I have lived that out has changed over time, and discovering how to fulfill my calling has sometimes been a struggle. I am far from perfect at this.

I was a journalist for many years. Newspapers were my venues, and written words my tools. I am now a priest, and words are still my tools, and the church is my venue. Sacraments are now part of my tool box.
This morning we hear of how the prophet Jeremiah struggles intensely with his calling. The Lord God calls Jeremiah to speak truth to the powerful, and the Lord God tells Jeremiah something he doesn’t want to hear – he was born for this task:

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,” the Lord tells Jeremiah, “and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

But Jeremiah protests, “I am only a boy!”

Then God tells him his age does not matter: “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.”

As Jeremiah soon discovers, all of us have a calling, no matter our age, or our social status.

The letters of the apostle Paul are filled with reflections about his struggle with discerning his call – his purpose in life.

“We know only in part,” Paul writes.

So how do we know our calling?

Paul declares the ultimate test of any calling is love.

“If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Paul continues with this:

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.”

Jesus, in today’s gospel lesson, reminds us we are not promised an easy path, and risk may come with our calling.

In the church, we have grown accustomed – too accustomed – to thinking of our callings as a hierarchy – with bishops, priests, deacons and lay people, in that order.

Our organizational structure emphasizes this, and bishops are sometimes seen as district administrators, or monarchs of the realm, and cathedral deans and parish rectors as franchise representatives, or lords of the manor.

This is no real surprise. The Episcopal Church is an outgrowth of the Church of England, and our organizational structure looks a lot like the British class structure.

But something else has happened in our American Episcopal Church in the last 40 years, and I trace it to the adoption of the not-so-new prayer book in 1979.
Because of this book, we have re-discovered the centrality of baptism to our life. Baptism is our charter to live out our callings in life, and that has exploded our ideas of a strict hierarchy.

When I was growing up, we called baptism “christening,” and it felt like we were launching little baby ships, never to be seen again until the baby ships started Sunday School.

But baptism is a proclamation that the Holy Spirit is alive in each of us, and nudging us through our life into our calling, whether we are very young or very old.

With that in mind, here is how I would like us to think of our structure: Rather than seeing the bishop as the person at the top of the pyramid, sitting far away in this seat, think of the bishop as standing here, at the baptismal font – which is why I asked that the font be placed in front of the Altar today even though we don’t have baptisms.

And then think of the bishop as having a unique calling at the center of a web of baptism, extending outward from this font in all directions, connecting us through lay people, deacons, and priests – each of us with our unique calling.

Our baptismal web extends endlessly through every person, everywhere. And think of those who are gone from this life as still part of this baptismal web. And think of who are not yet born, or not yet baptized, who will be invited into this sacred baptismal web.

Even the name our branch of Christianity evokes this baptismal web with bishops standing at the font.

Our church is called Episcopal because we are formed around bishops – the word *episcopé* is Greek for bishop.

The name signifies that bishops have a unique calling to connect us spiritually across geographic and chronological boundaries in the Body of Christ.

The next bishop will take this vow as a bishop: “Will you guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church?”

This is a weighty vow. The bishop is not figurehead, nor is the bishop to be an autocrat. This makes the Episcopal church different from some other branches of Christianity.

The basic unit of our church is the diocese, not the local congregation. We are connected through our diocesan bishop, Barry Beisner, to each of the 68 congregations of the Diocese of Northern California.

The bishop also connects us to an even wider baptismal web: the other 110 dioceses of The Episcopal Church. Each bishop is a bishop of the whole church, not just a single geographical region.
At the center of this larger baptismal web is one bishop: The Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, elected by other bishops in 2015 to lead this church for nine years. He is the first African American so elected as presiding bishop in our more than 200-year history.

And then we are part of an even bigger baptismal web – the Anglican Communion – with 35 other national provinces, and the Archbishop of Canterbury standing at the center of this baptismal web connecting us.

I bring us back to our bishop election next Saturday. We have five very gifted candidates.

Our delegates and clergy will gather at Faith Episcopal Church in Cameron Park to vote. Please keep all of those who will choose a bishop, and all our candidates, in your prayers.

I expect that whomever we elect will challenge us deeply. We will be asked to take risks for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to open our doors and bring new people into our baptismal web.

And we will be challenged to go beyond these doors to heal and shake up the world. The vows of our baptism will take us there.

In a few moments, we will renew our own baptismal vows, and I would invite each of us to consider how these vows are lived out in our individual and unique callings.

Then, I would invite all of us to re-enter, with thanks, the vows of our baptism when we come to this Holy Table today to share in our Holy Eucharist – a word that means “thanksgiving.”

We say in this Cathedral that all are welcome to share in this Holy Communion – no one is excluded – and this is true. But if you have never been baptized, I would invite you to consider baptism so that you might fully engage in this sacred baptismal web.

Baptism should not be seen merely as a ticket to the Holy Eucharist but as an invitation to live fully into the life God would have us live, for it is through our baptism that our Holy Eucharist has its fullest expression. Living into baptism includes being fully a part of this faith community, shaped by the Holy Eucharist, Sunday after Sunday.

Finally, we come to the proclamation we hear today from Jesus: “Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

How will we fulfill Scripture? How will we make these words real in our own lives? How will we live out our calling as members of the Body of Christ in this time and place?

This is for all of us to discover together as God grants us the wisdom and grace to do so. AMEN.