As we pick up the story today, we join Jesus in the fishing village of Capernaum, near the Sea of Galilee, which is really a large lake.

Most of the biblical stories of Jesus have him wandering the countryside, teaching, healing, praying and eventually confronting the religious and political authorities of his day in Jerusalem.

But for much of his short life, he lived in the countryside, including in this fishing village, probably as a stone worker, as his father once was.

The Greek word *tekton* in the New Testament is usually translated in English as “carpenter,” but it has a broader meaning defined as someone who works with wood or stone.

I can tell you, there are no trees to build houses in Capernaum. More than likely, Jesus was a stone worker.

Capernaum is still there. If you go to Capernaum you will see the remains of the small stone houses built tightly together, one of which must have been where Jesus lived.

I was there several years ago, and it is a peaceful place, far from the conflicts and chaos afflicting the Holy Land, then and now. Capernaum and the nearby shore still feel serene.

Jesus doubtless knew everyone in this village, including the fishermen who went out in boats at dawn to cast their nets into the lake.

Fishing was hard work; it took muscle and a strong back to haul in the nets, day after day, and to row the heavy boats back and forth from shore.

At night the fishermen would gather, say prayers, tell stories, share a meal with each other before finding shelter for the night in these sturdy stone houses.

It might be that Jesus built these houses.

Building houses was hard work. If you go on-line, you can see walls of these houses still standing after 2,000 years. The houses are built with boulders, hoisted into place by human hands. I believe Jesus lifted many of these stones, and he had the muscles to prove it.

In the gospel story from Matthew today, we hear of Jesus walking to the nearby beach where he summons the brothers Andrew and Simon.

It’s time, he tells them.

Time to follow. Time to gather people for the work of the Kingdom of God. Time to leave the safety and serenity of our village and take on the world.
In the story, the brothers Simon and Andrew leave their boats and “immediately” follow Jesus into history. Two more fishermen follow, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. So begins the gathering of the disciples. Jesus gives Simon the name “Peter,” or in Aramaic, “Cephas.” You just heard the name used by Saint Paul in his letter today. The name Cephas means “rock” or “stone.” Jesus, the stone builder, calls Peter “The Rock,” and will soon declare that upon “Peter the Rock” the church will be built. The combined name “Simon Peter” — Simon the Rock — is used 19 times in the New Testament, and that is important for a reason: It will be upon Simon the Rock that all the other followers will find strength in their darkest, bleakest moments when Jesus is gone. All this will unfold for us in the gospel lessons in the weeks ahead. I don’t think the fishermen at Capernaum are surprised at being summoned by Jesus. They have been waiting for this and they are ready. They probably spent many evenings talking with Jesus over meals, and walking by the beach, trying to understand life, and God, and the meaning of existence and their role in all this. They dream together of what life could be, not just as they see it now, but how God dreams it could be. They pray to know how God is shaping and leading them. There is something more: these fishermen see and feel a spark in this stone worker, Jesus, that they cannot quite explain. This spark they feel within Jesus does not let them go, and it grows and grows until they recognize something in him wholly beyond this world that is, well, holy. So, when Jesus comes to the beach and says it’s time, they drop their nets and go. They leave their little fishing village and their stone houses, and nothing will ever be the same again for them — or for us. There is no going back for Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, or James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They are all in. They will fish for people, and they will gather more disciples, and the circle will widen and widen. More lives – many more lives throughout the ages – will change because these first four disciples drop their nets and said “yes” to this call to discipleship. The road ahead takes them many places. They have amazing moments seeing God’s dream coming alive, one person, one prayer, one day at a time. But I think these disciples also struggle hard to find their place in God’s dream. They argue about their mission in life. We know they argue this because the New Testament is full of stories of their arguing about everything.
We hear today in the gospel where their arguments lead — straight to the heart of the prophet Isaiah:

“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.”

This is their mission: Bring light into the places of deep darkness. Everything they are to do is about bringing light to where it is needed most.

The stoneworker, Jesus, shapes them into servants of a hurting and wounded world. Ultimately, he shows them life beyond the horizon of this mortal life.

The disciples will struggle, their faith will falter, they won’t always “get it” when Jesus tries to tell them something.

Simon Peter, Simon the Rock, will deny Jesus three times after he is arrested. But upon Peter, flaws and all, so much will rest.

We would not be here without him.

This story continues with us.

We have the same mission as these early disciples, bringing light into darkness The stoneworker, Jesus, still shapes us, and show us the way.

How will we know we are on the right track?

It’s really not complicated: It’s about love.

Our presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Michael Curry, put it this way. If what we do is about compassion and grace, generosity and justice, it is about God.

And Bishop Curry adds this: “If it’s not about love, it’s not about God.”

This is why we serve a hot meal to the unsheltered on Wednesday evenings and participate in Family Promise to help homeless families get back on their feet.

This is why our dedicated band of lay Stephen Ministers walk as companions with people during rough moments in their lives.

This is why we are in partnership with other faith communities through Sacramento ACT to grapple with the underlying causes of poverty, homelessness and injustice in our community.

This is why a small dedicated group of Cathedral volunteers called TREE work to raise our awareness, and bring us to action, in the single most challenging issue of our time, the degradation of this good earth, our island home.

We don’t have to do everything, but all of us can do something, and do it very well.

It might be helping out at coffee hour or in a simple act of kindness to a stranger.

All of it adds up.

This is why we are summoned by Jesus to bring new people here. We have so much to offer if only we offer it.
There are many people living right around us, close to us – people we know – who are struggling in the shadows of life or searching for something larger than themselves.

Invite them here.

The stoneworker, Jesus, still summons to build God’s kingdom, one stone, one person, one day, one moment at a time.

My friends, may we be open how Jesus, the stone worker, is shaping us, and open to this holy journey we share, and may many blessings fill each of us and all who we serve. AMEN