

### First Reading – Isaiah 40:21-31

<sup>21</sup> **Have you not known? Have you not heard?**

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

<sup>22</sup> **It is the LORD who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;**

who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;

<sup>23</sup> who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.

<sup>24</sup> Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
when he blows upon them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

<sup>25</sup> **To whom then will you compare me,  
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.**

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these?

He who brings out their host and numbers them,  
calling them all by name;

because he is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.

<sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

<sup>28</sup> **Have you not known? Have you not heard?**

**The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.**

The LORD does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.

<sup>29</sup> The LORD gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;

<sup>31</sup> but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.

### Second Reading – Mark 1:29-39

<sup>29</sup> **As soon** as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her **at once**.

<sup>31</sup> Jesus came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup> **That evening**, at sunset, they brought to Jesus all who were sick or possessed with demons.

<sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus cured many who were sick with various

diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup> **In the morning**, while it was still very dark, **Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.** <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” <sup>38</sup> Jesus answered, “**Let us go** on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” <sup>39</sup> And **Jesus went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.**

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is on the move. Jesus has a mission that compels and propels him, for Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news, “The kingdom of God has come near.” Jesus called his first four disciples from the shores of the Sea of Galilee and with these four Jesus immediately went to Capernaum. Jesus teaches in the Capernaum synagogue and casts out an unclean spirit from a man. Jesus’ ministry of healing gains notoriety quickly.

As soon as they leave the synagogue, they head to Simon and Andrew’s home. When I was in Capernaum, the walk from the synagogue to Peter’s house wasn’t much further than the walk from the front of our sanctuary our outside sanctuary patio. Of course, a chapel is now built over the believed remains of Simon Peter’s home. Tourists and spiritual pilgrims lean over rails to view the remains of what once was the house where Jesus might have taken Simon’s mother-in-law by the hand and lifted her up, healing her service.

A demon cast out, a fever vanquished, and then at sundown Simon, Peter, James and John brought to Jesus those who were in need of healing. Jesus cured diseases and cast out demons. I can only imagine that when Jesus lay down to rest, he was exhausted. Even so, before dawn Jesus slipped out of Simon’s house and went out to a deserted place to pray. Knowing the proximity of Simon’s house to the shoreline, if I were Jesus I would have headed away from the small town but stayed close to the shoreline. Water is healing for me, like when I head for a place of prayer at Zephyr Point. I move away from the conference crowds and I find a deserted place along the shoreline of Lake Tahoe to pray.

We don’t know exactly where Jesus went, but the place possibly had been occupied during the day but was now deserted in the predawn hours. Jesus got up to pray, to be connected to the source of his strength, for the LORD does not faint or grow weary. The LORD strengthens and gives power to those who wait upon the LORD. Jesus got up to be refueled and equipped for his mission.

Notice that his disciples hunted him down and immediately let him know, “Everyone is searching for you.” As Mark said a few verses earlier, “Jesus’ fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.” Yet, Jesus didn’t take up residency in Capernaum. Jesus did not create a wellness center and set up shop. Jesus didn’t get comfortable with his success or notoriety. Jesus was singularly focused. Jesus knew that he was called to proclaim the good news and there was no discrepancy between his proclamations and his actions. Jesus walked his talk, saying to his four disciples, “Let’s go,” for there is more to be done.

Yet, we, disciples of Christ today like to set up shop and stay put. A small group of itinerate disciples get together and eventually put down roots, which often becomes a building and in time an even bigger building. I remember the first time I visited Redlands and drove around downtown – the Methodists, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, the Catholics, the Episcopalians, and the Presbyterians all put down roots. We are all so close in proximity to each other. Yet, we all are proclaimers, like Jesus, of the good news, for we, too know, that the kingdom of God has come new. Yet, I imagine that all of us struggle with Jesus’ words, “Let’s go.” We like the comfort of our home turf, for we have all built buildings. We like the programs offered within our structures. We like the way we do things, each with different nuances, hence why we have so many different types of churches here in Redlands and around the globe. We like to minister among ourselves and to those who come to us. Yet, Jesus didn’t say to the four, “Let’s stay put and get comfortable.” Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go.”

So, what does this mean for us today? Even though we have all built buildings, I believe Jesus' words to his first four disciples means we can't just stay safely nestled within our buildings. As disciples, we must go into our communities and proclaim the gospel in word and in deed, hence why I asked you last November during our Stewardship Drive to share your plans for serving in the community this year, as God has enabled you.

If you subscribe to the Redlands Daily Facts, you might have seen that your pastor participated in the point-in-time count on January 25<sup>th</sup>. The team I was with encountered 11 people who were homeless that morning and thanks to some phone numbers provided by a reporter with our team, I was able to initiate a process that connected a mother and three children living out of a van to shelter. I dared to go and I dared to call people I didn't know, asking for assistance for this family. Why would I get up at 5 a.m. on a Thursday to do this? Because Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's go," and I am physically able to do so.

When I filled out my commitment form last November, I also made a commitment to get involved hands-on somewhere in the community. Well, this past Wednesday I volunteered for the first time at Kingsbury Elementary School in a kindergarten class. I worked with students who need some extra help with learning to read at grade level. I gave just an hour and half of my time and what a joy it is! Each student is a beloved child of God. Each student is precious and unique. Now I didn't "preach the gospel with words," but I enacted the gospel, for Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me."

I don't know where Jesus is calling you to go, given your gifts, your talents, your abilities, your time, or your physical abilities. But I do know that most of us can get up and go in some fashion and proclaim the gospel in word and deed in new ways that will stretch and grow us.

After church a group of us are gathering to form church wide prayer groups, diverse groups of members that will be invited to pray for one another on a consistent basis. All the details have not been worked out, but I hear Jesus' words, "Let's go," in this new venture. It would be easier to be put into groups with those you already know. It would be easier to be grouped with those who are similar in age or profession or other like categories, but the design of these groups will challenge us to move beyond what is known. The design will help us enact Jesus words, "Let's go." Let's go and meet others, sharing the good news with those we may not yet know.

Let me share with you a simple way to get to know others among us that you don't yet know here in church. Ask, "What do you do when you are not at church?" This frees the individual to tell you something about themselves other than they go to the same church as you do. I learned quite a bit about two of our new officers, Elder Albert Ompi and Deacon Patti Robertson, yesterday by asking this question. When you meet others in the community, you can ask a similar question by substituting another word for church: What do you do when you are not at work? What do you do when you are not at the Redlands Bowl for a concert? What do you do when you are not at standing in line at the grocery store? What do you do when you are not walking your dog? You get the idea. Strike up conversations with others, as you never know where God might lead them.

Now I know this is easier for extroverts than introverts, but given my first year in Redlands I have found people here to be pretty friendly and welcoming of a conversation. Yesterday, a woman walking her dog by my home struck up a conversation with me and all I said to her was, "You have a well-trained dog," as her dog wasn't pulling on the leash."

**Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.** We worship an amazing God, yet if there is to be no discrepancy between our claimed faith and our actions, no discrepancy between our talk and walk, then I believe "Let's go," needs to move us out of our comfort zone into places where Jesus can work through us. We have to be willing to try new things, even if we fail. We have to be willing to reach out beyond what we know, even if it scares us. We have to be willing to share the love of God in new ways with those we do not yet know.

Listen to what a church of just 350 people recently did: They started 4 new worshipping communities! They started **The Fellowship** geared toward youth and young adults, because Pastor John Smith sees so many young people who feel like church is not for them because it doesn't talk about issues they are facing. "We have homeless kids, abused kids and those who face violence," says Smith. "Sometimes it's not time for a sermon. It's just being there, walking with them, with their hurts and pains."

They started **Small Town Society** where advocates and artists can share their art and connect on a deeper level. As leader Paul Keim says most people who hang out at **Small Town**, "want to be part of something spiritual, but even those who consider themselves atheists say, 'I feel like I'm part of something bigger when I'm here.'"

They started **Safe House** for community organizers and activist workers who work to hold each other accountable. "The truth is a lot of churches aren't safe places for people who do movement work," says **Safe House** Leader and chaplain Debra Avery. At **Safe House**, Avery encourages those in the community to "engage in scripture," and "to think about what it means to their work, as they confess their grief and sins, together."

They started **Come Be. Go Do.** It is a community for millennials led by Alex Largusa. He shares the gospel in non-institutional ways helping millennials learn how to do life together in response to the gospel.

This church could have easily said, "No," when they heard Jesus' imperative, "Let's go." I could have easily said, "No," when I heard Jesus' imperative, "Let's go." Yet, if there is to be no discrepancy between what we claim to believe and what we do, then we have to risk going. We have to risk going to places we would rather not go, for that is where we will find Jesus!

I wonder how this church will risk going, risk doing something new and different even if it scares us and costs us. Our call is not to play it safe. Our call is to proclaim the gospel. Will we work towards no discrepancy between our words and deeds, between our walk and talk as followers of Christ? Jesus did. Will we? I pray so. Amen.