

**“GO AND DO”**  
**Mark 1:14-20**  
**January 24, 2021**

*Two gospel writers—John and Mark, two versions of the calling of the disciples: which one resonates with you the most? Are you the type who wishes to Come and See what Jesus is all about before deciding whether to follow him, or are you the type who says yes to his call without knowing what it means to commit to the disciple’s life? Hear what the Spirit is asking in Mark 1: 14-20*

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: “Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message.”

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, “Come with me. I’ll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I’ll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass.” They didn’t ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

A dozen yards or so down the beach, he saw the brothers James and John, Zebedee’s sons. They were in the boat, mending their fishnets. Right off, he made the same offer. Immediately, they left their father Zebedee, the boat, and the hired hands, and followed.

*Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.*

Friday morning, I set about to feed the puppy. Bayley Beast. The 25-pounder that is now tall enough to counter-surf. But I didn’t know that until I filled his bowl with puppy chow and turned my back on him for just an instant. Crash! All the kibble and the bowl went flying to the floor and it was feast on! for both Bayley and Kona-The-Opportunist who, of course, offered to help him clean up the mess for me. Such helpful Boyz, those two!

As I watched them chow down on kibble strewn hither and yon, I thought of this week’s scripture passage and what it has to say to our church. I know, I’m weird that way, but hear me out. Puppy kibble and Jesus have more in common than you might think...

Last week, we were introduced to John’s Garden of delight, a slow, delicious invitation to a veritable buffet of Unhurried-Time-With-Jesus. Just getting started in his ministry, we find Jesus in Galilee strolling about when he comes across Philip

and said, “Come, follow me.” He sees something in Philip to which we are not privy, and Philip sees something in Jesus that compels him to say an unqualified, “Yes.”

*Come and see.* Come and be of a disciple’s life and ministry. Philip goes to get Nathanael (a friend? A brother or cousin? A co-worker or perhaps a fellow parishioner?) and says to him, *Come, see for yourself.* We get the sense that time can wait, that Jesus has room in his schedule for this calling to take place naturally, slowly, peacefully. We are in John’s Gospel Garden where life flourishes, color is appreciated, diversity is the norm, and we are in waiting.

That’s how I think of March 2020 to now—a time in a garden not of our own making, a garden full of brambles and thorns to be sure, but when we fought our way through and around them, we were greeted also with new life, growth, and color—a plethora of new ways to connect, worship, experience imagery and music, of “being church.” *Come and see.* The invitation was open, extravagant, unconditional and full of promise that we would not be left alone to figure it out for ourselves. We are never left alone to meet our obstacles—our brambles and thorns- without the protection and balm of the Holy Spirit. For UCC Parker Hilltop, we were wounded, but not mortally wounded. We were scraped up and scratched, lost for a bit in the tangle of technology and uncharted wilderness, but with the Spirit’s help, we figured it out, we cut a path through the hard stuff to the other side, to the glorious experience of possibility and creativity and connection online. *Come and see.*

Mark’s message is radically different. Mark’s Jesus is more insistent, short on time and long on purpose. This is a direct function of Mark’s time, punctuated as it was with death and destruction, oppression and fear. Mark’s Jesus has no time to waste, no time to tarry in the garden. *Come and see* is replaced with another command, one not nearly as social.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples he chooses, "Come with me; drop your nets and leave your life as fishermen behind. I will teach you how to fish for men and women, and we will start *right now*." Mark only has 16 short chapters of material and he cuts to the chase, gets right to the point: immediately after Jesus calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John from the banks of the Sea of Galilee, they travel to Capernaum and Jesus teaches in the synagogue, casts out of a man a challenging spirit, and heals sick people who flock to him as they hear of his wonderous miracles.

*Come and See* is replaced by *Go and Do*. Mark's Jesus says, "There is no time to tarry. Follow me and I will show you how to fish for people. I will show you how to get people to pay attention to my message; I will show you how to bring people back into relationship with God. You will learn how to bring God's love and justice directly to the people. You will be my hands and feet, heart and voice in the world when I am no longer in it. *Go, and Do as I do*."

I see this as the message for our church in 2021: *Go and Do*. Sometime this year we will re-gather in person. Sometime this year we will make decisions about how to make our message more accessible to more people. Will we continue with live Zoom worship? I believe it is a moral imperative that we do so. It is not just a question of the haves and have-nots, meaning those who have the ability to physically drive to our church and those who do not; for many, the online experience is more personal, more intimate and easier to take in. It is safe; there is no need to wear a mask or stand 6 feet apart, take one's temperature or answer a questionnaire about where you have been and who you have been with.

There is no need to fight with the kids to get up, to shower or dress up; it doesn't seem like such an *effort* to meet and worship online. So, Zoom worship is not anymore just a ministry service we are offering to infirm or to physically distanced persons. Maybe it never was, but by this time, it has become *the way we*

*worship God on Sundays.* We were implored to *Go and Do*, to meet with faithfulness and hopefulness the challenge of the pandemic, and UCCPH answered the call.

We also long to be together—really together. That is more a function of vaccine and herd immunity and the pandemic running its course so that it no longer poses the threat it does today. Soon, many of you will be immunized and you will be able to gather with like-vaccinated church friends in small gatherings—in restaurants, in your homes or across your bridge tables. It will take longer for those of us under age 70 to enjoy that freedom, but we will get there in 2021 when the days are longest and warmest. I am dreaming of an all-church picnic outside before the kids start back to school in the fall. There is nothing more that I want to do but hug each and every one of you and feel your warm embrace given back to me.

*Go and do.* We will kick back up our youth and children's programs, social life, hands-on missions life, and visitation ministry. We will emerge from our wilderness time tested, but energized, a bit wary at first but driven by our need to be social people of God, a Beloved Community that fishes for people together, shoulder to shoulder.

And that leads me back to the Great Puppy Food Caper of this morning. I was content to carefully gather all the kibbles that were scattered about the floor like John is content to carefully tend to all the petals of all the flowers in Jesus' glorious garden. I was content to move slowly, to laugh at what had happened, and to not let a single piece of puppy food go undetected. *Come and see*, come and see what this little lifeform has learned to do that he could not do yesterday!

Every day, he discovers something, learns something new, finds a shortcut, gains confidence and becomes more social in his new home. That was us as a church in 2020.

But as I was carefully and slowly sweeping the kitchen floor (*Come and see*), dogs were scarfing up the spilled food, fast and furious, leaving no kibble unfound, no nook or cranny unsearched, eager to get their fair share and then some, with no time to waste even though the food wasn't going anywhere, and they had as long as they needed to eat it all up (*Go and do*). This will be our church sometime later this year. We will hungrily slurp up the kibble that is spilled out before us when at last the pandemic lets us out of our kennels and onto the cool church lawn of unrestrained freedom.

In just a few minutes we will start our Annual Congregational Meeting. Please stay connected for the important work and right you have as parishioners for self-governance in a church that happily is faithful, social, financially healthy and moving ahead into our bright and hopeful future. If you are an active church partner: meaning, you have attended worship either live in the sanctuary before March 15<sup>th</sup> of last year or on Zoom since, or if you catch up by watching the recording or reading the sermons, you are active in the life of the church sw, someway during this time when opportunities for service are admittedly limited, and you financially support the work of the church at least to the minimal level of \$114 per year or above, then you are eligible to vote.

If you are not an active church partner, you are welcome to stay for the meeting. *Come and see* how UCC Parker Hilltop is answering the call of Jesus to *Go and do*.

I am grateful that you have all remained faithful to our church WHY this past 10 months. We are not through our wilderness time just yet and this is no time to waver or quit doing what has seen us through this time so far. There are a myriad of ways that you can be involved in the life of the church, and there is plenty of need for your voice and heart in upcoming decisions we will need to make in 2021. Our goal is for 100% financial participation by our parishioners in the life of the

church. If you have not donated in the past year, I hope you examine within yourself why not? and that you consider answering the question: What is the value of this church ministry as a lifeline for you?

We have been in John's garden for 10 solid months, waiting, watching, diving inward, regrouping. We needed to do that; we needed to slow down. That you are here is proof that you heeded that message. We mourn this week 400,000 of our fellow countrymen, women and children who were not so fortunate as to make it out of the garden alive. It is all so sad. It is all so sobering.

We have been tarrying together in John's garden, but now we are invited into Mark's determined, focused, and directed ministry. We have been told by Jesus to drop our fishing nets and fish for people instead. Will we heed the call to discipleship? Will we scarf up each kibble of God's urgent love so that no morsel is left behind and no person who has found us is left without us? Let us *Go and Do*, a Beloved Community of Christ spreading his Good News in 2021.

*May It Be So.*

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