

**“Outreach and Lift Up”**

Isaiah 40:21-26; Mark 1:29-39

February 4, 2018

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Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Thanks Be to God! We have successfully finished our annual rummage sale! And I want to express our deep appreciation to Mary Ellen, our rummage sale coordinator with Ruby and Wayde (Paris), and many other volunteers for sharing your time, tireless work and great effort. I saw many good hands delivering items to the church, sorting them out and marking the price on each item. As always, in terms of work evaluation, there might be some diverse ideas and suggestions. But, indeed, our rummage sale was a great outreach event linking our church to our neighborhood and community. Also, today is outreach Sunday. We encourage you to bring a donation to support one of our local outreach ministries such as Sunrise Christian Food Ministry, Tarps and Seasonal Support for the Homeless, Downtown Ministries, and the Pastor's Discretionary Fund. There is something spiritually and theologically important in these ministries, which is outreach. You were God's hands and feet in our outreach program and you did God's work as agents. Neighbors and community have profited and benefit through your physical labor and generous service!

Today's Scripture readings seem to be different but they commonly emphasize the divine presence in our outreach and ministry to lift up those who are in great need of support and care. God's love reaches out to everyone and lifts them up not only for the chosen but it is for everyone. If there is no outreach and caring for others in the church, that is not the church any more but merely a social club!

The first Old Testament reading is part of the Prophet Isaiah's message to the Israelites. This whole chapter 40 was written for the hopeless Israelites who were captives as Babylonia exiles. The prophet Isaiah spoke to his people and delivered God's comforting message in hope. It is not in our reading portion, but this chapter begins with saying in verse 1, "Comfort my people, says your God." The whole chapter is filled with hope, encouragement and reassurance of God's promise and care for their people. And then, the prophet Isaiah confidently reminds his people of who God is. God is not small but great! Our God is creator who made all beautiful stars in the sky. So Isaiah tells us not to worship stars but the one who creates them. God is so high and incomparable. Simply speaking, as we sing our hymn, "How Great Thou Art", Our God is wonderful and king of kings. This God cares for us and reaches out!

Our second Scripture reading describes Jesus' healing ministries such as curing the sick and casting out demons. Some scholars who researched and studied Jesus' history didn't think of Jesus' miracles and healings as important works. It looked too mystic. They tried to understand Jesus as a "Spirit person, a Jewish mystic." But Jesus' healing ministry was one of the Messiah's most important works. Healing the sick and casting Demons out had to do with social salvation for the sick and the marginalized. In verse 32, it says "At Sunset, people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, laying his hands on each one, he healed them." Truly, the healing ministry is important to Jesus not because he wanted to show off his miraculous curing power, but his whole focus was empowerment, lifting up those who were outcast and excluded from the community. Jesus restored them.

In Jesus' day, illness was regarded as a punishment from God. If you are ill or psychologically or mentally troubled, you had to be vanished from the community and could never return back as a child of God. Jesus wanted to make God's reign present among us: No matter what sickness you had, whoever you were, you were meant to be accepted and welcomed as the children of God. In the Bible, "Miracles" are always the sign of God's work and presence. Jesus' ministry for healing the sick was a visible sign of embracing God's love. In Jesus' day, healing the sick had more sociological meaning of 'restoration to the community' as well as 'restoration to life.' Jesus' power and core of ministry was to proclaim and witness to the kingdom of God. Jesus still proclaims and speaks to us, "God's love for everyone! So reach out and lift up those who are in need around you!"

I invite you to think about Jesus' hands and reflect your hands, not as a miraculous magic, but as an image of care who needs your touch and outreach. Jesus' healing hands reached out and brought hope to the hopeless, joy to the depressed and healing to the broken hearted laying his hands on each one. Wherever Christ comes, he comes to do good. He cures the sick: He shared the good news for eternal life, established the Kingdom of God where God's compassion, healing, and serving one another in love defeated the powers of evil. We, Christians and church are called to carry out this Jesus' ministry and spirit in our action and outreach ministries. We want to lift up people through sharing our love and hope in Christ.

Jesus Christ, our healer laid his hands on our wounds and he brought shalom of healing and restoration to the people. Now he invites us to join his healing ministry to those who are weak, and weary and those who are desperately

waiting for our hands in their troubled times. We should think about the role of our hands: how to reach out our neighbors and share God's love.

A great theologian, Paul Tillich said, "Who do you think Jesus is?" We would say that Jesus was the Messiah. He was not a glory oriented Messiah, but courageously centered on others. When our culture drives us to put ourselves into "only Me, Me and Me culture", we, Church and Christians should be bold to say, "I want to care for others." The essence of Evangelism and mission was to share good news of the Messiah and to reach out to those who are seeking the Messiah. If the church loses vital energy for mission and healthy spirit, it will only become a fellowship gathering.

Jesus Christ is still inviting us to follow him. Following the Messiah is not about sacrificing your life, but an invitation to share joy and support new life. Your willingness and commitment helps us to carry out our church missions.

I hope and pray that we can continue to be good hands and do good for others, and for our neighborhood. That is why church is here on our hill as God's people. Amen.