

## WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,

to remind us of God's presence with us,

and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

## GATHERING MUSIC

"Come and Find the Quiet Center" - Fran McKendree

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQiv6eB09xw>

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is  
a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;  
Southern California Nevada Conference of the  
United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that

"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,  
you are welcome here."

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder  
in the back.

If there are any other announcements about the life of the church, please type them  
in Nearby Chat at this time.

Thursday is Thanksgiving Day in the US, there will be no 4pm Vespers service

During the month of December, I'll be doing a sermon series based on a book,  
"This Here Flesh" by Cole Arthur Riley

I'm telling you now so you can buy the book and read along if you would like.

I won't be doing specific chapters per week, so just go ahead and read the whole  
thing.

## SHARING OUR GIFTS

Most churches have a time of offering.

Making an offering,

sharing what you can in God's name,

is a spiritual practice.

If you would like to make an financial offering to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl by the door to the sanctuary,

or you can go to our website:

[firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org)

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

## SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Our reading today is the gospel reading from the Revised Common Lectionary for this Reign of Christ Sunday.

This is the Sunday where we close out the year in the liturgical calendar, Next Sunday a new year begins with Advent.

And so, by tradition, we hear a story from the closing out of the earthly ministry of Jesus,

To ready us to prepare for the birth of new life at Christmas.

Let us listen to God speaking through the words of the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23, verses 33-43.

### LUKE 23:33-43 (NRSV)

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

Then Jesus said,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying,

“He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying,

“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”

There was also an inscription over him

“This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying,

“Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other rebuked him, saying,

“Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God!

"Origin"

Let us pray ...

As I was preparing for this service, a line from a poem by Lynn Ungar was stuck in my head,

“Never forget where you came from.”

When I first looked at this passage to prepare for this Sunday my first thought was,

“Ugh, what chaotic mess,”

And I hadn't even read it yet.

If you look it up, you'll see there are a slew of footnotes indicating conflicts between different ancient manuscripts and translators on the wording of the text,

And some editions even put brackets around one sentence suggesting maybe it shouldn't even be there.  
That's kind of appropriate, though, since it is a very chaotic scene;  
All these soldiers milling about,  
Some mocking him, and some taunting him with sour wine, and some casting lots for his clothing,  
And it feels to me like there is confusion and everyone is talking on top of everyone.  
Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."  
You got that right.

Chaos.

So I got to thinking about chaos and creation.  
And that's what Lynn Ungar's poem, "Origin" is about.  
She writes:

In the beginning the world  
was a great big mess.  
Topsy-turvy, helter-skelter,  
the grandest celestial  
mish mosh of time and space.  
Creation is the imposition of order:  
light from dark, day from night  
water from air and so on.  
Sometimes it works.  
Sometimes your carefully crafted  
plans tick down the rails of your decisions,  
running neatly on time. Sometimes not.  
Creation is a blessing.  
The careful construction of beauty  
and the delicate elucidation of truth  
is a blessing. Bending this malleable world  
toward justice and peace  
and your vision of what could be  
is a blessing. But.  
The nature of the universe  
is chaos. Never forget  
where you came from.

This got me thinking about how in Genesis 1 it says that  
"When God began to create the heavens and the earth,  
the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep."  
Chaos as the medium in which the Divine creates.  
And I thought about our modern scientific story of the birth of the universe,  
In the "Big Bang"  
or the "Great Flaring Forth," as Thomas Berry calls it,  
which I think sounds much better.

I imagine it,  
To the extent my human brain can imagine it,  
As something like the image I put on the screen from the James Webb Telescope  
Of the birth of a new star.  
How before life could crawl out of Earth's oceans to walk upon the land,

All these bits of matter chaotically swirling around in space, smashing into each other,  
and they had to come together to form planets and stars,  
Things had to cool down,  
The cosmic dust had to clear,  
And some chemical reactions had to happen  
to create the conditions for life.  
Out of all that chaos came everything we know.  
Then out of the recesses of my memory came the thought that "Chaos"  
(or "Khaos" in Greek) was a goddess in Greco-Roman mythology,  
the first being at the dawn of creation.  
Chasing that memory, I looked her up and found she was also a goddess of the air,  
Credited with creating birds.  
She was also seen as the space between heaven and earth,  
And she was a mother and a grandmother.  
That feels true.  
I remember the births of my daughter and my granddaughter,  
which were, each in their own way:  
beautiful and messy and painful and scary and grace-full (and did I mention  
beautiful?),  
all at the same time.  
Kind of chaotic in fact.  
Mother Khaos may be my new favorite image of God, both helpful and hopeful in these  
times,  
Which feel pretty chaotic to me,  
and scary and painful,  
especially on days like today when we are mourning the victims of another mass  
shooting.  
Which brings me back to the scripture text we started with,  
That sad, chaotic scene at Golgotha,  
In that space between heaven and earth,  
Life and death.  
Most people there were caught up in the chaos,  
But Jesus and the one criminal crucified next to him,  
They were able to look beyond,  
See that God was there in the midst of that chaos, pain and death,  
And draw from that comfort and hope.  
What will God create from the chaos of our times?  
Can we see signs that the swirling bits of matter of our world are starting to be  
drawn together?  
Is the dust beginning to clear?  
Are there actions and reactions happening that are creating the conditions for new  
life to emerge?  
When I read the news, this is what I look for.  
Signs of the Spirit moving through the chaos,  
And I treasure all these things, and ponder them in my heart.  
Like mother Mary did when she heard the shepherds' news  
After giving birth to Jesus in chaotic circumstances so long ago.  
My own daughter is due to deliver her second child in December  
(11 days until she is considered full term - yes, we are counting).

If all goes well, I will be there for that birth as I was for the first.  
As we approach that event with anticipation, impatience, and trepidation,  
it is comforting to remember that it is out of chaos the new life is born,  
and that the Divine is in all of it.  
“Never forget where you came from.”  
Amen.

Jose played one of his favorite hymns last week.  
This is one of mine.  
“In the Midst of New Dimensions”  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpQSI\\_PWuuw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpQSI_PWuuw)

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,  
as a community,  
join our hearts together,  
to connect to God and to each other.  
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.  
And now, if you have a prayer of joy or concern that you wish to lift to God,  
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at  
this time.  
As people share their prayers in text  
please read them prayerfully  
and hold this space as sacred and safe  
to open our hearts to God.  
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.  
Those voiced here today.  
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.  
Those for which we have no words.  
We lift them all to you, O Lord,  
with faith in your boundless love and grace.  
And we pray together the words Jesus taught us, saying  
Our Father who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy name  
thy kin-dom come  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil  
for thine is the kin-dom and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over  
our ministry to the world is just beginning  
the world is waiting

Go in peace, come again in hope.  
Amen.

“Resilient” – Rising Appalachia  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tx17RvPMaQ8>

GO IN PEACE