

As we gather together there is some technical information that most of you already know, but just in case someone doesn't:
The service will be in voice and text.
There is a copy of the service in the red book by the door to the sanctuary. You'll want to grab one of those if you need the YouTube links or want the lyrics for today's worship music.
Speaking of which, worship music will be in the media player.
Frequently in my worship service, folk end up dancing right here in the aisles or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you—I say go for it!
GATHERING:
In today's sermon I talk a little bit about the idea of Sabbath—a time set aside for recreation, reflection and prayer.
I don't know about you, but I find that life in my beloved homeland is more like this song:
<https://youtu.be/K4pqqzFWedc>, "Who Needs Sleep?" ~Barenaked Ladies

Now I lay me down not to sleep
I just get tangled in the sheets
I swim in sweat three inches deep
Just lay back and claim defeat
Chapter read and lesson learned
I turned the lights off while she burned
So while she's three hundred degrees
I throw the sheets off and I freeze
Lids down, I count sheep
I count heartbeats
The only thing that counts is that I won't sleep
I countdown, I look around
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
(Who needs sleep)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
My hands are locked up tight in fists
My mind is racing filled with lists
Of things to do and things I've done
Another sleepless night's begun
Lids down, I count sheep
I count heartbeats
The only thing that counts is that I won't sleep
I countdown, I look around
Well you're never gonna get it

(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
(Who needs sleep)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
So much joy in life
So many pleasures all around
But the pleasure of insomnia
Is one I've never found
With all I've had to offer
There's so much to be enjoyed
But the pleasures of insomnia
Are one's I can't avoid
Lids down, I count sheep
I count heartbeats
The only thing that counts is that I won't sleep
I countdown, I look around (Hala, hala, hala)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
(Who needs sleep)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
Who needs sleep
(Well you're never gonna get it)
Who needs sleep
(Tell me what's that for)
Who needs sleep
(Be happy with what you're gettin')
(There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war)
Who needs sleep
(Well you're never gonna get it)
Who needs sleep
(Tell me what's that for)
Who needs sleep
(Be happy with what you're gettin')

(There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war
(Who needs sleep)
Well you're never gonna get it
(Who needs sleep)
Tell me what's that for
(Who needs sleep)
Be happy with what you're gettin'
There's a guy whose been awake since the second world war

WELCOME

Welcome to First United Church of Christ and Conference Center, Second Life.

We have official standing with the Eastern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ as a Real Life church located in Second Life.

And I still think that's pretty cool, because I have sat in South Central Pennsylvania—I have sat in Northern Maine—
and I am currently sitting in Central Connecticut—
and I still think it's pretty cool that we can partner with my brothers and sisters and non-binary siblings all across the country
and all of you wherever you are!

Speaking of wherever you are:

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

Most churches have a time of offering.

Making an offering, sharing what you can in God's name, is a spiritual practice.

You can find out more about how you can engage in that practice below:

That offering can be one of prayer or of presence,
of work on behalf of the church doing things like reading scripture or serving on the board of directors,
of helping with any of the many things that are needed for the church to function, and/or, that offering can be one of money.

As a UCC church, we support the work of the wider church both with prayer and with donations.

And it's true that we don't have a physical building, but there are monetary costs for this ministry to function.

So if you would like to make an offering by participating in leading worship or social events,

or if you would like to become a member of this church,
let any clergy or staff member know.

If you would like to make a financial offering to support this ministry there is a donation bowl by the door to the sanctuary,

or if you prefer you can make a donation in RL currency on our website:

www.firstuccsl.org

And since we are a 501(c)(3) public charity, monetary donations are tax deductible in the U.S.

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

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude.

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Matthew 12:1-14

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him,

‘Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.’

He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests.

Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless?

I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

But if you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.’

He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, ‘Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?’ so that they might accuse him.

He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out?

How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep!

So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.’

Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’

He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

SERMON "The Phoenix Affirmations (Affirmation 11)"

This is the eleventh sermon in a series about what it means when I say that I am a Progressive Christian. Specifically, it is about one piece of what it means to be a Progressive Christian as it is described in the _Phoenix Affirmations_.

The _Phoenix Affirmations_ are twelve principles "...originally penned by a group of clergy and laypeople from Phoenix, Arizona..."

But it didn't stop there:

"Word spread, and soon pastors, theologians, and biblical scholars from every mainline denomination, with degrees from seminaries and divinity schools... added input.

They were joined by laypeople and progressive Christian leaders from around the country." (Elnes)

The first four affirmations were about how Progressive Christians love God. The next four affirmations are about how we love our neighbor. And now we are into the final four affirmations, which are about how we love ourselves.

Affirmation 11

[Loving Ourselves includes] Caring for our bodies, and insisting on taking time to enjoy the benefits of prayer, reflection, worship and recreation in addition to work;

(Exodus 5:4-8; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19)

As Christians, we strive to embrace and embody ways of living that promote the health of the body,

the joy of living, and the benefits attained when work is combined with rest and recreation, reflection and prayer.

We do this for our sake, for the sake of others, for the sake of the earth, and for the sake of Christ.

We affirm that the Path of Jesus is found where Christ's followers care for their bodies as temples of the holy, and take time to pray and play, to worship, and to reflect, as essential parts of their vocation.

We confess that we have moved away from this Path when we have supported the ethics of Pharaoh over the ethics of God by promoting systems of production and consumption without attending to the disciplines of rest and recreation, reflection and prayer.

We have further moved from the Path when we have denigrated or abused our bodies, or those of others, or denied the rights and responsibilities of others to make decisions about how they care for the bodies God gave them.

"A country pastor is out fishing on his day off.

A parishioner spots him and says, 'You know, pastor, the Devil doesn't take a day off.'

'And if I don't take a day off,' replied the pastor,

'I'd be just like him!'" (Elnes)

The Law of the Sabbath has been—and continues to be—one of the most fundamental laws in the Jewish tradition.

In fact, some of the key differences between various strands of Judaism revolve around how this law is interpreted—what counts as "work," exactly?

Today's Gospel Lesson vividly portrays a difference of interpretation between Jesus' teaching and that of Pharisees.

But what Rev. Elnes is pointing out in the little joke I opened the sermon with, is that in most of American culture, the question of "How much work can I do before I break the Sabbath?" is not primary.

In American culture, the primary question is more like, "What Sabbath?"

But I for one, truly believe that there is something valuable to be gained by observing the practice.

As Rev. Elnes puts it:

"One of the things I like best about the first Creation story in the Book of Genesis (1:1-2:4a) is that it reveals an understanding of life that, if taken seriously, helps us align our busy lives with what matters.

The first thing to note is that according to the Hebrew conception (still true today in Jewish Sabbath practice), day actually begins with night:

“And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

This concept of “day” thoroughly subverts our sense of self-importance.

When we rise in the morning thinking that the day has just begun, it’s actually half over according to Genesis.

While we’ve been sleeping, God’s Creation has been getting by just fine without us. Yet so often we spring out of bed in the morning half believing that the world has been at a complete standstill waiting with bated breath until we rise so it can function properly again.

Eugene Peterson notes in his book *Working the Angles*, perhaps instead of launching into our plans for the day, we should seek each morning to discern what God has already been up to and ask God how we may join in with those plans.”

Ooo. I *like* that.

He goes on:

Another thing I find intriguing about the Creation story is what happens on the seventh day.

God rests.

We’re not told why God had to rest, just that God rested.

If God finds it necessary to rest and be refreshed, what makes us so sure we can live a creative life without doing the same?

This point is brought home in the Book of Exodus on three separate occasions, one of them smack in the heart of the Ten Commandments.

Here God not only gives the command to rest on the seventh day but justifies it by pointing back at the Creation of heaven and earth:

“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day, therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it” (Exodus 20:8-11)

In the Book of Deuteronomy, this same Sabbath command is repeated as part of the Ten Commandments, only its justification is different:

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Deuteronomy 5:15).

In other words, not only are rest and relaxation necessary for staying creative, but without them, we’re little more than slaves in this world.

It doesn’t matter how wealthy we are; we might as well be back in Egypt working under Pharaoh.” (Elnes)

You know, now that I think about it, there’s a strong argument that the concept of Sabbath is a strong theme in *A Christmas Carol*.

After all, Ebenezer Scrooge was loathe to take a holiday!

It is so tempting to kind of end the sermon right there, but there’s a piece of this Affirmation that Elnes doesn’t touch—but I think it’s important:

“We have further moved from the Path when we have denigrated or abused our bodies, or those of others, or denied the rights and responsibilities of others to make decisions about how they care for the bodies God gave them.”

As a Hospital Chaplain, I see the results of what happens when we denigrate or abuse our bodies.

I see what happens when our bodies are denigrated or abused by others.

As much as I love the freedoms of my beloved homeland, there are entirely too many guns to easily attained here.
And to be honest, I kind of want to shake the world and say "Wear your helmet!!"
More than that, though, I'm always painfully aware of at least the basics of medical ethics.
Two of those basics are the concepts of Autonomy and Informed Consent.
The two things are related, actually, Autonomy is how ethicists talk about the individual's power to choose—to make their own decisions.
Informed Consent goes a step further, making it clear that it is vitally important that the choice the individual has the power to make is one based in good information and a good understanding of that information.
This is why, ethically, your physician is required not only to explain why you need surgery—for example—and what they believe the best surgery is for your problem, but also to make sure that you understand that you don't have to do what the doctor is suggesting.
These concepts lie at the heart of why I do not support overly restrictive abortion laws.
I understand where the folk who identify as "Pro Life" are coming from. I do. And I certainly see abortion as traumatic and tragic.
However.
Every pregnancy is different.
Every pregnant person is different.
And the people with the very best information concerning their health and the health of their fetus are their medical care team—and themselves.
Not some lawmaker.
The issues are simply too complex to appropriately legislate.
Therefore I can't in good faith support laws that take away a pregnant person's autonomy or their doctor's ability to provide informed consent.
In the end, what the Sabbath tells me is that there's nothing more important than being human.
God loves us and wants us to take care of ourselves.
What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

This song isn't about medical ethics.
This song isn't about politics.
It's about the emotional landscape of one man as he responds to one specific abortion.
<https://youtu.be/Wt5EHAqhR1c>, "Brick" ~ Ben Folds Five

6 A.M., day after Christmas
I throw some clothes on in the dark
The smell of cold
Car seat is freezing
The world is sleeping
I am numb
Up the stairs to her apartment
She is balled up on the couch
Her mom and dad went down to Charlotte

They're not home to find us out
And we drive
Now that I have found someone
I'm feeling more alone
Than I ever have before
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly
Off the coast and I'm headed nowhere
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly

They call her name at 7:30
I pace around the parking lot
Then I walk down to buy her flowers
And sell some gifts that I got
Can't you see
It's not me you're dying for?
Now she's feeling more alone
Than she ever has before
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly
Off the coast and I'm headed nowhere
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly
As weeks went by
It showed that she was not fine
They told me, "Son, it's time to tell the truth"
And she broke down, and I broke down
'Cause I was tired of lying
Driving back to her apartment
For the moment, we're alone
Yeah, she's alone, and I'm alone
And now I know it
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly
Off the coast and I'm headed nowhere
She's a brick and I'm drowning slowly

We have come to our time in worship that I really do believe is the core of what we do here together, and that is where we uplift our joys and concerns with one another in prayer.

And so I would like to invite you to enter this time of prayer with a sense of reverence.

We're about to enter into a conversation with God, and that shouldn't be done lightly,

but rather "... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"
(Ephesians 4:2-3)

Please type your prayers into chat, or if you need to use voice simply emote raising your hand so everybody can have a voice.

And as we pray together, you may wish to respond to others with words like, "God hear our prayer," or with any other words the Spirit leads to you use.

COMMUNITY PRAYER

If there was a prayer inside of you that you couldn't quite get out, it's ok.
Because the Psalmist tells us that God knows what we are going to say before the words can even form on our tongues.

And so we know.

We _ know _ that God has heard our prayers. Those spoken out loud, those typed into SL chat, and those spoken only in the silence of our hearts.

And that we pray them in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

LISTEN!

We have done a lot of talking. Let us take a moment of silence to listen to what God might be saying.

Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening...

PASTORAL PRAYER

In the deepness of winter, O God, remind us that the bleakness will not hold.
Spring is not a myth or false hope, but it is the endurance of faith, year after year, that deep in the frozen ground seeds will soon flourish, bulbs are ready to produce.

In the high days of summer, O God, remind us to cherish each moment of warmth in the beauty of Your creation.

We know that the constant of our tilted planet is for seasons to always change, to always bring us something new, whether challenges or blessings, hopes or trials.

You are with us, Your love enduring with us, and You will see us through.

In the name of Christ we pray.

Amen. (Rev-o-lution Resources by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell

<http://rev-o-lution.org>, (c) 2021. Used by permission.)

BENEDICTION:

And now it really is just this simple:

God loves you.

So, don't forget to love each other.

Go with God.

Go in Peace.

And Amen!

CLOSING:

I wanted to end with a fun, happy song that's about recreation, reflection and prayer.

And while prayer isn't specifically mentioned in this song, I think it's just about right!

https://youtu.be/KIYiGA_rIls, "Soak Up the Sun" ~Sheryl Crow

My friend, the communist
Holds meetings in his RV
I can't afford his gas
So I'm stuck here watching TV
I don't have digital
I don't have diddly squat
It's not having what you want

It's wanting what you've got
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I'm gonna tell everyone to lighten up
I'm gonna tell 'em that I've got no one to blame
For every time I feel lame I'm looking up
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I've got a crummy job
It don't pay near enough
To buy the things it takes
To win me some of your love
Every time I turn around
I'm looking up, you're looking down
Maybe something's wrong with you
That makes you act the way you do
I'm, I'm gonna soak up the sun
I'm gonna tell everyone to lighten up
I'm gonna tell 'em that I've got no one to blame
For every time I feel lame I'm looking up
I'm gonna soak up the sun
While it's still free
I'm gonna soak up the sun
Before it goes out on me
Don't have no master suite
But I'm still the king of me
You have a fancy ride
But baby, I'm the one who has the key
Every time I turn around
I'm looking up, you're looking down
Maybe something's wrong with you
That makes you act the way you do
Maybe I am crazy too
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I'm gonna tell everyone to lighten up
I'm gonna tell 'em that I've got no one to blame
For every time I feel lame I'm looking up
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I'm gonna tell everyone to lighten up (to lighten up)
I'm gonna tell 'em that I've got no one to blame
For every time I feel lame I'm looking up (I'm looking up)
I'm gonna soak up the sun
I got my 45 on
So I can rock on

end