

WELCOME

Thank you for coming! We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today on this Third Sunday of Epiphany.

It gives me great joy to tell you that 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 real 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."

Our service will be in voice and text. Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have voice and media turned on. If you don't know how to do that, let someone know and we'll try to help. There will be a link in Nearby so you can watch it in your browser if the viewer isn't working for you. Whenever possible, lyrics are either on the screen, in Nearby Chat or a link to the lyrics is provided so you can read along if you wish.

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

One of the blessings and responsibilities that come with our being a real church with real standing is that we, like all UCC churches, support the work of the national church not only with prayer but financially. So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry. If you prefer, donations can be made on our website, firstuccsl.org.

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

So now,
let us open our heart up to God,
remembering that where two or three are gathered
God is there.

GATHERING MUSIC

Tracy Chapman - Change (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bukXKdzyGEY>

SCRIPTURES

Matthew 4:18-23 NRSV

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers.

And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.”

Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them.

Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Prayer -

Would you pray with me?

Come Holy Spirit and feel this place with your presence.

May these words be beneficial and instrumental.

May we bring Good News to all for we are Good News to others.

Amen

The Resistance!

As I mediated on the text for this week the one thing that kept arising in my spirit was -

What made these two set of brothers drop everything to follow Jesus?

The gospel writer doesn't tell us, but leaves it to our imagination to wonder, to ask, to contemplate on the possibilities.

What do you think could have possibly gone through their minds when they heard Jesus invitation?

What made them sacrifice their livelihood?

What made them leave their investment, their boat, gear, and their family to follow Jesus?

Perhaps, they had heard John the Baptist testifying about Jesus, so they recognized him.

Perhaps, they felt it inside, like a gut feeling, a pull from his divinity to follow.

We don't know, we can only guess.

But what we do know is that they left their attachments and immediately went, without questions.

See I believe that following in the way of Jesus is a form of residence.

During this time while Jesus was strolling by the sea of Galilee, the Roman Empire was in power.

These imperial forces moved around these areas with their military and economic power in full display.

The wealthy, who wanted to stay on top would bow to these forces and stay quiet.

The Sadducee's, the religious leaders appointed and kept in office by the Romans, would look away, would compromise if that's what it took to keep the Romans happy.

Then there were the rest of the people, just trying to survive - like these fishermen.

Roman controlled the fishing industry, set the price of fish, determined who could buy it.

Jesus had a different kind of fishing in mind, and when he called out to these brothers, Jesus put into motion a path to resist the imperial forces then and today.

When these two brothers left their boats to follow Jesus, they turned their backs on the system of oppression that controlled their lives and their world.

They joined the resistance, and they took a big risk.

In today's world, friends, can you see a form of Empire or an Imperial force dominating or trying to dominate people?

See in today's world these forces of power try to be clever.

In the name of safety and concern, an Imperial force rose and hiding behind their wish to protect trans kids, attempted to criminalizing their much needed health access.

In the name of protecting innocence, a dominating power rose and eliminate through the Supreme Court the right for women to make decisions over their bodies.

In the name of law and order, unarmed black men are killed by police.

In the name of upholding morals and values lawmakers equate lessons on race, gender and identity with liberal indoctrination and so they ban books and seek to control what young people read and study.

That is what Imperial forces do, they hide behind a group of people who compromise and support their campaign of fear and oppression.

But just as the Empire rises the people also continue to rise.
Jesus knew that as he set to choose his disciples and he set a precedent for the resistance.

Jesus went to the synagogues to teach. But he also questioned how the religious leaders were supporting or oppressing the people.
Jesus walked among the crowds offering redemption and healing, while also asking individuals what they wanted from him.

He spoke truth to power, and called the religious leaders "hypocrites."
Jesus taught us leadership skills by teaching those he knew would carry the movement beyond his death, his disciples.

See seeking the realm of God is the good, the beauty, the life and joy that God wants in our lives. It is freedom and liberation for ALL people.

Activists Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, often talked about their spiritual lives and how in the middle of their own struggles they saw hope.

Just like these disciples they heard the call and in the 60's they set out to organize the people. They were not born activist, they were farmers, they were workers trying to make a living in the middle of being oppressed.

The farm workers, the laborers, the hard working community just like the fishermen in our story, set out to join the resistance.

Together, they led marches demanding to be treated with human dignity.

Dolores said, "The leaders come up from the volunteers who do the work. A community that never thought they had the power to make that happen."

Peter, Andrew, James and John said yes and they probably did not know they would one day rise as leaders teaching others to follow in the way of Jesus.

But they trusted in the Holy-One showing them the realm of God through Jesus.

At the beginning I asked what made these fishermen follow Jesus? Why do any of us follow in the way of Jesus?

For me as a young person it was the call to feed and help those by the border.

Today it is my passion to help young people find their way through live thriving not just existing.

For you, what is it that tugs at your heart?

See the rebellion and the search for the reign of God is all around you.

For some it might look like standing against oppression by marching, donating, writing to legislators, or volunteering to help those in need.

For some it might be stepping back in search of wholeness and healing.

The realm of God looks like a group of people in this nation coming together in Selma to stand with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on a bridge.

It looks like Nelson Mandela stepping into a roll to serve the people of his country.

It looks like Black Lives Matter becoming a global movement still seeking justice.

That is the good news friends, the walking, talking, and sharing the love and redemption offered by the one who calls us into being.

Following in the way of Jesus is a form of resistance but it is not an easy task.

For a professor in Florida it might mean finding new ways to teach students about Black history after their governor tries to erase the lynching, and killing of their people.

Seeking the realm of God is not always comfortable to the oppressor.

Seeking the realm of God cost Jesus his life.

It cost Martin Luther King Jr's his life.

It cost Nelson Mandela prison before he could rise from the ashes.

Standing for justice, and living in integrity with compassion and human dignity for all is not an easy task.

See it demands your commitment to the one who calls you.

For John and James it meant leaving their father, the attachment to their family.

For us it demands to leave the attachments to our personal gain when it is acquire at the expense of others.

Jesus showed us how unexpected fisherman, the common and hard working people would change the world.

Jesus through his metaphor of fishing for people showed his disciples how to bring the people to him to be healed, to be transformed, to be liberated.

Emperors will continue to rise. History will show us their rise and fall.

But it will also show us the resilience of the people “en conjunto” (together) seeking the realm of God and creating change.

Dietrich Bonhauser a German Lutheran pastor despite his church leaders compromising with the Nazi empire, refused to bow to that regime.

This reminded me of the Saduces and church leaders compromising with the Romans in Jesus days, if they would just leave them alone.

See church leaders don't always get it right but through the fruits of their labor you must ask if it matches following in the way of Jesus?

Bonhauser was not compromising his calling to seek the realm of God.

He told the youth in his care that the Hitler Youth was not the community they were looking for.

See our young friends are often attracted by those who show them the illusion of family, and acceptance.

That is why gangs can thrive in recruiting young people.

Bonhauser did not hesitate to speak against this false illusion of community.

He showed them what evil and hate was doing to human life.

For this act of resistance, Bonhauser hanged.

See he knew that the realm of God was open to all despite what his church leaders or Hitler was saying. He knew what it mean to follow in the way of Jesus.

He said in the Cost of Discipleship, “Proclaiming a discipleship means being liberated from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience.”

That my friend is standing in our truth.

The cost of disciples is not easy but it is not impossible, for we know the work of the resistance.

Transformation occurs friends when you resist the forces of hate, injustice and oppression.

Through the gospels Jesus left us a path that started with the calling for these two set of brothers.

He left us the good news that sets the captives free, now that is liberation offering redemption, transformation, love, and community to all.

For “en conjunto” together we can continue to be the community that seeks to bring forth the realm of God, and liberation for all the people

So will you join the resistance if you haven't already?

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We have come to this time of prayers.
Together we will lift our prayers of joy and concerns.

We are a community that holds each other in prayer.
Although we know that our God is faithful, and hears us
it is good to know we all pray for each other.

Today, I invite you while this song plays to type in your prayer request in the chat box.

Will Retherford - Human (Official Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGYDcwooG1k>

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
Trusting in your boundless love and grace.
Lord hear our prayers

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.
Now lets dance!