

## WELCOME

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

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](http://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

Manifest - Edge of my Life (Official Music Video)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_qrOHsDsQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_qrOHsDsQ4)

## SCRIPTURES

Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV

## The Beatitudes

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[b] on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Are you feeling blessed today? -

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 was one of my grandmother's favorite passages. The story of Jesus teaching his disciples and talking to an eager crowd who would listen to every word he was saying.

I remember being young and listening to her reading them one by one pausing at each for dramatic effect.

Grandmother would emphasize Jesus words some verses more than others.

Like...

Like be meek. She really likes that one and the one about being a peacemaker. She would say if you do these things God would bless you.

I might have been too young to understand what being poor in spirit was but I understood don't cause or be trouble if you want God to bless you.

I understood being blessed and finding favor in God's eyes as not being a troublemaker.

The truth is these blessings were different from what people expected back then in Jesus times and even in today's world.

Today it seems that it's not just about working hard but rather knowing how to get ahead by only trusting yourself.

It is about looking out for number one, you.

If Jesus was to write these Beatitudes to match what many society might expect, they would sound like these:

Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.  
Blessed are those untouched by loss.  
Blessed are the powerful.  
Blessed are those who are “realistic” about righteousness, compromising at every turn.  
Blessed are those who demand and exact an eye for an eye.  
Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.  
Blessed are those bold enough to make war and strike first.  
Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.  
Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

Each of these are an obvious blessing.  
The rich are blessed with more money.  
The powerful are obviously blessed when they control everything.  
The crafty and opportunities seemed to be blessed when they got ahead in life.

It's a dog-eat-dog world.  
A Darwin thinking of survival of the fittest.  
These modern blessings totally make sense because they appear to be working for many.  
Or are they?

Jesus seems to always change things around.

There was this formula he had when teaching.

Jesus would say, “You have heard this...”  
“But I say to you this...”

You have heard eye for an eye but I tell you don't hit back.

Now that's not what people expected to hear.

My partner Shelly has been watching these shows where people compete for millions of U.S dollars.

One of these shows is called "The Mold" and the other is called "The Traitor." Each of these shows have people working together to earn a huge cash price while also thinking of how to win for themselves.  
The games have clues, and obstacle courses and mind games.  
As the people compete in these things they keep adding money to the winning price.

So they all work as a team to get the rewards but at the end of the day they also work out a plan to eliminate each other.

This sounds like life in general.

Perhaps this is the game, and Jesus was giving us clues along the way to survive somebody sabotaging your inner peace.

Or perhaps it is life obstacles that show our endurance and dedication at the end of life.

But in today's world that is ran by instant gratification waiting for a blessing is not something that is comprehensible.  
We find the news at our fingertips.  
We can buy things right of your phone too.

Teens today are not used to researching or going to the library to look for anything, they got Goggle, they got their phones.

To wait for a blessing is something that makes no sense for people today.  
Blessings are the equivalence of a good life.

Perhaps it was my upbringing in a conservative evangelical mindset that I equated being blessed with finding favor before the eyes of God.  
Like the Modern Beatitudes I will be blessed and rich.  
But...  
If I lost my job, I did something wrong.  
If I could not pay my bills, I did something wrong.  
I must have short changed God somewhere and my prosperity went out the window and now I'm poor.

Does any of this sound familiar?

When the world says blessed and highly favored people are those who have a table full of food.

Jesus flips it and says blessed are those who have nothing.

Now how does this make sense?

Perhaps at first glance it does not make sense.  
But if you look again it's showing us this new way of thinking.

In all he did, Jesus would teach his disciples a new way of looking at things.  
He would do it by walking alongside them, by performing miracles and this case sitting around talking to them.

Jesus was showing us all a new social and economic practice filled with hope.

This was a way of looking at the empire and the realm of God side by side.

The difference of putting all your hope on what the world gives you or what you can earn for yourself.  
Right next to the blessings that God gives you regardless of what you did, have done, or will do.

You don't have to fight each other to receive a blessing.

See despite a change in your finances, or a loss, you are still blessed, God is there.

Jesus was talking about blessings that had nothing to do with what the Roman empire said or did.

They had nothing to do with the Realm of God blessing, inspiring and moving people to act.

Today, no matter how the empire rises, the people around feel the blessing fire of God and continue to stand against it.

Friends, God's favor is yours and it is not measured on attitude or being deserving. My abuelita was wrong in saying do all these things so you can be blessed.

Friends live your life knowing you have found favor before God even in the darkest moments of life.

You are blessed when you are authentic and know wholeness.

Be....kind. When you are you will see how others benefit from your awesomeness. Be Comfort. You know what it means when someone comforts you.

Live your life in a way that is marked by justice, practices of piety, and shared accessible resources. You will see blessings all around you, my friends.

The shows my partner watches have a winner at the end who takes the money.

But most of them at the end of the show say, "I feel bad that my behavior caused so much anxiety and pain, but it's a game."

Jesus very well could have been telling us today you have heard your life is a game and you deserve to win at all cost. But I tell you, there is no need to stress, the blessing is yours.

Name calling, bullying, rumors, social antagonisms are inevitable when the Empire puts people against each other and when the powerful are challenged.

But the challenge that the Holy one gives you is to stand against the Empire and to know your truth by the way you live.

In our world today, in the United States, in Memphis Tennessee there is chaos.

A community has raised against the Empire rebelling after another Black Man was killed in the hands of people who took an oath to protect and serve.

Today, we grieve with Memphis and the family of Tyre Nicholes.

In fact, how can anyone make sense of such hatred and beating in front of our devices?

Where is the blessing in all of this?

Where is the comfort?

Jeff Chuff, a writer and theologian wrote recently on his blog titled "A song for the Broken hearted" that cultivating joy when life around is faced with tragedy is a complex feeling.

But he said, "There is something hopeful here- something that promises ultimate healing, somewhere, somehow."

Perhaps we add to the comfort by joining our other siblings around the country and the world to pray for Tyre's mom who is grieving, who is angry, and who needs a quilt of comfort upon her.

Because we are a community holding on to these promises that comfort can be found, a promise for those who are hurting.

So today friends I'm going to invite you to re-imagine these blessings together.

The promise of what it is to come but also the hope through Christ that is among us today.

I will wait a few seconds, add my additional text and welcome yours in the local chat. But even as I'm going forward add to these blessings.

Here we go..

\* Blessed are those who are at the end of their rope, who know what it means to be at their lowest, those who have nothing.

Blessed be...

For yours is the hope that comes from the God of the broken-hearted.

\* Blessed be those who mourn, who know the gut wrenching pain of losing someone.

Blessed be....

Yell, kick, pound your fist, cry, shout, lament, and know that in the middle of it all the Holy-One-of comfort holds you tight, hold you near. Receive a Holy embrace

\* Blessed are those who at one time or another had to give in. You have yielded so much.

Blessed be...

For you have an inheritance of everything that can not be bought.

\* Blessed be those who are starving to see people treated with human dignity.

\* Blessed be those who are dehydrated by the suffocating loss of life in the streets.

Blessed be...

Blessed be for they will be filled with the Holy-one-of-righteousness that quenches the thirst and satisfies the hunger.

\* Blessed be those who care for others. Blessed be those who care enough to do something.

Blessed be..

For your will also be cared for, mercy and love is yours.

\* Blessed be those who found a way to make peace within their heart and not cheat others. Those who do not step on others to get ahead.

Blessed be..

\* Blessed be the peace lovers, the non-agitators, the chill, the non combative, non-violent people.

Blessed be..

For you are to be called family! Yours is the place among the children of God

\* Blessed are you and those who are chased, harassed, called out, ridiculed because you protect human dignity, and are merciful to the earth, and mindful of the world around you.

Blessed be..

For the Holy-one-of the oppressed is showing you the realm of God all around you and it's yours.

\* Blessed be you when people come at you, when they make up stories to hurt you, when they tried to bring you down because of your commitment to the people on the margins.

Rejoice, be glad. Blessed be you among the legends, the saints, the people who are lovers of Gods creation.

Blessed be you!

Friends let us be a living example of compassion, of righteousness, seekers of justice.

Let us commit to shine a path for those chasing the illusion of living while drowning in despair.

May we offer comfort, and a place to rest among the community that embraces the Holy

One of All.

Blessed be you who strive to show the realm of God living and breathing through our lives.

Jesus does not ask for us to become poor in spirit, or to be in pain.  
He is rather saying that when life happens you know they are great rewards waiting for you today and always.

Are you feeling blessed?

Amen

#### 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.

Powerful - Jussie Smollett and Alicia  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gbejk8nd1jE>

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!

#### MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Fuego w Lyrics - Lecrae, KB, Suzy Rock  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zj1AGCgQcjU>



