

## 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

"All are Welcome (Let us Build a House)" - Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlnVLP0qFEo>

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life 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.

We will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some cake or pie,

and something to drink such as wine, juice, or water.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website

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

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

There are a few announcements,

first, believe it or not, Lent is right around the corner,

and we will have an Ash Wednesday service on February 22

in the place of Psalter.

So make plans to join us.

Second, Pastor Jamie has an announcement.

Thank you, Jamie.

## 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.  
If you have a prayer 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.

"New Day's Lyric (excerpt)" by Amanda Gorman  
May this be the day  
We come together.  
Mourning, we come to mend,  
Withered, we come to weather,  
Torn, we come to tend,  
Battered, we come to better.  
Tethered by this year of yearning,  
We are learning  
That though we weren't ready for this,  
We have been readied by it.  
We steadily vow that no matter  
How we are weighed down,  
We must always pave a way forward.  
Amen.

"Your Love is Here" - the Many  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXrkBetfDXM>

#### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Our lectionary scripture reading for today comes from the Gospel of Matthew.  
It is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount,  
And comes right after the Beatitudes, we looked at last week.  
Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 13-20.

#### MATTHEW 5:13-20

"You are the salt of the earth;  
but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?"

It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

"You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets;

I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven;

but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

"Salt, Light"

Let us pray ...

You are salt of the earth.

You are the light of the world.

You are.

You.

Salt. Light.

Not you can be, or you should be, or you will be.

You are.

Salt of the earth. Light of the world.

The Season after Epiphany is a time to think about how God is revealed – how God shines forth, like the star that guided the magi to the Christ child.

Today's scripture is about how God is revealed in you.

It's about our identity,

but instead of describing us by name, Jesus describes us by our function.

It's like when we describe ourselves by our occupation or vocation:

I'm a teacher – or I'm a nurse – or I'm a mother.

Because what we do is part of who we are – though not all of it.

It's not a complete description, and we are often several things at once.

The descriptions Jesus gives of us here is also incomplete –

but we can still learn something from it about ourselves,

about who we were created to be:

We are salt of the earth. We are the light of the world.

Let's talk about salt.

It can be a little harder to hear this description of us as positive today, given the messages we are being given all the time about how bad salt is for us.

You know, that we need to cut back on salt, go on low or no salt diets.

But it's only in modern times that an excess of salt has become a problem.

Through most of human history, salt has been something special, something precious. Saltworks, where salt is extracted from the water or earth have been found dating back to 6,000 years before the common era (BCE).

The quest for salt led to the development of major trade routes around the world. Some cultures traded salt for gold – equally by weight.

Makes a little more sense of the phrase “worth their salt” doesn’t it?

Our word “salary” comes from a latin word used to describe trading for salt.

The Celtic word for “salt” means “holy” or “sacred,” and salt is used in the rites and rituals of many cultures and religions.

For the Hebrews, salt was a sign of the covenant with God:

it was sprinkled on offerings to show their trust in God.

In Christianity, it was even traditionally used to consecrate a new church.

In some pagan traditions, salt was considered to have magical properties.

Why was salt considered so important?

Think about what salt does.

It gives flavor to what would otherwise be tasteless or bland.

It helps make food come alive for our senses.

Nowadays you can even get different flavors of salt.

It also preserves food – and is one of the first ways humans learned to do this.

When we eat salt, it encourages us to drink water; it regulates our thirst.

Modern science has also discovered that the human body contains about 8 ounces of salt.

It’s in our very cells, and we need salt to live.

Salt helps our nerves and muscles function correctly.

And as a society, we’ve learned that salt helps our cities function, by melting snow on roads and walkways.

Salt is distinctive, precious, and necessary.

It helps bring out the flavor of life and makes things function smoothly.

And we, Jesus tells us, we are salt. Hmmm.

And then there’s the next description–Light.

I remember when I first really read this passage it shocked me.

“Light of the World”? It says we are “light of the world”?

I thought that was another name for Jesus.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.”

True.

But in Matthew’s Gospel, written much earlier, Jesus looks right at his disciples, right at you, right at me, and says, “You are the light of the world.” Who me?

“Yes,” Jesus says, “you.”

What does light do?

Enables plants to grow through photosynthesis,

Helps us to see, guides our way,

Brings a little warmth on a cold winter day.

And there are different colors or kinds of light.

Hold a prism and see the rainbow spectrum on full display.

And there is some light on that spectrum our human eyes cannot see,

But is just as real.

In the biblical creation story,

Light was created on the very first day.

John Philip Newell describes how Christian writers out of the Celtic tradition thought of this kind of light of the first day.

God said, "let there be light," and there was light, before God created any external sources of light like the Sun or the stars.

That light of the first day of creation could only come from one source, from God. And the Celts believed that divine light permeates all of creation, including us, connecting us with each other, with all of creation, and ultimately with the One Source, with God.

Our modern creation story tells a similar tale of the Big Bang, and of how all the elements of our bodies, and all the particles including light particles, photons, were created in that process.

We all contain those original particles of light.

God light.

Jesus says we are to let our light in each of us shine before others, placing it up high where everyone can see it.

As Jesus describes it, our light is like a lamp that can illuminate a whole house, or a shining city that provides a beacon, like a lighthouse, to travelers on a darkened road.

It's a light that can make visible how God is working in the world, and so bring hope.

And all this matters, says Jesus, for the kin-dom.

It matters.

You matter.

What you do matters.

And there's no pre-requisite.

Jesus doesn't say "do this and you will be salt, believe this and you will light."

He says, "You are salt. You are light."

Distinctive, precious, necessary, bright.

Almost always present,

So if they are missing,

if the food has lost its taste,

if your light is hidden,

we need to ask, why?

And it's not just true of each of you, it's true of all of us,

Because in Greek the "you" here is plural.

We are salt. We are light.

That is who we are, individually, and as a group.

So our community matters.

What we do as a community matters for the kin-dom.

So I'd like to spend a few minutes considering ourselves,

Gathered as First UCC in Second Life,

Who we are and what we do.

Full disclosure, you will also be helping me in a class project.

For that project, I want to lead this church in crafting new mission and vision statements,

To guide our way forward as a church community.

And today will be a step in that process.

I'm going to ask some questions and give you some time to reflect and type your response to each one.

You can do that in two ways.

You can type it in Nearby Chat,

Or, if you took a copy of the bulletin from the binder in the back,  
The questions are listed there where we are in the service now.  
You can type your response on that notecard under each question and later share it  
back to me when you are ready.

Either works.

We've considered some of these questions before, but I think repeated reflection is  
helpful.

Please do not directly respond to what people share in chat,  
But read them prayerfully.

Any questions?

Okay, here's the first question.

1. What keeps bringing you back to First UCC SL?

Or if you are here for the first time, what brings you here today?

2. What do you see as the core values of First UCC SL?

3. What do you see as the mission of First UCC SL?

4. What gifts do we have at First UCC SL that we need to access, cultivate, or  
celebrate? How best can we make our light shine?

Lastly, take a deep breath and let it out slowly,

Opening ourselves up to the Spirit,

The God light within each of us.

One more, breathing in peace, and opening up with our exhale.

5. What does God long for from First UCC SL?

You may want to take a few more slow breaths as you consider that question listening  
deep inside.

Thank you.

And I hope that if you didn't respond in chat that you will take some time to  
reflect on these questions,

Type them in your bulletin notecard

And share it with me.

We'll be asking these questions to folks not here today,

And collecting responses all this month.

Because these questions get to how we in this community recognize and live into who  
we are:

Salt, light.

What needs our particular flavor of salt?

Who needs to see our light, and how do we make that happen?

So the next time you sprinkle salt or other seasoning on your food,

the next time you turn on a light,

let that act remind you of who you are, who we are:

salt of the earth, light of the world.

Amen.

"Let Your Little Light Shine" - Ana Hernandez

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=99&v=4DvyNGZLvB8&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=99&v=4DvyNGZLvB8&feature=emb_logo)

# SHARING THE LORD'S TABLE

(adapted from Maren Tirabassi, phono by Nancy Donovan)

Come to this table, shaken like salt;  
come to this table, tasty like salt -

for you have preserved old stories,  
and raised the blood pressures  
of those who do injustice.

Come to this table, with shining;  
but also come with your tired old batteries -

for you have illuminated joys and sorrows,  
and you have been snuffed out  
and re-lit again and again.

Come to this table salty like sweat  
from caring for the world,  
and crumpled like a bag of chips.

Come to this table, bright as a halogen headlight  
and fragile as the candle flame  
on a one-year-old birthday cake.

Come to this table because whoever you are  
you are welcome here.

We remember that Jesus came to lead followers  
to feed those who are hungry  
shelter those unhoused,  
clothe those naked,  
and comfort those afflicted.

Jesus came to lead followers  
to destroy injustices,  
lift up those who are oppressed,  
break the yokes of those victimized

and, at the same time,  
to have compassion for ourselves and others,  
and to stop pointing fingers of blame.

And we remember that Jesus  
sealed the covenant  
not in a fast of deprivation,  
but a feast of hope,  
sitting at a seder celebrating  
escape from oppression,

and claiming that the new Way  
is bread and fruit and love.

Now take the elements,  
Hold them in your hand,  
Feel their weight, as we pray.  
Spirit of Christ, shake on our lives  
the seasoning of love  
for Bread is Body  
and the Cup is poured for all.  
Shine on these gifts here and now.  
Shine on our lives today  
and give us enough for  
everyone's tomorrows.  
Amen.

For all your paths in the New Year,  
and all the light arising on your way home,  
Take this bread and eat together.  
(pause to eat)

For every meal you share with others,  
and every sip you need of hope.  
Take this cup and drink together.  
(pause to drink)

Let us pray,  
God, now that we are fed,  
we recognize how many there are  
who need a lighted lamp lifted so high  
it may take several hands to hold it,  
and who always need  
a taste of tomorrow  
and a sip of courage for it.  
For this we pray.  
Amen

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY  
Our worship is over  
Our ministry to the world is just beginning.  
Go forth and be who you are  
Salt of the earth  
light of the world  
knowing you don't go alone.  
God goes with you  
every step of the way.  
Go in peace  
come again in hope.  
Amen.



“This Little Light of Mine” – Soweto Gospel Choir  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUK0S\\_cEXY&t=116s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUK0S_cEXY&t=116s)