

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:
Today's sermon is about the breaking and repairing of relationships. This song is certainly about broken relationship—and I pray that my beloved homeland might one day have the moral and ethical fortitude to admit and repent of what we have done. Until then, we have these voices to listen to:
<https://youtu.be/E-UdB3HQmWw>, "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee" ~Indigo Girls

Indian legislations on the desk of a do-right Congressman
Now, he don't know much about the issue
So he picks up the phone and he asks advice from the
Senator out in Indian country
A darling of the energy companies who are
Ripping off what's left of the reservations. Huh.
I learned a safety rule
I don't know who to thank
Don't stand between the reservation
And the corporate bank
They'll send in federal tanks
It isn't nice but it's reality
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Deep in the Earth
Cover me with pretty lies
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee. Huh.
They got these energy companies who want the land
And they've got churches by the dozens
Want to guide our hands
And sign Mother Earth over to pollution, war and greed
Get rich... get rich quick.
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Deep in the Earth
Cover me with pretty lies
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee. Huh.
We get the federal marshals
We get the covert spies
We get the liars by the fire
And we get the FBIs
They lie in court and get nailed
And still Peltier goes off to jail
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee (eighth of the reservation)
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee (transferred it secret)
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee (of murder and intimidation)

Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
My girlfriend Annie Mae talked about uranium
Her head was filled with bullets and her body dumped
The FBI cut off her hands and told us she'd died of exposure
Loo loo loo loo loo
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Deep in the Earth
Cover me with pretty lies
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
We had the Goldrush Wars
Aw, didn't we learn to crawl
And now our history gets written in a liar's scrawl
They tell 'ya "Honey, you can still be an Indian
D-d-down at the 'Y'
On Saturday nights"
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Deep in the Earth
Cover me with pretty lies
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee.
Deep in the Earth
Cover me with pretty lies
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee

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

Matthew 5:21-37

'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement."

But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement;

and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council;

and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire.

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.

Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away;

it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.

'It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."

But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

'Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord."

But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

SERMON "Reconciliation"

Every once in a while, I run across a fact that—I was going to say "makes me feel old," but that's not true.

I _feel_ 25, and I maybe always will.

But every once in a while I run across a fact that reminds me that I have *cough cough* years of experience being 25!

And then, sometimes, I'm shocked and amused to discover that something I thought was from my childhood was actually something I was watching in reruns!

For example, I just learned that _Schoolhouse Rock!_ first hit the airwaves 50 years ago.

I don't know about you, but I learned some things from _Schoolhouse Rock!_

I learned that 3 is a magic number. I learned about how bills become laws in the United States Congress.

And I learned the function of conjunctions!

Cheryl A. Lindsay, an author who works for the United Church of Christ, tells us that "Conjunction Junction, what's your function?" is:

...an important question that our focus texts invites us to consider.

There are a series of dualistic statements that Jesus makes.

This passage is situated within the larger context of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus presents the reality, lived and hoped, of the kingdom of God on earth.

He has just introduced his sermon with the Beatitudes, a series of statements reimagining what it means to be blessed.

He continues with these dualistic statements with a particular pattern.

The first clause begins with "You have heard that it was said...", and the second clause begins with "But I say to you..."

It's the but (a conjunction!) that plays an essential role in our understanding of what Jesus means during this discourse.

"But" brings together two independent, and equal, clauses.

They stand on their own; they have a relationship.

It's not mutual, affirming, or complementary because in that case they would be connected with the conjunction "and."

The word "and" holds the two clauses together as equals that are both true.

"But" serves a different function that, at least in part, negates what precedes it by the truth of what follows it.

The first statement stands on its own, but it does not enjoy equal status with the second one.

The clause that follows maintains a higher position and exerts itself on the words that come before the "but." (Cheryl A. Lindsay, "Be Reconciled")

Now, when Jesus says "You have heard that it was said..." he is referring to Jewish Law.

It's no wonder that people got all bent out of shape about the authority Jesus claimed for himself!

Can you imagine standing up in front of a crowd—or a mob—of Bible-believing Christians and saying, "The Bible says... But _I_ say to you..."!

What is Jesus doing?

Well, Biblical scholar Warren Carter rightly points out that:

“...the six scenes in 5:21-48 are not antitheses, where Jesus quotes from the biblical tradition and then abolishes it.

Rather, he quotes the passage and interprets it.

He instructs disciples to be a reconciled community (5:21-26),

to curb male lust and power concerning adultery and divorce in a patriarchal society (5:27-32),

to speak trustworthy words (5:33-37),

to employ active,

nonviolent resistance to evil (5:38-42; Wink),

and to love neighbors and enemies (5:43-48).” (Warren Carter)

Actually—important side note: That’s right.

The teaching of Jesus isn’t “if women don’t dress modestly, they deserve it.”

It’s “if your eyes are gonna cause you to sin, rip ‘em out your head.”

Where was I?

Oh yes—at first it sounds like Jesus is making a pretty big leap in interpretation here.

But I think I’m with Cheryl A. Lindsay when she points out that the core of the Law and the core of what Jesus is teaching is the same.

That “but” has to do with a difference of execution, not substance:

“The Law was introduced to serve relationship rather than the other way around.

To the extent that they provide a moral or ethical framework, it is foremost in the acknowledgement that when we break communal commitments, harm occurs, and harm demands repair.

God’s laws are just and for the benefit of humanity that does well when boundaries and expectations are clear.

Human designed laws may create boundaries and expectations but fail to meet the standard of God’s justice when those restrictions are designed for division, privilege the powerful, and perpetuate harm of the marginalized.

God’s law had become distorted by human interpretation or lack thereof.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, exposes the limitation of taking the Law on face value alone without reasoning about its deeper and broader application and meaning.”

(Cheryl A. Lindsay)

This way of thinking about the Law—

that when we harm someone, the moral and ethical response is to do what is necessary to repair that relationship—

puts a finger on something that’s been bothering me for a long time, now: Public discourse about “Cancel Culture.”

I could seriously do a whole sermon on that topic, but this is the part that fits here:

Cancel Culture comes across as coercive, “Apologize or we will Cancel you.”

Nobody responds well to coercion!

More than that, though, Cancel Culture sometimes demands apology without forgiveness—without, in other words, caring about repairing the relationship at all. To me, that’s the difference between justice and vengeance.

I’m not dogging on Progressives here, though—Conservative voices have a tendency to froth at the mouth while screaming “Cancel Culture must stop!” when the term doesn’t

even apply—

Like when the publisher of the Dr. Seuss books took action on their own accord to repair their relationship with people of color by halting publication of the books that make direct use of stereotypes that are—in fact—racist.

That's not Cancel Culture.

That's a multinational conglomerate publishing company taking it on themselves to make an ethical and moral decision about the way they do business.

I wish all corporations were so upright.

I said before that this repairing of relationship—the \$5 word for that is “reconciliation,” by the way—is the core of both Jesus’ teaching and the Law.

And I said that the difference uplifted by that “but” is one of execution.

What I’m trying to say is that the Law outlines “if you hurt someone in this way, this is the reparation that must happen in order to be reconciled to one another.”

As Rev. Dr. Anna Case-Winters, Professor of Theology at McCormick Seminary, puts it, this teaching of Jesus:

...does so not by giving a set of prescriptions to be followed in a legalistic manner but rather examples of life oriented by the love of God and neighbor.

The living of the law of love is illumined by its application to a few “focal instances.”

In every case, the disciple is urged to follow in God’s way by doing as God does: loving without limits (5:44-45), doing justice, and being merciful (5:7) and forgiving (6:12).” (Anna Case-Winters)

Or as Cheryl A. Lindsay puts it:

“Reconciliation is a way of living...
a way of being.

When we center the relationship, the law is fulfilled.

We can heal and be healed.

We can repair and be repaired.

We can restore and be restored.

We can reconcile and be reconciled.”

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

We talk a lot about repentance and apology and reparations—but perhaps not enough about forgiveness and mercy.

<https://youtu.be/ns0-PKy3-JI>, “Mercy” ~Jacob Banks

Followed your name into the wild, yeah, yeah

Showed my shame, I ran a mile

I sing your lullaby, your melodies, like a symphony

We burn the same inside a fire

I just need a little mercy, mercy on me

I just need a little mercy, mercy on me

I drank your holy water, your liberty, your make-believe

I just need a little mercy, oh mercy on me

I played the game, I reconciled, well, well, well, well

I wear the blame like a suit and tie

I sing your lullaby, your melodies, like a symphony
We fall the same when we walk the wire
I just need a little mercy, mercy on me
I just need a little mercy, mercy on me
I drank your holy water, your liberty, your make-believe
I just need a little mercy, oh mercy on me
I keep growing and
You keep tearing me down, oh
I keep growing and
You keep tearing me down, oh
I just need a little mercy, mercy on me
I just need a little mercy, mercy on me
I drank your holy water, your liberty, your make-believe

I just need a little mercy, oh mercy on me
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 this time between seasonal markings, in the time when our daylight is shifting again, O God, may we remember that Your steadfast love endures forever.
When sometimes our lives can become monotonous,

when the daily schedules repeat,
or when difficulties such as Covid and other severe illness continue to interrupt
our lives in a way that seems never ending,
when hardships fall one after another—
may You surprise us, like a mustard seed.
May Your scripture open to us a new understanding.
May the kindness and compassion of a neighbor or stranger remind us of Your
goodness.
May some small piece of good news break open our hearts when we despair.
May we find You in the little things, and may we know that we will get through this
time, though it is difficult now.
May we trust in You.
May we also be reminded, O God who listens and takes notice, to reach out to others
when we are struggling.
May we be reminded of the pastors, teachers, parents, social workers, mental health
professionals, and others who are here for us.
May we know that we are never truly alone, and You will help guide us.
Help us to seek You, and to seek one another, especially in times of need.
In Jesus' name 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:

Ok, ok, I know. I know! This earworm has been plaguing you ever since the sermon.
Here you go, I hope this helps!
<https://youtu.be/LjdCFat9rjI>, "Conjunction Junction" ~Schoolhouse Rock

Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up words and phrases and clauses.
Conjunction Junction, how's that function?
I got three favorite cars
That get most of my job done.
Conjunction Junction, what's their function?
I got "and", "but", and "or",
They'll get you pretty far.
[spoken] "And":
That's an additive, like "this and that".
"But":
That's sort of the opposite,
"Not this but that".
And then there's "or":
O-R, when you have a choice like

"This or that".
"And", "but", and "or",
Get you pretty far.
[sung] Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up two boxcars and making 'em run right.
Milk and honey, bread and butter, peas and rice.
Hey that's nice!
Dirty but happy, digging and scratching,
Losing your shoe and a button or two.
He's poor but honest, sad but true,
Boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up two cars to one
When you say something like this choice:
"Either now or later"
Or no choice:
"Neither now nor ever"
Hey that's clever!
Eat this or that, grow thin or fat,
Never mind, I wouldn't do that,
I'm fat enough now!
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up phrases and clauses that balance, like:
Out of the frying pan and into the fire.
He cut loose the sandbags,
But the balloon wouldn't go any higher.
Let's go up to the mountains,
Or down to the seas.
You should always say "thank you",
Or at least say "please".
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up words and phrases and clauses
In complex sentences like:
[spoken] In the mornings, when I'm usually wide awake, I love to take a walk through
the gardens and down by the lake, where I often see a duck and a drake, and I
wonder, as I walk by, just what they'd say if they could speak, although I know
that's an absurd thought.
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
Hooking up cars and making 'em function.
Conjunction Junction, how's that function?
I like tying up words and phrases and clauses.
Conjunction Junction, watch that function.
I'm going to get you there if you're very careful.
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
I'm going to get you there if you're very careful.
Conjunction Junction, what's your function?
I'm going to get you there if you're very careful.

end