

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.

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.

Today's service will be a combination of Lectio Divina, which are the written meditation writings that Pastor Kris had set up for our morning gatherings.

We begin our Lent Season reflecting on these words, while listening to some music.

I will invite you to think about the words that speak to you or catches your attention and share with us while a song plays.

As we begin our Lent season let us pause today to meditate, share in community what comes up and prepare our hearts for this season.

So now,
let us open our heart up to God,

remembering that where two or three are gathered
God is there.

OPENING WORDS

[as candle is lit]

We light a light
in the name of the God who creates life,
in the name of the Savior who loves life,
in the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.

Be still and open yourself to God's presence within and all around.

GATHERING MUSIC

Hold the rain- Consumed by Fire
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrJRejrrQ8M>

SCRIPTURE - MATTHES 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the desert wilderness
to be tested by the devil.

He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished

INTRODUCTION by Rev. Irv Porter (excerpt)

My Indigenous heritage comes from the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and the T'hono O'dham (Papago) of southern Arizona through my father and from the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce) of north-central Idaho.

Having grown up in Phoenix, Arizona, I can speak to the experience, a bit, about the desert (wilderness).

Contrary to the biblical narrative, the desert is only a wilderness unless you don't know where you are going or what provisions you should take along with you.

It therefore strikes me as awkward that the Son of God is being seen as "wandering" or that "fasting" equals somehow starving and about to drop dead.

Indigenous peoples of the American southwest wouldn't have, nor do they now, see their environment as "wilderness", something to be afraid of or avoided.

It is their homeland. It has been for thousands of years.

The Bible connects fasting to prayer, but it is not just sacrificing food; it includes prayer, repentance, and heart-searching.

It had to be done for the right reasons and in the right way.

Jesus taught that there is a right way to fast and a wrong way.

Matthew 6 tells us that fasting can be a form of religious hypocrisy, like giving to the poor and conspicuous praying.

He condemns fasting that is done with the intention to be seen as "holier than thou", action done so all may see.

The true fasting should be done in silence.

Lent is a challenge, and many of us don't like change.

We don't like challenges to our status-quo.

My wife and I have used the same cell phone company since 2001, have lived in our home for fifteen-years and though we are on our third and fourth dogs, we continue to make sure they are cocker spaniels. We can be predictable, I suppose, but we like things as they are. The world is changing. Society is changing. And so have we. New directions for the ministries we are involved with occur regularly and we both adapt and see God's wisdom within it all. We are surprised to see where God shows up. And one thing we are all clear about is that we are challenged to live into the unknown, to continue sitting at the feet of Jesus and to discern his directions in our lives.

You see, only God knows what this year's Lenten journey will bring us. But there is a promise he makes: That he will sit with us, walk with us and if need-be, carry us when we just can't seem to go another step. But God also makes a very important promise too: God will never leave us alone. I have been there, and God has been there too. Through the voices of others and through his presence in my life. God's love, presence, and faith in us is true. Our Lenten journey begins. I am thankful for it because once again I am reminded that we never walk alone. Thanks be to God.

While this next song plays, you are invited to share anything that arose in you or that resonated with you from the reflection by typing it in Nearby Chat.

Yo-Yo Ma performs "Ave Maria" at Notre-Dame de Paris
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7mVSwPmlh4&t=7s>

Thank you for sharing with us the words that spoke to you.
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.

Crowder, Dante Bowe - God Really Loves Us
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG-Y9bWlCw8>

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God our Helper, we thank you for keeping our lives always in your care and protection and pray for any and all who are in harm's way.

For those walking in the midst of danger....
For those who are treading a slippery path...
For those who are exhausted and seeking relief...
For those who face a mountain of worry or debt or any other obstacles...
Be Guardian and Guide, we pray, setting all our feet
on your path of righteousness and peace.

We pray for those who are struggling with a new challenge or call, with a major transition in life or livelihood....
with their faith and understanding....with grief, ancient or new...

Keep in your tender care and mercy, O God,
those who are sick in mind, body or spirit..
those weighted down by depression or pain....
those recuperating from surgery or an accident...
Protect not only us and those we love, but also
the whole wide world you so love.

O Holy-One-of-Those in the Margins....
hear our prayers those voice here today
Those spoke only in the depths of our hearts
those for which we have no words
We lift them all to you

Where hope has grown tired and thin, lift our sights,
so that we may see hope beyond hope,
life beyond death,
and you, lifted up before us.
In the name of Christ,
who gave himself in love for us all, we pray.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go forth knowing you are free from condemnation,
free to question and seek, knowing God's love
surrounds you in both the good days and bad.
You are not alone!

Blessings on your journey!

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Jireh | Elevation Worship & Maverick City

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC-zw0zCCtg>