

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:

In today's sermon, I reference a particular historical mystery. This video will give you a feel for it:

<https://youtu.be/eilFp0FhiI0>, "The Disappearance of Flight 19" ~National Geographic

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

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded.

They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

The people quarreled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.'

Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?'

But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?'

So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people?'

They are almost ready to stone me.'

The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.

Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.'

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

John 4:5-26

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?'

Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?'

Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.'

The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.'

Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is

true!’

The woman said to him, ‘Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’

The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ).

‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’

Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’

SERMON "Trust and Water"

Have you ever given much thought to water?

Here in my beloved homeland it’s usually easy and simple to come by; simply turn on the tap. So chances are that none of us here tonight have ever actually needed to pay special attention to water.

But it is not always so. Just ask the people of Flint, Michigan. Or do some research on the Wyoming Range War that occurred during the late 1800’s.

My point is this: It is very easy to overlook the importance of water in the two stories we’re focusing on today—but we shouldn’t.

Both stories talk about Life and Death—and not at all in the abstract.

Today scholars are unsure exactly where Rephidim was, but we know from the text that it was somewhere there was no water for the people to drink.

As the UCC’s Minister for Worship and Theology, the Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay, puts it:

“They have reached a dry place.

It’s curious that in this sojourn, they do not follow waterways closely until they reach their destination.

In this part of the earth, the terrain varies from lush, verdant landscapes to arid deserts.

Water, as an element essential to life, is only surpassed by air when it comes to our constant and consistent need of it for survival.

One can go for weeks without food, but only days without water.

The request for water is not an unreasonable demand.”

I’m reminded of the final voice recordings of the members of Flight 19, the Navy training mission—navigation training, believe it or not—that mysteriously disappeared and helped give rise to the mythology of the Bermuda Triangle.

For the record, I believe that there are elements of our universe that we do not understand yet and therefore experience as supernatural—but I do not believe that the disappearance of Flight 19 fits that description.

This is not a sermon about the Bermuda Triangle!

But I am drawn to the very human emotions I hear in those recordings, as the leader of the flight became completely confused and lost and arguments break out regarding the direction they should be heading in.

I’m struck by the sheer frustration in the voices that say, “Damn it! If we just fly west we would get home” and “Hold it. Head west, damn it!”

It's not a bad metaphor, actually, to think of the Sinai wilderness the same way that you might think about the Bermuda Triangle— if you go the wrong way and get lost, you might disappear, never to be seen again. I do not blame those other pilots for being afraid, frustrated and angry. I do not blame them for arguing.

And I do not blame the Hebrew People for being afraid, frustrated and angry. I do not blame them for quarrelling and testing.

But I don't blame Moses for his response, either. Rev. Dr. Lindsay describes it in terms of a Trust Walk:

"A trust walk is ultimately a test.

On the surface, it seems to measure our ability to lead on the one hand and to follow on the other.

The leader is charged with providing good instruction and setting the pace and path.

The follower needs good listening skills, enough imagination to move towards a vision they cannot see or fully know and communication skills to provide feedback or ask clarifying questions.

In this grand, communal trust walk toward the promised land, there are more than two parties, which only amplifies the challenges toward trust and progress.

The ultimate guide is the Holy One, who engages Moses as their intermediary but also has his own trust walk as the human leader of this movement.

The people follow Moses, who has instructions to impart but knows the end destination no more than they do.

It should not be surprising when these moments of tension arise on the journey.

If it's not easy to follow someone who knows the final destination, how much more difficult is it to trust the leader who does not know where they are going?

As a result of the peculiarity of this triangular relationship, the tension plays out in interesting ways.

The people have no choice but to go through Moses with their feedback and questioning.

It cannot have been easy for Moses to navigate his particular position, he's both leader and follower in this scenario.

He has questions and is being questioned.

He received their feedback—demands and doubts—as complaint.

After all they had been through together, how could he help but take it personally?"

At first glance, only the presence of water connects that story to the one of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Jesus asks her for what he needs—water, and she questions him. But not for the same reasons.

You see, she must have thoroughly been an outcast in that situation.

First of all, the Samaritans and the Jewish people fought as only very close siblings can—tooth and nail!

The parenthetical statement in the text, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans," is a fantastic understatement.

More than that, though, she must have been an outcast among her own people, too.

Our first evidence of this was her presence at the well, drawing water in the hottest part of the day—instead of in the morning alongside everyone else.

Secondly, there's her marital history, including currently being with a man who is not her husband!

Such things simply weren't done.

Then there's this wonderful back-and-forth where Jesus is speaking metaphorically and she is responding literally—it's actually a pretty funny passage, if you read it right.

I can hear amusement in Jesus' voice as he says, "What you say is true!" can't you? So in the end, what really strikes me about this passage is the way Jesus maintains what Chaplains refer to as a "non-judgmental presence."

Jesus knows all of her dirty little secrets. But he doesn't judge her for them. Not once.

Instead, he meets her where she is and reveals himself to her in ways that he doesn't reveal himself to his own disciples until much later in his earthly story. And here, finally, we find a more important similarity between our two texts for the day:

"Through their conversation, she begins to question Jesus who responds without hesitation or condemnation.

Interestingly, when the Holy One responds to Moses' presentation of the people's complaint, condemnation and correction are also absent.

The Holy One meets the need, responds to the request, and simply takes the test. Are you with us, God, or not?

Both these texts present tests to God where there is really only one question. Are you with us, my people, and me?

In both, we observe God taking the test without affront.

God knows they are going to pass the test...and the testing leads to trusting.

Faith asks us to believe in what we cannot observe, but trust is built by experience.

Jesus does not ask his disciples to believe in him, he asks them to walk with him without knowing the ultimate destination but to trust him as guide." (Lindsay)

I pray that you, too, are able to express your emotions to God, even when they are fear and frustration.

I pray that you are willing to test and to quarrel, if you need to.

I pray that you have faith_and_ build trust.

And I pray that you know that God will not judge you for it.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

It can be very difficult to question, especially in the face of opposition, it can be very difficult indeed.

And it can be very difficult to trust.

This song is very much about those difficulties.

https://youtu.be/8oEP8ZIo_jk, "All My Children Of The Son" ~Tim Robbins

All my children of the sun
The navigator said to the engineer
I think our radio's dead
I can hear but I can't send
And there's bad weather up ahead
The pilot said to the co-pilot
Our right engine's gone
But if we can make it over these mountains
Perhaps I can set her down

All my children of the sun
Five hundred miles from nowhere
We belly landed on a river
We bid a quick goodbye
To that ship of silver
Twenty-five piled out the window
Twenty reached the shore
We turned to see our metal bird
Sink to rise no more
All my children of the sun
We found some floating logs
We found some sharp stones
We cut some vines and made a raft
It was our only hope
The navigator said he thought there was
A town somewhere downstream
So now each man tried his best
To paddle as a team
All except one young guy
Who kept arguing with the navigator
He said he'd read about a waterfall
We would come to sooner or later
At a river's bend he persuaded us
To bring our raft to beach
But a search party found the river smooth
As far as eye could reach
All my children of the sun
Once again he persuaded us to stop
We cursed at the delay
Once again we found the river
Flowing on the same old way
We said, "Shut up your arguing
You give us all a pain
Why don't you pitch in and do your part
Be constructive for a change?"
All my children of the sun
Still egghead kept on talking
In the same long winded way
We said, "If you won't paddle
Get the hell out of our way"
We told him to go sit
Far back at the stern
Then we strained to paddle harder
And then the river made a turn
All my children of the sun
One paddler heard sound of tapping
And what he saw, when he did turn
Was egghead with a sharp stone
Cutting the vines that bound the stern
With a cry of rage the paddler

Leaped up to his feet
He swung his long pole
Knocked egghead into the deep
But now the logs were splaying out
The raft had come unbound
Like mad we paddled for the shore
Before we all would drown
All my children of the sun
A search party went out to find more vines
To tie the raft up tight
In twenty minutes they returned
Their faces pale with fright
They said a quarter mile down the river
We found a waterfall
It's over a hundred feet in height
It could have killed us all
All my children of the sun
And that is why on the banks
Of a far off wilderness stream
Which none of us, none of us
Will ever see again
There stands a cross for someone
Hardly older than a boy
Who we thought was only
Trying to destroy
All my children of the sun

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

Holy Spirit, fall afresh on us.

Fill us, renew us, mold us and shape us into who You need us to be.

Help us to let go of the ways this world confines us, so that we might be free in You to love, care, and lift up one another.

Holy Spirit, inspire us when the well is dry.

Care for us when we cannot rise again.

Empower us to rise up, and to keep rising when we fall down again.

As we are reminded from scripture, from the beginning to the end, You breathed life into us and formed us into a community of faith.

We are not on this journey alone.

Refresh us, Loving Spirit, and remind us that You are with us, now and always, and we have one another.

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:

Here's a song about trust. Please imagine what it might mean if God were singing it to you tonight.

<https://youtu.be/4JNtAtGGNRU>, "Count On Me" ~Bruno Mars

Oh-oh

If you ever find yourself stuck in the middle of the sea

I'll sail the world to find you

If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see

I'll be the light to guide you

We'll find out what we're made of

When we are called to help our friends in need

You can count on me like one, two, three

I'll be there

And I know when I need it, I can count on you like four, three, two

And you'll be there

'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do, oh, yeah

Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh

Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, ooh, yeah, yeah
If you tossin' and you're turnin' and you just can't fall asleep
I'll sing a song beside you
And if you ever forget how much you really mean to me
Every day I will remind you, oh
We'll find out what we're made of
When we are called to help our friends in need
You can count on me like one, two, three
I'll be there
And I know when I need it, I can count on you like four, three, two
And you'll be there
'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do, oh, yeah
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, ooh, yeah, yeah
You'll always have my shoulder when you cry
I'll never let go, never say goodbye
You know
You can count on me like one, two, three
I'll be there
And I know when I need it I can count on you like four, three, two
And you'll be there
'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do, oh, yeah
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh
Ooh-ooh-ooh-ooh, ooh
You can count on me 'cause I can count on you

end