

WELCOME

Grace and peace be with you my friends and familia on this lovely Sunday!

Thank you for coming!

Welcome to First United Church of Christ and Conference Center in second life.

My name is Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

One of the most exciting things for me to share is that we are a real life church with real life standing in the Eastern Association; Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC).

We are connected through a network that is vast and wide sharing a message of radical inclusion, hope and love.
You are welcome here, and no matter who you are or where you are in your life journey you are welcome here!

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

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.

This month of May we have been exploring the theme of Being...

Be....Connected.

Be...Curious

and next week,

Be...Celebrated.

Today's theme is about being curious.

I have invited our Pastors to join us today for an open Mic session.

We will take turns responding to your curiosity.

As we go on today with our service I will invite you to send a note card to Doug or

you can type them in the nearby chat after the sermon.

So Invite you my friends to join me as we start with an invocation and a prayer.

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this digital place with your presence touching the homes, places and locations where our worship service is being seen, or heard.

Connect your presence through the digital waves infused with your love and covered with your peace.

We pray in your many names. Amen.

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

GATHERING MUSIC

Mr. Curiosity

Song by Jason Mraz

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_vjukuc694

SCRIPTURE

A reading from the book of Mark chapter 8:27-30 (NRSV)

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON - Be Curious

Be Curious -

What does it mean to be curious?

The dictionary talks about curiosity as being eager to learn something.

A strange, unusual, overwhelming desire to learn about something.

Curiosity for me is like pulling on a thread on a fabric.

You find that one small thread to grab and you pull it out and you keep pulling.

But not everyone likes curious people.

Being curious can be seen by some folks as being nosy.

Being curious can be good or not so good.

In the church being curious can be seen by religious people as lacking faith.

As a young evangelical I got in so much trouble when I started to ask questions.

But "why is there hell?"

But “why do some people heal, and some don’t?”

But “why did the disciples perform miracles, and we can’t?”

My questions were often met with these words, “Have Faith! For without faith, it is impossible to please God.”

But “why is God not pleased if I’m simply asking to know more about the divine?”

Asking questions in the church might not always be encouraged by elders, or Pastors. But not here. A few weeks ago, I encouraged everyone in attendance to think about a question you had for the Pastors here.

If we believe that God is still speaking and that we are here to learn together, then we must encourage questions.

Now, I am not saying to be rude and to interrupt.

Or be a hackler and yell at a Pastor in a church building during a worship service from the audience, that will freak people out.

Nope.

I am talking about being invited to ask a question when the floor is open for such a thing.

And if the floor is never open as it happens to be in many churches.

Then, ask to see someone or to meet for coffee and then ask if you can have a conversation.

Say something like, I was wondering about the sermon, can we talk later about it? Be curious.

Write, and ask.

Connect through chat, email, phone, or send a pigeon to deliver your question, but ask.

In a Bible study, ask.

Asking might not always lead to the answer you want. It can be like the thread on the fabric, it leads to more and more and more questions.

We might not have all the answers, but we can always come back to you after doing some research and then respond.

Some questions might require patience or several conversations.

This is how a healthy dialogue goes.

A conversation that is based on respect, integrity, compassion, and wonder.

In the gospels we see Jesus showing his disciples different ways of healing, teaching in parables and telling stories. Nothing was ever as simple as it seemed.

The gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are all similar in some ways and different in others.

Similar stories are told in Mathew, Mark and Luke with more information added to some and less to others.

According to the Rev. Martin B. Copenhaver, Jesus asks in the four gospels 307 questions.

But he was asked only 183 questions.

Among some of the questions the disciples asked were:

Teacher, who sin?

Teacher, who is good?

While other questions Jesus was asking directly at the people coming at him.

To a blind man, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Seems to me like Jesus is always looking for a way to make us think.

Seems to me that Jesus liked to send people on a quest, a search, a deeper understanding by telling stories, or reversing the question.

To Peter in our scripture reading he asks, “Who do they say I am?”

But was it in an angry tone, "WHO DO THEY SAY I AM?!"
I demand to know what they are saying about me! Are they throwing shade?
Or was it comical, "ah come on Peter, who do they say I am?" nudge Peter in the arm.
When Jesus asks questions, does he do it to prove a point or to transform someone's thinking, living, or way of being in the world?
Now one of the most powerful questions that Jesus asked was to God while he was on the cross.
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)
Friends, how many of us have asked this of God ourselves?
Some questions we ask might not have an obvious response.
But that is okay.
God is not angry when we need to ask, "Why this is happening to me?!"
Being curious is something that kids know how to do so well.
They have this awe and wonder of things around them.
Why is the sky blue?
Little ones have this curious desire to learn.
I wonder at what age did we lose that? And why?
Now, while reading and searching on the subject surrounding asking questions in Biblical times, I found several websites, and books that said that Jewish Rabbis, or teachers ask questions from their students because it is in the rabbinic Jewish tradition.
I wish they would have told that to my grandmother growing up.
But I have a feeling she would have said, but we are not Jewish.
I would ask a question like, but grandma why?
Could you guess the response?
Because I said so! I find myself doing that at times.
I have corrected that and tried a different approach when I ask the six-year-old at home to do something.
"Why would you not want to take a bath? Why would you want to go to sleep itchy and stinky?"
I'm still working on the methods on my new alternative ways to respond "because I said so."
When Jesus asked Peter, who do they say I am, he was looking to learn from the disciples if they had figured out who was walking among them.
The crowds that followed Jesus around were amazed by these miracles, "who is this guy?"
The disciples had heard all kinds of responses to this particular question.
Some say you are John the Baptist.
Now friends when they are saying this in this scripture it's because by this time John the Baptist had been beheaded by Herod.
So, when they say John the Baptist they are saying, "he got up from the death and your it!"
They say John was resurrected and that is why you have all these powers.
Who do you say I am?
Others said Elijah, a prophet who has been gone and is making a comeback.
The confession that Peter has on behalf of the group is that he is the messiah, the christos, the one and only from the lineage of David who will restore Israel as a nation, as a powerful religion, as a warrior coming to free them all from the Romans.
But the liberator would liberate them in an unexpected way.

But who do you say I am?

Jesus was asking for their own opinion, not what everyone else was thinking or saying.

See it turned out that this Jesus was so different.

Jesus redefined the title of savior.

Jesus redefines what being a messiah meant.

Jesus redefines what being liberated means.

Who do you say I am?

How do we re-define all we have learned when it comes to God?

Friends, being a Christ follower turns out does not have to be done in a specific way.

There is no map or book that tells you exactly how to behave and be.

I mean sure, be kind, love your neighbor, love mercy and other things we call fruits of the spirit.

But how do you do all these things?

What is modus operandi? What is the way to do things?

My friend, it is up to you.

I'm a creative creature. I love to joke around and have fun.

I'm a comedian at times getting in trouble for over doing it, especially when I'm nervous.

But when it comes to God and Jesus, I was told I had to be serious, long faced, sacred, Holy, not one to be "reproached."

In gender norms, I was to be a virtuous woman, the first to rise and the last to sleep making sure all are taken care of and served.

I was to learn in silence, never question the man, men, even boys who were to be above girls. I was to be submissive, and quiet.

Well, as a gender nonconform individual you might have guessed that box did not fit me well.

So, when I was told that God loved me and was asking me, who do you say I am?

I said, " Christ, who came to liberate me and love me unconditionally."

That statement is free from the dogma, the rules that said a gender is a boxed creature.

I was free to be me.

Friends the Holy-One-of-those-in-the-margins wanted from me to be who I was created to be, a funny and creative creature.

So today, friends I ask you, who do you say he is?

And what does that mean to you?

What are some questions that are in your mind today that we as Pastors can open the floor to respond to?

I will turn over to brother Doug to ask away.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEOPLE

We have come to this time of prayers.

A time where are are reminded that we are community that believes in holding each other in prayer.

The scripture says that in everything we do we shall pray without ceasing and Aretha Franklin could not have explained it any better than with this song "I Say A Little Prayer."

So as this song plays I invite you to type in your prayer request in the chat box.

Aretha Franklin - I Say A Little Prayer
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDyiREoBw0o>

Holy-One- I need strength in my faith
To make the mountains move.
I believe you are with me even when I ask and ask many questions about you.
Help me Almighty to take my faith in you seriously but not the way I show my devotion.
Remind us o Holy-One to play, to dance, to rejoice as a follower of the one who redefine salvation, and liberation.

Holy-One 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

Holy-One, let us not be afraid of opinion, nor of failure.
Let us not run from sorrow or grief,
but let us stand with you,
beside our friends in their hour of need.
I pray and trust in your Holy name.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Let us go forth from this place into the world to find yourself; a cause you can live for; and a love you can live into.
May the grace of the one who calls us to be curious, and live life abundantly be with you!

Now, let us dance with some Santana and find joy!

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Santana, Chris Stapleton - Joy (Official Music Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6rkBfTbDKU

Thank you for coming!