

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.

During the opening piece, please feel free to make any Announcements for the good of the community.

And 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:

Happy Pride Month, everyone! I want to start worship today with a song that encapsulates the pressure of systemic injustice and the need to get out from underneath it.

Truth be told, it makes you want to scream.

(Note: This song contains adult words. But they are the right words.)

<https://youtu.be/0P4A1K4lXDo>, "Scream" ~Michael Jackson & Janet Jackson

I'm tired of the injustice

I'm tired of the schemes

Your lies are disgusting

So what does it mean, damn it

Kickin' me down

I got to get up

As jacked as it sounds

The whole system sucks, damn it

Peek in the shadow

Come into the light

You tell me I'm wrong

Then you better prove you're right

You're selling out souls

But I, I care about mine

I've got to get stronger

And I won't give up the fight

With such confusion, don't it make you want to scream? (Make you want to scream)

Your bash abusin' victimize within the scheme

You try to cope with every lie they scrutinize

Somebody please have mercy

'Cause I just can't take it

Stop pressuring me

Just stop pressuring me

Stop pressuring me

Make me want to scream

Stop pressuring me

Just stop pressuring me (you just stop, baby)

Stop pressuring me

Make me want to scream (you just, you just)

I'm tired of you tellin' (tellin')

The story your way (story your way)

You're causin' confusion (confusion)

You think it's okay, damn it
You keep changin' the rules
While I, I keep playing the game
I can't take it much longer
I think I might go insane
Ah, baby
With such confusion, don't it make you want to scream? (Make you want to scream)
Your bash abusin' victimize within the scheme
You find your pleasure scandalizing every lie
Oh Father, please have mercy, 'cause I just can't take it
Stop pressuring me (stop the pressure)
Just stop pressuring me
Stop pressuring me
Make me want to scream
Stop pressuring me (stop the pre-)
Just stop pressuring me (stop the pressure)
Stop fuckin' with me
Make me want to scream
Oh my God, can't believe what I saw as I turned on the TV this evening
I was disgusted by all the injustice
All the injustice (all the injustice)
Yeah, yeah
Baby (whoa)
With such collusions, don't it make you want to scream? (Make you want to scream)
Your bash abusin' victimize within the scheme (make you want to scream)
You try to cope with every lie they scrutinize
Oh brother, please have mercy, 'cause I just can't take it
Stop pressuring me (stop the pre-)
Just stop pressuring me (stop your pressure)
Stop pressuring me
Make me want to scream
Stop pressuring me (stop the pre-)
Just stop pressuring me (stop the pressure)
Stop pressuring me (you did it, you did it)
Make me want to scream (you did it, baby)
Stop pressuring me (just don't do it)
Just stop pressuring me (stop the pressure)
Stop pressuring me
Make me want to scream
Stop pressuring me (let me show you what)
Just stop pressuring me (stop the, stop the)
Stop pressuring me
Make me want to scream (stop your pressure)

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Most churches have a time of offering.
Making an offering, sharing what you can in God's name, is a spiritual practice.
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.

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."

SCRIPTURE

John 8:2-11

Early in the morning he came again to the temple.

All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him,

'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.

Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women.

Now what do you say?'

They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them,

'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'

And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.

When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders;

and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Jesus straightened up and said to her,
'Woman, where are they?
Has no one condemned you?'
She said, 'No one, sir.'
And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you.
Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

John 10:7-10

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.
All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate.

Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

SERMON "Sin-A Pride Sermon"

Happy Pride, everyone! I don't know about you, but I love Pride Month.

The color, the celebration, the sheer joy of being out—if you've never been in a closet, it is hard to understand the profound sense of well-being and freedom of coming out.

But if you have a shred of empathy, you can see it!

It is easy to understand Pride Month in this simple, human way, but what about theologically?

What does it mean to be a Christian who celebrates Pride?

As I asked myself this question and set about answering it, I discovered Fr. Shannon TL Kearns—he is the first openly transgender man ordained to the Old Catholic priesthood. ("Old Catholics" are any number of groups who split off from the Roman Catholic Church after the First Vatican council of 1869-1870.)

He points out that in the conservative rural church of his upbringing, pride was very serious sin:

"Growing up pride felt like the worst of all of the sins.

Well, I mean, other than the sins that involved _whispers_ sex and bodies.

Pride was the worst of the sins that we felt that good Christians were capable of.

Pride was the one we were warned about.

Don't be too big for your britches.

Don't get a big head.

Don't forget your place.

God wants you to be humble.

God wants you to give the glory to Him (again, in these situations, God is always Him)."

(You can read the entire piece here:

<https://www.queertheology.com/the-sin-of-pride/>)

And he's right, it was all too easy for me to Google "Pride scriptures" and immediately find a list with the heading, "God Hates Pride!"

Proverbs 11:2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace;

but wisdom is with the humble.

Proverbs 16:18-19

Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.
It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Can you imagine growing up steeped in that culture and then coming out of the closet and entering a community for which Pride is a key component?

Fr. Kearns writes that "...it was pretty complicated when I came out and there was this whole movement about being "proud" of your identity.

Good Christians aren't allowed to be proud.

And of course, that's what the anti-gay folks will harp on:

Look at these homosexuals being PROUD of their sin!

They are flaunting their identity!

They are proud to spit in the face of God!"

Fr. Kearns is not being hyperbolic, here. Those are all things that have been said about the queer community by some of the loudest Christian voices in my beloved homeland.

And the scripture backs them up.

Or does it?

I'm reminded of Jesus' instruction, "Do not judge," and the story with which we started today.

The one where Jesus forces the crowd to do some honest self-reflection before they condemn someone for breaking the law.

I love the image of Jesus in that story, by the way, not even looking at the mob that surrounds him and tries to back him into a corner.

They think they're giving him an ultimatum—follow the Law and sign off on her death, or show her mercy.

As usual, Jesus finds a third option. He simply says, "Whoever is without sin may hit her first." And then he doodles! He just... looks at the ground and doodles in the dirt, and he waits!

Can't you just see the crowd slinking off one-by-one?

Even in this case, where she was literally caught in the act of breaking a Law for which execution is this stated punishment, Jesus refused to condemn.

What then, should "good Christians" do? What should they say?

Also... when the scriptures speak against the sin of pride, what exactly is the sin they are referring to?

Fr. Kearns asserts that:

"...the Bible is talking about people who lord their station over others.

People who are oppressors and tyrants.

People who think they speak for God.

The Bible is talking about people who are cruel to others, who sow dissension, who don't act in the best interest of the community.

It isn't talking about people with a healthy self-definition.

People who understand that God has made them special and good.

People who understand that God has given them gifts to be used for the good of the community.

When queer and trans folks talk about being proud we're talking about our pleasure

in being able to be who we are.
We're talking about being glad that we had the courage to come out.
We're talking about the joy of surviving a hostile world.
And yes, we're talking about being proud to claim our identities in the midst of a world that is constantly telling us we are less than.
But this isn't the sinful pride of oppressors and tyrants (those crying about baking cakes and gay marriage notwithstanding).
This isn't the pride of speaking for God.
This isn't the pride of using your wealth to hold yourself up and pushing the poor toward deeper poverty."

My first instinct was to start off the next sentence with the words, "There's a fine line between..."

I want to say that there's a fine line between the opposite of pride—humbleness—and the actual lived experience of queer folk living in the shadow of "Don't be too big for your britches.

Don't get a big head.

Don't forget your place.

Look at these homosexuals being PROUD of their sin!

They are flaunting their identity!

They are proud to spit in the face of God!"

I want to say that there's a fine line between humbleness and humiliation, and there is—but that shadow overruns that line, wouldn't you say?

It's not subtle.

Again, Fr. Kearns says it beautifully when he writes:

"What I was really being taught, over and over and over again, was to be ashamed.

For taking up too much space, for daring to be a leader, for asking questions.

For looking different, for loving who I loved, for using the gifts I had been given.

The way we were taught about pride was as if to make its opposite humility.

But we weren't being taught to be humble, we were being taught to be humiliated.

These Christians didn't just want queer and trans folks to not be proud (as in haughty and stuck up) they wanted us to be ashamed.

Because ashamed people are easier to control.

They are easier to keep in their place.

They are easier to push to the side.

People who are ashamed hide.

They sometimes engage in risky behavior.

They sometimes hurt themselves.

And the anti-gay folks would hold up that hiding as evidence of how sick and sinful being queer and trans is instead of realizing that these actions were symptoms of shame.

They were symptoms of a disease that was being pushed on us by those very anti-gay people.

But people who have a healthy sense of self, who can stand in their own identity especially in the face of hatred, those people are dangerous.

Those people fight to protect themselves and their communities.

Those people feel that they are deserving of rights.

Those people will unite and work to get those rights.

You can see why this terrifies the oppressors.

Because when people claim their space in the world, suddenly the oppressor feels their hold slipping a little bit.
When queer and trans folks walk through the streets proclaiming their identity; that they and their bodies and their desires are good, the people who are afraid of that get a little more afraid because they see their power slipping.
They see that queer and trans folks aren't just going to go away.
They aren't going to hide anymore.
They aren't going to allow themselves to be sent to conversion camps or hide their relationships or not transition.
When people stand up and say "We will no longer be humiliated" this isn't a sin.
It's actually fulfilling what Jesus said his mission was:
"That they will have abundant life."
When queer and trans people say that we are proud of who we are we are claiming that abundant life and living it to the full.
So go out there and be proud.
Claim your identity. Live into the fullness of the gifts that God has given you.
This isn't a sin, it's salvation."

I say, "Amen!"
What do you say?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

<https://youtu.be/hdw1uKiTI5c>, "Rise" ~Katy Perry

I won't just survive
Oh, you will see me thrive
Can't write my story
I'm beyond the archetype
I won't just conform
No matter how you shake my core
'Cause my roots, they run deep, oh
Oh, ye of so little faith
Don't doubt it, don't doubt it
Victory is in my veins
I know it, I know it
And I will not negotiate
I'll fight it, I'll fight it
I will transform
When, when the fire's at my feet again
And the vultures all start circling
They're whispering, "You're out of time"
But still, I rise
This is no mistake, no accident
When you think the final nail is in, think again
Don't be surprised, I will still rise
I must stay conscious
Through the madness and chaos
So I call on my angels
They say...
Oh, ye of so little faith
Don't doubt it, don't doubt it

Victory is in your veins
You know it, you know it
And you will not negotiate
Just fight it, just fight it
And be transformed
'Cause when, when the fire's at my feet again
And the vultures all start circling
They're whispering, "You're out of time"
But still, I rise
This is no mistake, no accident
When you think the final nail is in, think again
Don't be surprised, I will still rise
Don't doubt it, don't doubt it
Oh, oh, oh, oh
You know it, you know it
Still rise
Just fight it, just fight it
Don't be surprised, I will still rise

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: Prayer for Father's Day

Abba God, we come to You on this day knowing that it may be a difficult day, for those who are missing their fathers and for those who have difficult relationships,

for those who are estranged and for those who never knew their fathers.

We thank You for those fathers who demonstrate Your love, and for stepdads, uncles, coaches, grandpas, teachers and neighbors.

We thank You that we know Your love like a father to Jesus Christ, who called You "Abba."

Abba God, may we know Your love surpasses our human understanding and that You are beyond gender, but You love us, Your children, far beyond what we can comprehend or imagine.

Abba God, may we draw closer to You, to abide in You as Jesus abides in us, and it is in Your Son's name that 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:

All I want—for myself and for all of you—is to be free to be yourself; at home, in SL, in public, in all of the worlds you sojourn.

This song rocks that feel righteously!

<https://youtu.be/8gFCW3PHBws>, "I Don't Want To Be" ~Gavin DeGraw

I don't need to be anything other

Than a prison guard's son

I don't need to be anything other

Than a specialist's son

I don't have to be anyone other

Than the birth of two souls in one

Part of where I'm going

Is knowing where I'm coming from

I don't want to be anything

Other than what I've been tryna be lately

All I have to do is think of me

And I have peace of mind

I'm tired of looking 'round rooms

Wondering what I gotta do

Or who I'm supposed to be

I don't want to be anything other than me

I'm surrounded by liars

Everywhere I turn

I'm surrounded by imposters

Everywhere I turn

I'm surrounded by identity crisis
Everywhere I turn
Am I the only one who noticed?
I can't be the only one who's learned
I don't want to be anything
Other than what I've been tryna be lately
All I have to do is think of me
And I have peace of mind
I'm tired of looking 'round rooms
Wondering what I gotta do
Or who I'm supposed to be
I don't want to be anything other than me
Can I have everyone's attention, please?
If you're not like this and that
You're gonna have to leave
I came from the mountain
The crust of creation
My whole situation made from clay to stone
And now I'm telling everybody
I don't want to be anything
Other than what I've been tryna be lately
All I have to do is think of me
And I have peace of mind
I'm tired of looking 'round rooms
Wondering what I've got to do
Or who I'm supposed to be
I don't want to be anything other than me
I don't want to be, hey, yeah, hey, yeah
I don't want to be, oh, oh
I don't want to be
I don't want to be anything
Anything other than me
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah (I don't want to be)
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah (I don't want to be)
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah (I don't want to be)
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah
Hey, yeah, yeah, yeah (I don't want to be)

end