

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).

This month of June we celebrated Pride month.

This is our last Sunday in Pride month, but we will always celebrate each other and the liberation we have found in the Holy-One-of-rainbow-colors.

It is such a blessing to be part of a network connected with the common goal of sharing a message of hope and bearing witness to the Holy-One's unconditional love.

In fact I love to say, that no matter who you are or where you are in your life journey you are welcome here!

And 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.

So Invite you my friends to take a deep breath and remember where two or more are gathered there the Holy-One is.

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

GATHERING MUSIC

Colton Dixon - Build a Boat (with lyrics)(2022) - Colton Dixon
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ky3-duE7d4>

SCRIPTURE - Mark 4:35-41 NRSV

A reading from the book of Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side.
And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.
A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.
But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"
He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.
He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"
And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

SERMON - Peace. Be still.

Two words come to mind when I read these passages: Fear and Hope.

Fear of death.

The Disciples saying, "Teacher, do you NOT care that we are perishing?"
Hope. The Disciples saying, "Who then is this, then even the wind and sea obey him?"
The Disciples hope in a leader, a messiah, a God that even nature listens.

But when one is in the middle of a storm, it is hard to experience hope.
When you are in the middle of feeling like you are drowning, how can you hold on to faith?

And how can hope or faith truly be manifested when terror grips us, that not even knowing Jesus is nearby brings peace.

I would like to invite you to hold on to these questions as we talk about fear, hope, and faith this evening while also hearing Jesus saying, "Peace. Be Still."
Let us pray.

Amado creador del Universo ayúdame con mi incredulidad.

Loving creator, help my unbelief and help me be still before you even when everything around me can be chaotic.

Amen

While reading this passage friends, I was wondering what happen to the other boats during the storm?

Perhaps if we could understand what the Disciples were seeing around them, we could understand a bit more.

For example, I wonder if they saw the boats around them tossed and shipwrecked and realized what was coming!

Or maybe they could not see beyond the darkness of the storm.

When the sky gets dark, and the winds pick up the water is the last thing you want to be in.

I was raised by the ocean about twenty minutes up the Isabela Cross way into Padre Island or down another road to Boca Chica Blvd.

Both leading to the Gulf of Mexico.

Since I was very young my father taught me to be respectful of the ocean.

He would say, the beauty of the ocean comes from its mystery, respect it.

One could be in the water enjoying soft waves and another moment one could be dragged in by an undercurrent and be sucked in.

This type of undercurrent could happen if a large boat was near.

So, we learned to be diligent and to NEVER wander into the ocean alone.

Now what about when you are in a boat?

If any of you have been on a boat, you might remember how it feels to sway from one side to another and the peace of this.

For others even these words start to cause sea sickness.

In Mark chapter 4, we can read several parables of Jesus teaching by the sea of Galilee on a boat overlooking the crowds.

One of the parables that Jesus talked about was regarding the different types of soil that seeds land.

In another parable Jesus talks about the light in a lamp and how one should not place it where others could not see its light.

In this chapter Jesus also talked about the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed and how regardless of its size it produced great crops.

Jesus compared this to having a faith that can be small enough like the mustard seed and yet yield great results.

And if all these parables and all these teachings were done on the same day that this storm happened, no wonder was asking the disciples where their faith was when the storm came.

He might have ask them if they did not remember him taking the time to explain the parables to them.

Faith is a lot easier to confess when you are not in the middle of a storm.

Amen?

Believing in something, or someone is easier when such belief is not put to the

test.

Relationships regardless how steady and sturdy they look at one time or another might be tested.

People who are in a healthy relationship will know that not everything is roses. And before the chaos comes there is a mutual agreement of some sort of how things might get worked out when challenges come up.

Being prepared is the key and knowing that life has its own seasons of good and bad will help us be better equipped to deal with it.

For example, the ocean is vast and so beautiful!
But it is also deadly.

Fishermen and boat aficionados know that they can be enjoying a wonderful blue sky and then a storm could change that.

So, they pay attention to the winds, the shift in the air, or the national weather or Marine weather services.

They base their decisions on such data every day before going out to sea.

In Jesus times, they only had their instinct, their eyes, and their common sense. By the time they were reacting water was upon them.

They can feel the winds tossing them around.

They can sense that things were not going well.

The conclusion of such a violent storm was evident to cause death and their teacher was asleep.

How could Jesus not feel the boat tossed around?

I'm wondering if Jesus was like the Grand Master Jedi and sensed the fear around him before they came to get him?

How could Jesus not be woken by the violent moves of the ship?

After all, the stern is the back of the boat, and he was lying on the floor.

Maybe the humanity of Jesus shows that he is a deep sleeper.

Regardless of his state, he was there, and it should have given them hope.

Hope.

So church, I want to ask you to type with a simple yes or no....

Is the word hope and faith the same?

Both faith and hope sound similar.

1 Peter 1:21 says, "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Peter calls them both by name, hope, and faith.

Hope is saying, I'm going to receive this, and I'm going to hold on to that.

Hope is in the near future.

While faith is saying, I already got this.

I believe deep inside I am okay because of my faith, my deep commitment in knowing

the Holy-One-of-doubt has me.

In the middle of a storm, when water is hitting your face, and the boat is tossing you all over the place, the winds are blowing, and the sky is looking darker than ever, hold on.

Dr. Yara Gonzales Justiano said, "Hope is a virtue that predisposes an expectation of the future. It is our walk both/and our wait on the things that have yet to materialize. Sustainable hope or hope in practice maintains and sustains that practice. Hope is not the end but at the center of what moves and shapes us."

There was a storm upon them, and the winds were blowing.
Chaos is the word that comes to mind in a storm and not hope or faith.

Each of us goes through different storms in our lives.
Each of us has gone or is going through things in our lives that can feel like we are drowning.

Where is hope then?

So, let me ask you, friends, what is it that you are hoping will happen?
What is it that we are hoping happens?

Can we name it?
When we take a moment to name it friends, we can see the reality before us.
Then we can be honest about what it is that we are expecting to receive.

And I believe that is what Dr. Yara Gonzales Justiano was saying, "Sustainable hope or hope in practice maintains and sustains the practices."

To hope but at the same time to be grounded.
For example, I often complain about my weight.
I want to look just as awesome as my avatar, maybe stronger, and have arms with bulging biceps!

That hope should move me to an end.
It should shape what time I dedicate to the gym.

But let me confess to you my friends, I am not good at going to the gym.
I do not even pick up the weights at home.

But when I share what I am hoping for with my partner and ask her to be my accountability voice of reason, my hope becomes active.

When I pick up a Pepsi at the store, she gives me that look.
Then she will say, "You're not going to get well with Pepsi, get some water."

That hope is actively seeking to be realized, even if that is one less sugary drink at a time.

Perhaps, like the gym, we need a hope buddy.
Not one that tells us what we want to hear.
Not one that patronizes us, either.
Oh, you are going to be fine!

And I do not like hearing, "God does not give you more than you can take!"
Have you ever heard this before?
I will say, would someone tell God that I'm good and to stop the madness.

Church, I am talking about a person that can help us hold on to reality towards liberation.

A liberation of the knuckle gripping fear.
A liberation from the tunnel vision of failure and death.

So I wonder when Jesus was asking his disciples about having no faith, he was really asking, did you forget who I am?

Faith is believing deep inside that we are not alone and no matter what happens we will be fine, we are not hopeless.

It does not mean we are not afraid, it just means you are okay if the storm tosses you in the water cause you know you will be rescued.

While the disciples are pleading to him in fear to save them, he shows them his divinity, his ability to say to the waters, peace ...be still.

Friends, what is your hope in God?
How does it translate to your situation?

What is the connection my friends to your hope and your faith in the Holy One sitting by you?
I get it! Life is hard.
Sometimes I wonder, is Jesus asleep during my storm?

How can I hold on to faith when you're dealing with fear and life challenges are tossing you around?

Hold on to that knowledge in knowing that Jesus is an important factor to helping us find peace in turbulent times.

St. Ignatius Loyola helps people deepen their understanding of the divine with the practice of holding on to good or storing up good times when bad times come.

This practice is the state of consolation and desolation.

In other words, St. Ignatius Loyola was saying that when doubt, confusion, or discouragement comes, you will be ready with some backup.

Perhaps that might be having positive sayings, Bible quotes, a journal of good

things happening, a card from a friend, or other things that ground you to remember that God is faithful and has not and nor will God ever leave you.

Little things in our lives that you and I cultivate that inform our faith, that ground our belief in the Divine.

The things that help us to live in wholeness and fullness.

These are the things that will help us get through the storms, the winds, and the frightening water rising all above us.

Perhaps then, I can then remember Jesus is at the stern.

I can then remember that I am not alone.

I can hold on not to a hope that is imaginative or exaggerated but to a hope that liberates me from the failure, and dooms day mentality.

One that helps me stay grounded or at least hold on to the boat's side as it is tossing me back and forward.

For I KNOW that Jesus is right there.

Jesus was about a faith that was grounded in the realization that life was whole in him.

The scripture says that if we live or if we die, we are with him.

This did not mean friends that we don't care about our lives but rather that we are not merely existing but truly living.

It is understanding what he means by saying peace be still.

I can often hear Jesus shouting through the winds and storm in my life,
"Yadi....peace.....be Still."

Now you try it, insert your name in this blank and hear Jesus saying, (your name) peace. Be still.

Those around him said, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

And You reply...." oh he is with me."

You are not ever alone friends, breath, hope, have faith, and be still, watch Jesus's work in your life.

Peace. Be Still

Amen.

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.

Today, I'm going to do something completely different.

Don't panic it is still Payer time.
But today I'm going to invite you all to be in prayer with me.
For example, I would like you to pray with me for my son Josh and his band mates
from all over the US traveling around on tour.

You can say, "Lord hear our prayer."
Or "God be with Josh as he travels."
Make sense?

As you read the prayers on the chat add to it your prayer for that request or say
"Lord hear our prayers" or something like that. We are joining in prayer as Bishop
Yvette Flunder signs "Be Still and Know That I'm God." It is a worship song with a
choir and words of inspiration. If we have no more prayer request through the song I
will pause it because this worship could go on for a while. So let me invite you my
friends to join in prayer, chat, type, pray away with your fingers today.

Be Still and Know That I'm God - Bishop Yvette A Flunder
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi_mRnAgxAA

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

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 Lord Jesus Christ, springing up
like living water, fill your heart, and flow through your life.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Let us slow dance, sway, raise your hands, and be filled with hope as we depart.

You Say (Official Music Video) - Lauren Daigle
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIaT8Jl2zpI>