

## WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,  
wherever you are

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,  
to remind us of God's presence with us,  
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

## GATHERING MUSIC

"Grow" - FaceSoul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8lNUArJvvs>

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life 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 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."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be  
included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in  
life.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder  
in the back.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website

[firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org)

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

## SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Our scripture reading for today is the lectionary gospel passage but next Sunday,  
But I'm not going to be here so I decided to do it today.

It is a little discussed parable from the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew  
about the weeds in a wheat field.

It's a parable that appears only in Matthew,

And comes right after the Parable of the Sower, and right before the Parable of the  
Mustard Seed.

Several verses after the parable, there is an "explanation" of the parable  
attributed to Jesus,

A pattern seen with several of Jesus' parables.

Some scholars argue these explanations were later additions by either the gospel writer or church leaders,

As many of these parables in the 13th chapter of Matthew have been interpreted as specifically addressing the early church.

Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Matthew, chapter 13, verses 24 through 30 and 36 through 43.

MATTHEW 13 24-30, 36-43 (NRSVUE)

He put before them another parable:

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field, but while everybody was asleep an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

And the slaves of the householder came and said to him,

'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Where, then, did these weeds come from?'

He answered, 'An enemy has done this.'

The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'

But he replied, 'No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

Let both of them grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers,

Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.' "

\* \* \*

Then he left the crowds and went into the house.

And his disciples approached him, saying,

"Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man;

the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom;

the weeds are the children of the evil one,

and the enemy who sowed them is the devil;

the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

"We Have Met the Enemy and ..."

Let us pray ...

Who is this "enemy" and why are they sowing weeds in our wheat?

I want to share some reflections on the "Enemy" and then offer my own reinterpretation of a 16th century meditation on this from Ignatius of Loyola.

I want to lay my cards on the table up front,

So you know where I'm coming from.

I don't believe in the Devil, capital "D" - a personified manifestation of evil, by whatever name

I also believe that the Devil, Satan, whoever has often been used as a convenient excuse for our own human choices

(cue Flip Wilson saying, "The Devil made me do it")

Also, I believe in Original Blessing, not Original Sin

The idea that all creation, as it says in the first chapter of Genesis, is good.

At the same time, my experience as a young lawyer ripped away any rose-colored glasses I may have had.

Right after law school I worked for a justice of the Florida Supreme Court.

Florida is a death penalty state, and every case where the defendant was sentenced to death is reviewed by the state's highest court.

The clerk's office puts those cases in big red folders - cute right?

And they would be stacked up on the floor of my office.

I doubt that anyone could read as many of those cases as I did in the two years I worked there

And not believe that evil exists

Evil is very real and needs to be named.

The wisdom of the parable we heard today, I think, is the recognition that evil lives side by side with good,

So closely entwined that it is very difficult to root it out,

Part of the very same field,

That it can become so pervasive that it chokes out what is trying to grow,

And with time we might even forget that it was supposed to be a field of wheat at all,

Because we become so accustomed to the weeds,

And it is only once the harvest is in, that we begin to really see.

This is how systemic or institutional evil works, why it is so insidious.

Slavery was an evil that many were raised to believe was normal.

The forced removal of native American children from their families was an evil that some involved may have even believed was in the service of good.

I believe the consumerist model of indiscriminate use of our planet's resources for the benefit of a relatively few humans is evil.

We are all reaping the harvest of weeds these evils have sown.

At the same time, things are not so simple, you know,

Good vs. evil, right vs. wrong.

There are no clear cut, easy answers.

This is a parable about ambiguity, and the need for careful discernment.

One person's "weed" may be another's "wildflower,"

Careful discernment may be necessary to distinguish which to gather into the barn and which to burn,

And sometimes a third way is needed which values both.

Ralph Waldo Emerson defined a "weed" as "a plant whose virtues have yet to be discovered."

I'm distrustful of binary opposites as a rule:

Good/bad, white/black, male/female, sacred/secular, for example.

It's an overly simplistic way of looking at the world,

it's easier to keep things simple and uniform, but it doesn't feel True to me.

There seems to be a very human tendency, once something is labelled one or the other,

To be overzealous in our attempt to eradicate what falls on the "bad" side of the line.

We are often distrustful of diversity.

Perhaps there were some overzealous weed pullers around Jesus, or the author of Matthew's gospel, hence this parable.

Wait, says Jesus, it's not that simple.

Also, the same soil nurtures both the weeds and the wheat,

We all carry the potential for both in us,

It is part of being human.

During the War of 1812, the United States Navy defeated the British Navy in the Battle of Lake Erie.

Master Commandant Oliver Perry wrote these words to Major General William Henry Harrison:

"We have met the enemy and they are ours."

Roughly a century and half later, cartoonist Walt Kelly parodied of this famous battle report in his comic strip Pogo:

"We have met the enemy and he is us."

The cartoon was created for Earth Day in the 1970s,

and Pogo says this while looking out over a forest covered in trash as far as the eye can see.

The things in that trash pile, cans and bottles and bicycle tires and shower heads, It's all good stuff, or used to be.

But the sheer volume of it, simply thrown away, has a tremendous negative impact on the earth and all the beings living on it,

Including ourselves.'

There is a trash pile (actually 2 related piles) in the Pacific with a surface area of around 620,000 square miles,

Or roughly twice the size of Texas.

We have met the enemy and they are us.

To address that kind of enemy, binaries and battle metaphors just don't work.

Which brings me to Ignatius of Loyola.

In his "Spiritual Exercises," which is a kind of manual of prayer he developed in the 16th century,

Ignatius describes a meditation he called the "Two Standards" that lays the foundation for discernment in Ignatian spirituality.

A man of his time, Ignatius borrowed from his military past to construct this meditation.

He imagined a battlefield, with two massive opposing armies.

I Imagine something like a scene from the Lord of the Rings, with the armies of Mordor and the armies of the West facing each other across a huge expanse.

Only for Ignatius, one army rode under Christ's standard, or flag, the other rode under the flag of "the Enemy."

He invites us to imagine that each is calling out for us to join them.

The Two Standards meditation addresses the reality that there are forces in ourselves, in our lives, and in our world that draw us towards God or draw us away from God.

The struggle between these forces occurs not only within ourselves, but within our families and communities, and even between nations. It can manifest as different value systems.

However, this meditation is not so much about choosing under which standard we will stand;

Given the option of being part of something labelled "good" and another labelled

“evil,” most of us know where we would choose to stand.

Instead, the meditation is really about noticing and reflecting on those forces.

It’s about discerning what pulls or pushes us towards one or the other.

Another way to think of this is listening to whether we are “in tune” with God’s song, or is there a siren song luring us away.

As William A Barry writes:

“God is always actively working to bring about God’s kingdom, and we can be in tune, out of tune, or more or less in tune with God’s intention.”

The Two Standards acts kind of like a tuning fork, to help us as we move through the realities of life.

Unlike the Lord of the Rings, this is not some one-time, winner-take-all kind of situation.

This is a daily discernment, as the threads of both songs are woven through everything,

Like the weeds amongst the wheat.

In the midst of the noise of everyday life, it is not always easy to discern the notes.

So for the next several minutes I’d like to walk us through an adaptation of the Two Standards meditation using music as a metaphor instead of a war.

I encourage you to play with the juxtaposition of opposites and see insights what the play of music between them has for you and your life.

So, deep breath, let it out slow.

The meditation starts with the Enemy’s song.

The Enemy’s song can be subtle, maybe just slightly off-key.

It is a song about material wealth, possessions, awards and accolades.

It speaks of pride in external things, judgment and false modesty.

The Enemy can also work through the opposite of pride, singing notes of helplessness, worthlessness, envy or shame.

This saps our energy and discourages us from action.

Material wealth and honors, like the items in that trash pile, are not inherently evil,

but they can be temptations and distractions.

They can weigh us down and imprison us.

Focus on them represents a value system that can disrupt or damage relationships.

Acquisition of goods without recognition of the cost to the world in terms of labor, natural resources, and disposal severely impacts the earth on which we live.

Can you think of a song, story or an image that would represent this for you?

How has this shown up in your own life?

We’ll be in quiet meditation for a few minutes,

You may want to write down what comes to you in this time.

[Time of quiet meditation]

The second part of this is Christ’s song.

Christ’s song is tender and gentle.

It is a song about connection, freedom, and love.

It encourages you to live into your authentic self and your full potential.

It invites, rather than demands, and empowers us to creative action.

The words of this song include mercy, peace, redemption and grace.

It is a song of inclusion, not exclusion, recognizing the worth of all beings, Not just humans or a subset of humans.

It is also a song of humility, which literally means “from the earth” –

a connection to the very ground we walk on, the ground of being, the nourishing soil of life.

At the same time, hearing this song can give our hearts wings to soar.

Can you think of a song, story or an image that would represent this for you?

How has this shown up in your own life?

[Time of quiet meditation]

If you identified a song, story or image for these two, I encourage you to sit with them,

Feel where you currently stand in the continuum between them,

Reflect on what attracts you towards one or the other.

If you do this work, perhaps you will better recognize how you make choices between them daily,

Sometimes in small, subtle ways

It's in every one of us to be wise,

If we grow in wisdom, then the field of the Lord will grow in love.

Let anyone with ears to hear listen.

Amen.

"It's In Every One of Us" – David Pomeranz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qiGXyYOR3o>

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,

as a community,

join our hearts together,

to connect to God and to each other.

So this time is the essence of what we do here together.

If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,

and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at this time.

As people share their prayers in text

please read them prayerfully

and hold this space as sacred and safe

to open our hearts to God.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord 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, O Lord,

with faith in your boundless love and grace.

Amen

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over

our ministry to the world is just beginning.

The world is waiting

for us to learn to discern,

weed, wheat, wildflower.

In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself,  
go in peace, come again in hope.  
Amen.

I can't believe I found a song with "discern" in the title  
and it's not too bad  
"Learn to Discern" - Wian  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFS665u6p50>

GO IN PEACE