

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.

If you get a message stating that the video is unavailable, please toggle media in your viewer; that usually fixes the problem.

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 with me, or in the aisles, or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you at any point in the service—I say go for it!

GATHERING:

Today we're going to go the mountains together—metaphorically speaking.

Personally, I think there's a great deal to be said about going literally! And so did Woody Guthrie, according to this story told by Pete Seeger.

[https://youtu.be/Hb\\_o-tg-WZk?si=Fqnm9cC35R9TaYp7](https://youtu.be/Hb_o-tg-WZk?si=Fqnm9cC35R9TaYp7), "Are There Any Mountains Near Here?" ~Pete Seeger

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](http://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."

SERMON        "Mountaintop(s)"

Hear this ancient parable:

Once upon a time, there were three blind men who had never experienced an elephant.  
But they had a sighted friend who had access to an elephant, so he brought it before  
them and said, "Here: This is an elephant."

The first blind man reached out and took the elephant by the trunk and said, "Oh, I  
understand! An elephant is like a great snake!"

The second blind man reached out and wrapped his arms around the elephant's foreleg  
and said, "You're wrong. An elephant is nothing like a snake. It's more like the  
trunk of a tree."

The third blind man reached and took the elephant by the tail and said, "You're both  
wrong, an elephant is nothing like a snake, and it is nothing like a tree. It is  
just like a stiff broom!"

And they argued.

I believe that our individual experiences of God, or the Divine, or whatever name  
you have for That Which Is Greater Than Ourselves are just like that—I've got a  
tail, you've got a leg, they seem so different!

But none of them is the whole picture. To even begin to understand, we have to  
layer picture upon picture upon picture...

So that's what I'd like to do, tonight. I'd like to just give you picture after  
picture and let you experience them, one after the other.

I want to let them echo each other, layer upon layer, and just—see how that strikes  
you.

Most of them are from the Hebrew Scripture or the New Testament.

But before we're through, I'll give you another example and invite you to consider  
what other echoes and layers you might have experienced!

Alright. Let's look at some mountaintops!

Exodus 3:1-6

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he  
led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he  
looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the  
bush is not burned up.'

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the  
bush, 'Moses, Moses!'

And he said, 'Here I am.'

Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on

which you are standing is holy ground.'

He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

I Kings 19:11-13

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.'

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind;

and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake;

and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves.

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!'

Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

Mark 13:3-8

When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?'

Then Jesus began to say to them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray.

Many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.

This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Luke 22:39-46

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him.

When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.'

[[ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.  
In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]]  
When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping?  
Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

This next reading starts in Jerusalem and then moves "out as far as Bethany," which locates the end of the reading on the Mount of Olives.

Luke 24:46-53

...and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.  
You are witnesses of these things.  
And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'  
Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

"I've Been To The Mountaintop"

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

April 3, 1968

And then I got to Memphis.

And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out.

What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now.

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now.

Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life.

Longevity has its place.

But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.

And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land.

I may not get there with you.

But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.

And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

I don't know about you, but I have my own Mountaintop experience. It's deeply personal. And, like Peter and James and John, I find myself afraid to share the story with just anyone.

But I have it. And I add it to all the layers that have come before me.

I highly suspect that each of you have your own Mountaintops!

I won't press you. I won't ask you to share.

But I wonder.

I wonder what would happen if we weren't afraid to share those stories.

I wonder what would happen if we learned how to talk about those stories.  
I wonder what would happen if we added each of our own, deeply personal layers to all of those other Mountaintops.  
What do you say? Amen?

#### PRAYER PREPARATION:

I regret to inform you that I've been unable to find the lyrics for this next song—not as it is performed here.  
But I can tell you that the Mammals are heavily influence by the music that evolved in the Appalachian Mountains.  
And, if I need to, I can remind you that Jesus drank wine!  
<https://youtu.be/gTCvqcM1HrQ?si=g7joNAb98Hg6cA8q>, "Red Mountain Wine" ~The Mammals

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:

God of Transformation, we stand on the precipice of the metaphorical mountain, preparing to enter Lent, preparing to enter Your story of journeying in the wilderness and journeying toward the cross.

We come to this moment recognizing our own need to transform our point of view: to look away from the fake gospel of this world that tells us to pull ourselves up

by our bootstraps, that tells us if we work hard we will be blessed,  
and instead, turn to the Gospel of Truth: that to live is to die to the ways of this world.

Help us to put aside the worldly measures of success and instead seek You and Your ways.

We cannot go back to the simple understanding of being a good person to get into heaven, for that is a false gospel.

Instead, we must work to dismantle systems and structures of sin in this world.

To put ourselves in the shoes of those who have never had the opportunity to know a world without suffering and pain.

To listen with kindness and compassion to the stories of injustice and wrongdoing, and work to restore what has been taken, repair what is broken, and pursue justice, in order to live into Your kin-dom.

For only then might we understand that faith is more than a simple confession in Your sovereignty over us, but a lifelong commitment to solidarity with You, Jesus the Christ, who lived and died and lives again, and in whose name 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:

In closing, let's go to one more Mountain—over the hills where the spirits fly!

<https://youtu.be/Bb9pjvfLanY?si=PfQPcCbzv-NXhaut>, "Misty Mountain Hop" ~Led Zeppelin  
Walkin' in the park just the other day, baby

What... what do you think I saw?

Crowds of people sittin' on the grass with flowers in their hair said

"Hey, boy, do you wanna score?"

And you know how it is

I really don't know what time it was, woh, oh-oh

So I asked them if I could stay awhile

I didn't notice but it had got very dark and I was really

Really out of my mind

Just then a policeman stepped up to me and asked us said

"Please, hey, would we care

To all get in line... get in line."

Well you know, they asked us to stay for tea and have some fun

Oh, oh, oh he said that his friends would all drop by, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh

Why don't you take a good look at yourself and describe what you see?

And baby, baby, baby, do you like it?

There you sit, sitting spare like a book on a shelf rustin'

Ah, not trying to fight it

You really don't care if they're coming, oh, oh, oh

I know that it's all a state of mind, ooh, ooh, ooh

If you go down in the streets today baby, you better  
You better open your eyes, whoah-yeah  
Folk down there really don't care  
Really don't care, don't care, really don't  
Which, which way the pressure lies  
So I've decided what I'm gonna do now  
So I'm packing my bags for the Misty Mountains  
Where the spirits go now  
Over the hills where the spirits fly  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh  
I really don't know  
I really don't know  
I really don't know

\*end\*