

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us on this Transfiguration Sunday.

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

"Be Thou My Vision" - Salt of the Sound

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

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

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

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

On the liturgical calendar, the last Sunday of Epiphany is designated as Transfiguration Sunday.

It's when we tell again the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, a story told in all three synoptic gospels

Of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Today, we'll here Mark's version.

It's kind of a strange word, "transfiguration,"

Today, if you find someone who has heard the word

They are more likely to associate it with Professor McGonagall,

Who taught “transfiguration.”

But then they might, at least, understand it’s basic meaning.

Let us listen to the Spirit speaking to us through the words of Mark, chapter 9, verses 2-9.

MARK 9:2-9 (NRSVUE)

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 brighten 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 set up three tents, 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.

As they were coming down the mountain,

he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen,

until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

“Changing Perspectives”

Let us pray ...

What is “transfiguration” but a 15-letter word for change.

According to the dictionary, it is a change of form or appearance to a more beautiful or spiritual state.

And change always involves risk.

But I get ahead of myself.

Our reading for today began with a central moment in Mark’s gospel, when Jesus asks his disciples,

“Who do people say that I am?”

and then,

“But who do you say that I am?”

And Peter gives the answer we know is the “right” one,

he says, “You’re the Messiah.”

It’s a good word, “Messiah,” with a long history in Jewish tradition and scripture.

But Jesus then goes on to teach that this word, “Messiah,” doesn’t mean what they think it means.

Most people thought that the “Messiah” would be the one to deliver the Jews from Roman oppression.

Galilee was hot bed of revolutionary activity,

and the “Messiah” would unite them to defeat the Romans.

So it wouldn’t be surprising if Peter and Jesus’ other Galilean disciples shared that popular view.

So, when Jesus told them that instead,
The one who they called "Messiah" had to suffer, and die, and then be raised from
the dead,
that was not good news;
it was, frankly - inconceivable.
And once Jesus started talking about dying, it's like Peter couldn't hear anything
else,
His brain shut off.
The part about rising again in three days,
I'm not sure he even heard it;
It was just lost on him.
After all, dead is dead, right?
End of story.
Peter's expectation about what "Messiah" meant,
about what "dying" meant,
were barriers he just couldn't get past.
Or, to use Jesus' words, Peter was setting his mind on human things, not divine
things.
Peter was so confined by his own preconceptions
that not even Jesus could change his mind.
And this kept him from understanding who Jesus was and what it meant to be his
disciple, to follow him.
Peter and company needed a change of perspective.
So Jesus led them up a high mountain.
The view would be different from up there, apart from the crowd.
High up at the summit,
The people, the houses, perhaps the cares and concerns of earthly life,
Would all seem small.
And mountains in scripture are thin places,
where people have encounters with God.
And there it happened - transfiguration - a change of form, of appearance.
The human outline blurred by the divine light shining from within.
His words hadn't gotten through, so Jesus showed them instead,
tore down the barriers that kept them from seeing Jesus' real identity,
let his divinity shine,
and let them see a glimpse beyond the veil of those who had gone before him,
those who should be "dead" - if dead is just dead.
Gave them a vision of things to come.
Maybe Jesus hoped that if they could see that there was something more,
More than the way they had always understood things like life and death, human and
divine,
then maybe they could also understand Jesus' mission and their own as his followers,
differently.
That maybe with that change of perspective they could get past words like "Messiah"
and "dying"
to see Jesus and themselves in new light.
I think there are many times when we too need to go up the mountain,
Need to get a change of perspective,
so we can reimagine ourselves and our relationship to God and the world in a new
light.

I think a lot about the barriers that may keep people from Jesus and the church.
And I've often wondered if one of those barriers is the word "Christian."

Pastor and writer John Pavlovitz once wrote:

"I've always thought I was a Christian. . . .

But these days I'm looking at what alleges to be Christianity in my country
and I'm now almost certain that I was wrong about myself all along.

Maybe I'm not a Christian after all.

I've always had this delusional idea that my personal faith in Jesus should drive me
to the marginalized and the hurting,

that it should move me to defend those who are alone and invisible and voiceless,

that my Christ-likeness alone was the mark of my faithfulness. . . .

I'd always thought that the church was meant to be the oddly beautiful,
counter-intuitive, set apart entity

that quietly but boldly reflected the image of Jesus to the watching world;

that as it mirrored his compassion and kindness and humility and dignity,

it would be a beacon to all those seeking the best like possible. . . .

I used to believe that I was a Christian,

simply because I wanted the world to see Jesus when they looked at my life."

But now "I've certainly got some learning and some repenting to do.

I once was blind, but now I see."

Thank you John Pavlovitz, I am so there.

My mother was extremely active in fighting for equal rights for women in the 60s,
70s, and 80s.

Some of you may remember the ERA - the Equal Rights Amendment,

It was that era.

She once told me that she didn't refer to herself as a "feminist,"

because that word had come to be understood by so many as meaning something hateful,
and scary,

and was experienced as demeaning by many women.

The far right propaganda machine was in full force,

telling people that "feminist" meant someone who wanted to force women out of their
homes,

who devalued the work of mothers,

who thought dressing and acting in feminine ways was demeaning

and so women would all have to dress and act like men,

and who would force women to use men's bathrooms.

I kid you not - some of you who lived through that time may remember this.

Decades later, the target has changed, but the far right propaganda machine is still
at it,

Not with "feminists" so much anymore,

But they have other targets,

Like transgender people and the "woke."

Anyway, my mother said, if a word isn't useful because it carries too much baggage,
when it becomes a barrier to getting your message across,
then just don't use it.

She just called herself a supporter of equal rights.

Over time, much of the baggage of the word "feminist" has dropped away,
and I think people today understand it quite differently.

I use it.

I suspect my mother would reclaim that identity today.

Many of you know I went through quite a struggle before I could claim the identity of "Christian" for myself.
But now I often wonder if the word, "Christian" has so much baggage that it has become a barrier,
keeping people from seeing and coming to Jesus, from hearing the message of the gospel.
Like John Pavlovitz describes, I think many people have preconceptions about what it means to be a "Christian"
that have little or nothing to do with the life and teachings of Jesus,
preconceptions based on what they see those calling themselves "Christians" are doing and saying in the name of "Christianity."
I read recently that a significant percentage of those self-identifying as evangelical Christians
Don't go to church.
Somehow church isn't part of their practice as Christians
And fewer and fewer people are identifying themselves as "Christian" at all,
And fewer and fewer people respect "Christianity," let alone to go or belong to a church.
In many instances, once I identify myself as a Christian people can't get past that word;
their preconceptions of what that word means about Jesus and about me based on what they see in the media take over.
Hateful and hurtful things.
Narrow-minded things.
And they can't even hear me anymore.
Myself, I don't want to say that others are not "Christian."
I'm not sure that is my judgment to make.
But if that is what it means to be "Christian" as understood in today's world, maybe I need a different word, a different identity,
and maybe the church does too.
Maybe we in the church need to go up the mountain and get a change of perspective, see how our God colors outside the human lines we would draw around Jesus, how the divine light shines through.
And see our identity as followers of Jesus differently.
What would we call ourselves instead?
I don't know, but I am leaning towards an even more traditional description than "Christian":
People on the Way.
Or perhaps, to use pastor and writer Sara Miles' self-description:
"Jesus Freak."
I can claim that identity.
And maybe, eventually, the baggage surrounding the word "Christian" will fall away and we can reclaim that too.
But in the meantime, it just feels like if it keeps people from hearing the message of the gospel, it's not worth it.
Holding onto it is like setting our minds not on divine things, but on human things.
There was a story on public radio several years ago about a photographer named Meredith Hutchison
works in refugee camps, where there is so little hope,
where people can't see a future.

Their identity is all bound up in those words “refugee,” “victim,”
Words that others have drawn for them,
That confine them as surely as the walls of their refugee camps.
Several girls from a camp in Jordan were given the chance to work with mentors to
envision a future of their choosing.
They were asked the question all children get asked here in the U.S.:
“what would you like to be when you grow up?”
Then they work with the girls to develop a plan to achieve those dreams.
Part of that is to help them change the way they see themselves.
The girls were dressed in the clothing of their new identity, and Meredith
photographed them living their dreams.
The idea is for them to change their perspective on themselves,
To envision of themselves in the new identity they dream,
so they can make that identity their own.
Here are a few of those photographs, the resolution isn’t as good as I would like,
but I wanted to show them to you.
Here’s Hiba, age 9, who wants to be a doctor, so she can help children.
And here’s Fatima at age 16, who wants to be an architect,
To build beautiful homes for families,
Though people tell her architecture is not a “feminine” profession.
And my personal favorite, Haja, 12, who wants to be an astronaut,
because she wants to look at things from a new perspective and discover things that
have never been discovered before.
A high vantage point, indeed.
I think of these children when I think of the children of Gaza and Israel and
Ukraine
And others in places of conflict.
What is your identity as a follower of Jesus?
What identity do we dream as a church?
What new image or word might describe us?
How might we transfigure our understanding, of ourselves, of our church, of Jesus,
so that it communicates the message of the gospels?
Can we color outside the lines that have been drawn for us,
Dream of something new?
To get a new view, when I’m preaching during Lent
I’m going to be relying on the work of Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine.

I hope it challenges me and us to see the familiar stories of Jesus’ Passion
differently.
It’s hard and risky to change, but maybe if we step back, step up, get a new view,
we can help others get a new perspective on Jesus, and the church, too.
Maybe we can remove the walls and let the light shine through.
Like Jesus.
After all, transfiguration is just a 15-letter word for change. Amen.

“My Love Colors Outside the Lines”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10s62DicTNY>

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.

WORDS FOR THE JOURNEY

Transfiguration" - Wendy Jean MacLean
You cannot capture the light
But you can name it
And notice how you are changed
By its presence.
Will you be seduced by its glimmering
shimmering flirting dance?
Or made brilliant by its clarity?
Perhaps your soul is animated by the liminal,
crepuscular blues, or aureole roses.
Do you have a taste for iridescence?
Greet the light as a dear friend.
Listen for the wisdom of the rays.
They have come a long distance to shine on you.
Bask in their generous gift.
As the light gathers strength
From the love shining within your heart,
Let it be a prayer for you.
Light was placed there
in the very first moment of creation
So glory would always have a home.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over,
our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting for you
to shine
what good can indeed come from the Nazareths in your

Go in peace,
come again in hope.
Amen.

“Lean In Towards the Light” – Carrie Newcomer
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QmJez0lfvF0>

GO IN PEACE!