

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:

In today's sermon, I make reference to the character, Thor, as he appears in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Part of his story is that his warhammer, Mjolnir, can only be lifted by one who is "worthy." In fact, the first Thor film is all about his growth into being worthy enough to claim this weapon.

In the scene I'm about to show you, his friends and teammates are having a discussion about the hammer and who among them might be worthy.

Pay close attention to the look on Thor's face as each of them gives it a try.

<https://youtu.be/o3bhQwY0KCY?si=PPqvmYB2hTNEA5bB>, "Lifting Thor's Hammer" ~A Scene from Avengers: Age of Ultron

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

Matthew 6:1-21

'Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

'Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;

but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

SERMON "Worthy"

In the second story of creation found in the Book of Genesis, God is described as creating humankind from clay—in fact, the Hebrew word for "ground" is "adamah." So, the name "Adam" is a pun—like naming your kid "Groundling" or "Earthling!" Which is a lot brighter thought than how it comes across on Ash Wednesday (which was last Wednesday).

On Ash Wednesday, Christians all over the world have the sign of the cross made on their foreheads as they hear the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

That's a little harsh. It's a little grim.

As the Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay puts it, "If we are only dust, then what does it matter?"

Spoiler alert: Rev. Lindsay believes that we matter!

So... why say it? Why "remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return?"

I believe that it's a little bit like what Neil deGrasse Tyson tells us in his book, Astrophysics for People in a Hurry:

"What we do know, and what we can assert without further hesitation, is that the universe had a beginning.

The universe continues to evolve.

And yes, every one of our body's atoms is traceable to the big bang and to the thermonuclear furnaces within high-mass stars that exploded more than five billion years ago.

We are stardust brought to life, then empowered by the universe to figure itself out – and we have only just begun."

It is such a beautiful image, isn't it? We are stardust brought to life!

But here's the thing—as beautiful as that is, it doesn't make us special or unique.

Every one of us is composed of atoms traceable to the big bang and to the thermonuclear furnaces within high-mass stars that exploded more than five billion years ago.

I am stardust brought to life! And so are you. And so is Mr. Trump, and President Biden, and so was Adolf Hitler and Mother Theresa and...

You get my point.

On the other hand, doesn't that mean that we're all related to each other?

Doesn't that mean that each of us is equally important?

The Christian take on what I'm saying is that "...our lives have purpose and meaning. We represent Christ in the world.

Our very existence is a blessing in the community of creation.

The Holy One notices our actions, and we have the ability to bring honor or dishonor

to God.

We do not live in vain.

Rather, we live in service and love to God and one another.

Jesus enters the world, in part, to model this, and their teaching reframes the biblical narrative on how to be fully human in relationship and compassion.”

(Lindsay)

Today’s lesson comes from the Sermon on the Mount, which is a perfect place to understand what Jesus had to say about living in service and love to God and one another:

“The Sermon on the Mount, in its clarion call to a radically different way of life, does unmask the sinfulness of the life we now live—turned in on ourselves as we are.

Indeed, it makes our need for God’s grace very clear, but the message also moves and motivates us toward the higher righteousness to which Jesus calls us.

It does so not by giving a set of prescriptions to be followed in a legalistic manner but rather examples of life oriented by the love of God and neighbor.

The living of the law of love is illumined by its application to a few “focal instances.”

In every case, the disciple is urged to follow in God’s way by doing as God does: loving without limits (5:44-45), doing justice, and being merciful (5:7) and forgiving (6:12). (Anna Case Winters)

What does this lesson have to do with us being dust? About every single one of us being nothing greater than dust? Think of about it this way:

“Being deliberately attentive to God and others requires a shift away from self-centeredness, self-validation, and self-sufficiency.

To be clear, to love God and neighbor does also hinge on loving oneself.

Nurture and nourishment of the self is a necessary and faithful choice.

In this teaching on hypocrisy, Jesus helps to inform his listeners on the distinction between putting self over God and others rather than in relationship to them.”

It feels a little illogical, doesn’t it? But, on the other hand, it can be really freeing, too.

I find it to be a lot like this scene from the Marvel Cinematic Universe wherein a grieving, depressed, and defeated Thor goes back in time and ends up having this conversation with his mother:

<https://youtu.be/VT-ra8P7DUUs?si=EGFYSmLyb4ioq0dT>, “Still Worthy” ~A scene from _Avengers: Endgame_

“An idiot, no. A failure, absolutely.”

Remember that you are dust.

“Do you know what that makes you? Just like everyone else.”

And to dust you shall return.

“Everyone fails at who they’re supposed to be..”

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

“The measure of a person, of a hero, is how well they succeed at being who they are.”

You are still worthy.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

I have more than one reason to reference Thor and Mjolnir and the concept of worthiness.

You just heard me preach that we live in service to one another, and that doing that involves shifting away from self-centeredness, self-validation, and self-sufficiency.

And there's another place in the Marvel Cinematic Universe where Mjolnir represents all of that!

As this next video explains what I'm referring to, I invite you to ponder the ways in which you are worthy, too!

https://youtu.be/zfb3w9i11uk?si=LrrhcEzGoDJ_ynyN, "We Now Know Why Cap Didn't Lift Mjolnir In Age Of Ultron" ~Looper

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:

Ancient of Days, the earth flooded long ago, and we were given a sign: the rainbow, a reminder that Your covenant is with the whole earth, that You will never again destroy the earth by flood.

Your covenant is a reminder to us that the world is still broken, but You strive to make it whole.

We have failed and fallen short, but You have remained steadfast.

Your love for us has never ceased, though we have wandered and sought after the world's desires.

Call us back to Your covenant.

Remind us of how You formed the world and made us in Your image.

Remind us that we come from You, and we return to You, and Your promises never end.

You may be ancient, but You also make all things new.

In Jesus Christ 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:

https://youtu.be/tH2w60xx0kQ?si=tZh_UPosB6A-AqRa, "Dust In The Wind" ~Kansas

I close my eyes

Only for a moment, and the moment's gone

All my dreams

Pass before my eyes, a curiosity

Dust in the wind

All they are is dust in the wind

Same old song

Just a drop of water in an endless sea

All we do

Crumbles to the ground, though we refuse to see

Dust in the wind

All we are is dust in the wind

Now don't hang on

Nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky

It slips away

And all your money won't another minute buy

Dust in the wind

All we are is dust in the wind

(All we are is dust in the wind)

Dust in the wind

(Everything is dust in the wind)

Everything is dust in the wind

(In the wind)

end