

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 is our second Thursday Vespers in the liturgical season of Lent, and our themes for the day are death and shame.

Don't worry! It'll have some uplifting moments.

But first, if the internet is correct, this song was written in response to the death of Billie Joe Armstrong's father.

It certainly depicts one possible response to death and shame—to just hide away from the world.

"Wake me up when September ends."

https://youtu.be/rdpBZ5_b48g?si=cc0_Zp4JCfFpMNz5, "Wake Me Up When September Ends"
~Green Day

Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends
Like my fathers come to pass
Seven years has gone so fast
Wake me up when September ends
Here comes the rain again
Falling from the stars
Drenched in my pain again
Becoming who we are
As my memory rests
But never forgets what I lost
Wake me up when September ends
Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends
Ring out the bells again
Like we did when spring began
Wake me up when September ends
Here comes the rain again
Falling from the stars
Drenched in my pain again
Becoming who we are
As my memory rests

But never forgets what I lost
Wake me up when September ends
Summer has come and passed
The innocent can never last
Wake me up when September ends
Like my father's come to pass
Twenty years has gone so fast
Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends
Wake me up when September ends

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

Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

He said all this quite openly.

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation,

of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

SERMON "Exposed"

When I prepare to write a sermon, I like to use the Revised Common Lectionary or a sermon series like the UCC's "Sermon Seeds" to pick the scripture.

I like to read the lesson in context, so I simply read the entire chapter in which it is found.

Sometimes that's enough to inspire a whole sermon and sometimes I need to consider the way other pastors and theologians have worked with the text in order to get there.

Then I pull out the section of text that I feel conveys the point of the lesson within its proper context and paste it into a document before I begin writing the actual sermon.

That's more than you ever wanted to know about my sermon prep! But I am sharing it with you for a reason:

This week, after I did all of that reading and reflection, I pasted the passage into my document and was surprised.

I was taken aback by how short it actually was—because there's a lot going on there and it is all intense.

First of all, this passage comes immediately after Peter stated that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah—

the rightful heir to the Throne of David who the people hoped would free Israel from the dominion of the Roman Empire.

And Jesus agreed!

But then he says, "don't tell anyone" and goes on to say that he—the Messiah—must suffer, and be rejected by all of the religious authorities, and be killed..

Can you imagine? I'd think that my brain would shut down before he even got to the craziest part where he says "and after three days rise again."

But he said all of those things. According to the Gospel of Mark, "He said all this

quite openly.”

It’s a lot!

And then there’s the relationship between Jesus and Peter, right?

“In a temporary reversal of their relationship dynamics, Peter rebukes Jesus.

That may, in fact, be the most astonishing moment recorded in the text.

Jesus predicts his passion.

Peter chastises Jesus either for being so open in sharing this prediction or because of the prediction itself.

That remains mysterious as the markan account omits Peter’s actual words.

For the gospel writer, Peter’s reasoning does not matter.

The specificity of his offense is not significant.

Mark silences Peter in the way that Peter attempts to silence Jesus. The main point is that Peter offends Jesus.” (Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay)

It might be easy for us to gloss over that part, but it really is shocking! Up until this point, we do not have any indication that they have the kind of relationship where Peter can speak to Jesus in this way.

I’m actually having a difficult time coming up with a simile for how surprising it is.

I think because we live in a time where people are just constantly, brutally rude all over social media. Not to mention the fact that a former US President is well-known for cruel name-calling as part of his campaign strategy.

I’d have to say something really horrific to get the same shock value, because we’ve all been desensitized.

Suffice it to say, that the followers of Jesus, who consistently referred to Jesus as “Rabbi,” Teacher, out of deep-seated respect would not normally even consider rebuking him.

Then there’s the tension between public and private discourse:

“While Peter pulls Jesus to the side for a private talking to, Jesus pulls Peter back into the open so that his response will be public.

Being called Satan by Jesus surely was humiliating to Peter.

Of course, Jesus will later be accused wrongfully of being someone he was not.

In some ways, Jesus provides Peter with a sampling of what will come for both of them when they each pick up their respective crosses.

...Peter and his action are the focus of the passage, but like elsewhere in the gospel narratives, he also represents other disciples.

It is not possible to spread the gospel if one is ashamed of it.

Jesus forced him to confront his feelings of distress over the coming events.

The text suggests that Jesus humiliated Peter in public when Peter wanted the conversation to be private.”

Wow. Just, wow. It’s almost cinematic: Peter pulls Jesus aside and has words with him.

Jesus cuts him off, turns to make eye contact with the rest of the crowd of followers, and just verbally eviscerates Peter.

For the love of God, why?

What offended Jesus so much?

And why was he so offensive toward Peter in response?

In all honesty, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is pretty consistently offending someone!

“Here the Markan Jesus turns all worldly conceptions of honour on their head in favour of a deeply counter-cultural, shocking and distasteful focus on what contemporary society would usually brand as shameful.

Disciples are called on to deny themselves, to act as slaves or servants to one another, and to care nothing for status or prestige.

They are asked to give up everything – not only riches (10.17-22) but homes and families too (10.23-30), and possibly even their lives (8.34-8).

True honour and greatness in the community which gathers around Jesus lies not in courting the esteem of others, but in embracing a new understanding of honour based on ignominious service, suffering and disgrace.

Significantly, however, this is not only instruction given to others, but is crucially the basis for Jesus’ own way of life and, ultimately, his death (as 10.42-5 makes clear).” (Helen K. Bond)

Personally, I believe that it was the idea of Jesus—his beloved Rabbi and Messiah—dying that Peter simply couldn’t handle.

There are few things in human existence that we do not want to acknowledge more than death.

That’s why there are so many euphemisms for it that Monty Python was able to make an entire sketch out of them—passed on, gone to meet the Maker, rung down the curtain, joined the Choir Invisible, etc., etc., etc.

Anything to avoid saying, “died.”

Well, I’m here to tell you that “died” is not a dirty word and that we would do well not to avoid it.

That sense of avoidance is the last thing that I want to talk about, because Jesus uses the word “ashamed.” And shame is very closely associated with avoidance and hiding.

It’s important to note that shame is not the same as guilt. Guilt is, “I’m sorry, I did something wrong.” Guilt motivates us to do better, and then we don’t have to feel it any more.

Shame is, “I’m sorry, I am something wrong.”

“Shame often works in private.

It isolates and conceals.

The embarrassment that accompanies shame causes the one experiencing it to attempt to hide themselves or the source of shame.

Yet, Jesus insists on having this moment be fully revealed.

Yet, in his countering rebuke, Jesus instructs Peter to get behind him.

He may be telling Peter that he cannot obstruct his plan or his destiny.

Or, Jesus, who loves his enemies, may also be inviting Peter to repent and continue to follow him.

This is supported by his admonition to pick up their cross and follow him.

Jesus has always known that the glory will be accompanied by suffering.” (Lindsay)

I’ve probably said to you at some point or another that I believe poetry to be the art of saying as much as you can with as few words as possible.

Personally, I believe that Jesus was saying all of the above to Peter and to the greater audience of followers in those few short lines.

If you’ll grant my definition of poetry, this is arguably the second most poetic moments of the Gospel story.

More importantly, “Jesus, then, is not advocating or threatening isolation and

exclusion through shame.

He informs his followers of the risks of being ashamed of the fullness of the gospel—the walk through the valley of the shadow of death as well as the ascension to God’s holy mountain.

Saying no to that shame facilitates saying yes to compassion and companionship with the suffering and marginalized.

Saying no to shame allows pursuit of God’s beloved community despite fear and beyond consequence.

Saying no to shame keeps the way of Jesus in full, exposed, and transparent view.

Saying no to shame says yes to picking up one’s cross and following Jesus knowing that Jesus only carried the cross for a small portion of his life.

At the moment of truth, Jesus did the hardest thing...in full public view.

It was an attempt to humiliate him, but he kept his integrity.” (Lindsay)

What Jesus did to Peter in this lesson sounds absolutely brutal, but what he is doing is teaching Peter how to say no to shame.

And through Peter, Jesus is teaching us how to say no to shame.

It is so hard to stand in full, exposed, transparent view.

But it is so worth it to say no to shame.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

There are very few albums that face death head-on. The Album The Black Parade, by My Chemical Romance is one of them.

Not only is this song the one most obviously about preparing for death, but it also has a hint of that shame we were talking about. See if you can hear it, too.

https://youtu.be/wc2s9skF_58?si=zEkZ1Z_Hx2sNzv86, “Cancer” ~My Chemical Romance

Turn away

If you could get me a drink

Of water 'cause my lips are chapped and faded

Call my aunt Marie

Help her gather all my things

And bury me

In all my favorite colors

My sisters and my brothers, still

I will not kiss you

'Cause the hardest part of this

Is leaving you

Now turn away

'Cause I'm awful just to see

'Cause all my hair's abandoned all my body

All my agony

Know that I will never marry

Baby I'm just soggy from the chemo

But counting down the days to go

It just ain't living

And I just hope you know

That if you say (if you say)

Good-bye today (good-bye today)

I'd ask you to be true (I'd ask you to be true)

'Cause the hardest part of this
Is leaving you
'Cause the hardest part of this
Is leaving you

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:

Creator of the Stars, You made us out of stardust.

You are the one who knits us whole when we unravel.

You are the one who carefully shapes us back together when we fall apart.

You are the One who makes all things new, and You are continuing to remake us into vessels of Your love.

There is so much heaviness among us: climate change, politics, education, war, genocide, fear, and so much pain.

Remind us that we do Your work when we love one another, when we care for the most vulnerable in our society.

Keep us to Your ways of reparation and restoration, and no matter how difficult it gets, keep encouraging us to do better.

For You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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:

One of the most beautiful things about the Christian faith is our belief in the afterlife.
This song faces death head-on, describes grief—and the feeling that our beloved dead are not gone.

Not really.

https://youtu.be/hP6QpMeSG6s?si=TtsxelzBRDZ_n4np, “marjorie” ~Taylor Swift

Never be so kind, you forget to be clever
Never be so clever, you forget to be kind
And if I didn't know better
I'd think you were talking to me now
If I didn't know better
I'd think you were still around
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, you're alive in my head
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, so alive
Never be so polite, you forget your power
Never wield such power, you forget to be polite
And if I didn't know better
I'd think you were listening to me now
If I didn't know better
I'd think you were still around
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, you're alive in my head
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, so alive
The autumn chill that wakes me up
You loved the amber skies so much
Long limbs and frozen swims
You'd always go past where our feet could touch
And I complained the whole way there
The car ride back and up the stairs
I should've asked you questions
I should've asked you how to be
Asked you to write it down for me

Should've kept every grocery store receipt
'Cause every scrap of you would be taken from me
Watched as you signed your name Marjorie
All your closets of backlogged dreams
And how you left them all to me
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, you're alive in my head
What died didn't stay dead
What died didn't stay dead
You're alive, so alive
And if I didn't know better
I'd think you were singing to me now
If I didn't know better
I'd think you were still around
I know better
But I still feel you all around
I know better
But you're still around

end