

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:

I think I first had the thought in Seminary—which was a couple few years ago, now!—that I ought to start the Easter service with a quote from Charles Dickens \_A Christmas Carol\_:

“There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.”

For even longer than I've been having that thought, I've been a little fascinated with the piece you're about to hear.

I distinctly remember asking my mother what she thought of the piece, and she observed that the songwriter does not take the Resurrection into account.

Which, to my way of thinking, makes it the perfect “Marley was dead” song for opening worship!

[https://youtu.be/Or8Ba20Q\\_OY?si=7uHoP6cL5bveRdPz](https://youtu.be/Or8Ba20Q_OY?si=7uHoP6cL5bveRdPz), “The God That Failed” ~Metallica

Pride you took, pride you feel

Pride that you felt when you'd kneel

Not the word, not the love

Not what you thought from above

It feeds (it feeds), it grows (it grows)

It clouds all that you will know

Deceit, deceive

Decide just what you believe

I see faith in your eyes

Never you hear the discouraging lies

I hear faith in your cries

Broken is the promise, betrayal

The healing hand held back by the deepened nail

Follow the God that failed

Find your peace, find your say

Find the smooth road on your way

Trust you gave, a child to save

Left you cold and him in grave

It feeds (it feeds), it grows (it grows)

It clouds all that you will know

Deceit, deceive

Decide just what you believe

I see faith in your eyes

Never you hear the discouraging lies  
I hear faith in your cries  
Broken is the promise, betrayal  
The healing hand held back by the deepened nail  
Follow the God that failed, yeah  
I see faith in your eyes  
Broken is the promise, betrayal  
The healing hand held back by the deepened nail  
Follow the God that failed  
Pride you took, pride you feel  
Pride that you felt when you'd kneel  
Trust you gave, a child to save  
Left you cold and him in grave  
I see faith in your eyes  
Never your hear the discouraging lies  
I hear faith in your cries  
Broken is the promise, betrayal  
The healing hand held back by the deepened nail  
Follow the God that failed  
Follow the God that failed, yeah  
Broken is the promise  
Betrayal, betrayal, yeah

**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."

#### SCRIPTURE

John 19:38-20:10

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus.

Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.'

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb.

The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.

Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.

Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Then the disciples returned to their homes.

#### SERMON "End of the Gospel of John"

All through Lent, we've been working with the Gospel of John, so it is only appropriate that this Easter service spend time with that particular Gospel as well. For the past few weeks we've been spending time with one character in particular—a gentleman who only appears in the Gospel of John named Nicodemus.

He appears three times: coming to Jesus under the cover of darkness, unwilling for

whatever reasons to be seen speaking with him.

We see him in his role as a member of the religious elite, speaking out against the idea of arresting Jesus out of hand.

And in the lesson we just heard, not only providing the material for the embalming of Jesus' body, but also—  
with the help of Joseph of Arimathea—  
the physical labor of the embalming. I see you, Nicodemus. You've come a long way and I salute your bravery.

John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'

She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." '

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

I encourage you not to sleep on this fact: Mary Magdalene was first. She saw that the tomb was open first. She brought the news to the other Disciples first. She was first to speak to the Resurrected Jesus and first to be sent out with the Good News.

So I encourage you not to sleep on this lesson.

A woman was first.

John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

This is a good example of why we have more than one Gospel story: John is fantastic for themes regarding the divinity of Jesus, but the Holy Spirit is barely mentioned.

We need the author of Luke / Acts for the full weight of the Holy Spirit.  
But also... you can't sum up any human being in just one story.  
Let alone God.

John 20:24-31

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.'

But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.'

Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.

But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

I have always felt that Thomas gets a bum deal in this story, and my feelings on the matter haven't changed.

In fact, I've come to believe that this story isn't about Thomas at all—it is pointed directly at the Christian community for whom the author of the Gospel of John was writing 70-80 years after the life and times of Jesus.

Well, and at us.

We weren't there. We haven't probed the wounds of Jesus' resurrected body with our very own fingers.

But that shouldn't stop us from believing.

John 21:1-14

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples.

Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?'

They answered him, 'No.'

He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.

That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'

When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake.

But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they

were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread.

Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The literary term for what's happening here is "book-ending." Jesus first found Peter in a fishing boat. And here, at the end of the Gospel, we find him fishing once more.

John 21:15-19

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?'

He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'

A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.'

He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?'

Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.'

Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'

Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished.

But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.)

After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

This is so good for Peter! The three denials of Jesus between the end of supper and the first rooster-call of the morning are not the final words.

These are: I love you. I love you. I love you.

(So go out and love!)

John 21:20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?'

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?'

Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!'

So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die.

Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If it is my will that he

remain until I come, what is that to you?'

This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

In this last passage, the author of the Gospel nearly begs us to believe in their message.

Is it possible that the author, well over 100 years old by that point, was a literal witness to the events?

I don't know. And I don't care.

What matters to me is that I am a Trinitarian. I believe in the Incarnation—that Jesus was both fully Divine and fully Human. That is the message of this Gospel, and I believe it.

And.

I think it's entirely more important that the Gospel writer left the doors wide open for other interpretations, other themes, other stories of Jesus.

The world isn't big enough to contain him. Death itself isn't big enough to contain him.

And that's the point of Easter, after all.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

[https://youtu.be/WsOBsj8g6Dw?si=Bd-HULYXE\\_DFNhA8](https://youtu.be/WsOBsj8g6Dw?si=Bd-HULYXE_DFNhA8), ~A scene from \_The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe\_ (2005)

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:

Loving Savior, we give You all praise and honor and glory.

We remember today that every day is an Easter day.

Every day is a Resurrection day.

Every day is a day of new life and new hope.

Help us to live as resurrected people.

Help us to let go of fear, and to live into Your love.

We give you all thanks and praise.

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:

Let's end with my favorite song about the power of sheer, unadulterated joy!

[https://youtu.be/ZbZSe6N\\_BXs?si=iEvXBQB8gS3TW-km](https://youtu.be/ZbZSe6N_BXs?si=iEvXBQB8gS3TW-km), "Happy" ~Pharrell Williams

It might seem crazy what I am 'bout to say

Sunshine, she's here, you can take a break

I'm a hot air balloon that could go to space

With the air, like I don't care, baby by the way

Huh (Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you know what happiness is to you

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do

Here come bad news talking this and that (Yeah)

Well give me all you got, don't hold back (Yeah)

Well I should probably warn you I'll be just fine (Yeah)

No offense to you don't waste your time

Here's why

(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof

(Because I'm happy)



Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do  
Uh, bring me down  
Can't nothing, bring me down  
My level's too high to bring me down  
Can't nothing, bring me down, I said  
Bring me down, can't nothing  
Bring me down  
My level's too high to bring me down  
Can't nothing, bring me down, I said  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do  
Uh, bring me down (Happy, happy, happy, happy)  
Can't nothing (Happy, happy, happy, happy)  
Bring me down, my level's too high  
To bring me down (Happy, happy, happy, happy)  
Can't nothing (Happy, happy, happy, happy)  
Bring me down, I said  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you (ayy, ayy, ayy)  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth  
(Because I'm happy)  
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you (hey)  
(Because I'm happy)

Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do  
Come on

\*end\*