

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 in the aisles or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you—I say go for it!

GATHERING:

January, 1993, this artist came out of the closet as a Lesbian. September, 1993, she released her album Yes I Am. And this song was all over the radio.

<https://youtu.be/86xV2cI0-Bc?si=ioAif9PLY3oxv5qA>, "Come To My Window" ~Mellissa Etheridge

Come to my window

Crawl inside

Wait by the light of the moon

Come to my window

I'll be home soon

I would dial the numbers

Just to listen to your breath

And I would stand inside my hell

And hold the hand of death

You don't know how far I'd go

To ease this precious ache

And you don't know how much I'd give

Or how much I can take

Just to reach you

Just to reach you

Oh, to reach you

Oh

Come to my window

Crawl inside

Wait by the light of the moon

Come to my window

I'll be home soon

Keeping my eyes open

I cannot afford to sleep

Giving away promises

I know that I can't keep

Nothing fills the blackness

That has seeped into my chest

I need you in my blood

I am forsaking all the rest

Just to reach you

Just to reach you

Oh, to reach you
Oh
Come to my window
Crawl inside
Wait by the light of the moon
Come to my window
I'll be home soon
I don't care what they think
I don't care what they say
What do they know
About this love anyway?
Come, come to my window
I'll be home
I'll be home
I'll be home
I'm coming home
Come to my window
Oh, crawl inside
Wait by the light of the moon
Come to my window
I'll be home soon
I'll be home
I'll be home
I'm coming home
Come to my window
Oh, crawl inside
Wait by the light of the moon
Come to my window
I'll be home soon
I'll be home
I'll be home
I'll be home

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

Ruth 1:1-19

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food.

So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.'

Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.'

But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from

marrying?

No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.'

Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.'

But Ruth said,

'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!'

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'

SERMON "Found Family"

This Monday, April 22nd, begins international Lesbian Visibility Week. It started in the United Kingdom in 2008 as a single day of visibility and has since expanded to a whole week.

Now, these days I tend to present as feminine. And I have been known to have relationships with women. But I've never really considered myself a Lesbian. For one thing, I'm a non-binary person, neither wholly masculine nor wholly feminine. For another, I was assigned "male" at birth and many people perceive me as masculine no matter how I'm presenting.

More sadly, though, I never really felt like I had a place among them.

By the time I was inching myself out of the closet, the Lesbian community had a reputation for excluding trans women.

It is hard enough to sit in the intersection of non-binary and transgender—when I turn to the queer community it's for support, not more exclusion!

But here's the thing: living well in today's day and age involves really working to understand the nuances of the reality behind the noise.

So, let's have a look at what Lesbian Visibility says about itself. An article written by Trudy Ring for *The Advocate*, heavily quotes Diva publisher Linda Riley: "'I came to the conclusion that a single day for lesbian visibility was simply insufficient,' she went on.

'We needed, and deserved, more time to shine a light on some of the amazing women in our community, and to celebrate who we are without fear of prejudice, harassment or vilification.'

Since the observance's expansion to a week, it has become 'an unmissable event in the LGBTQI calendar,' she noted.

Lesbian Visibility Day and Week have supporters worldwide, including GLAAD, UK Black Pride, LGBT Foundation, the Peter Tatchell Foundation, and more.

'These organisations all agree that lesbians need to be given space to be visible and shown to the world on our own terms,' Riley wrote. 'For too long, we have been fetishised by the heterosexual male gaze, as little more than the stuff of fantasy. At the same time, a small number of cis lesbians, whose opposition to the rights of our trans siblings has become ever louder and more toxic, have led some to believe that the lesbian community is not an inclusive space. I can assure you that for the vast majority of us, this is not the case. That's why I am so committed to celebrating all under the LGBTQI umbrella.'"

Earlier I said that I'm a non-binary person who was assigned male at birth and has been known to have relationships with women. My spouse, Emmi, is a non-binary person who was assigned female at birth and has been known to have relationships with women—in fact, when we started dating, there was kind of a hubbub within their circle of friends. They knew Emmi as a Butch Lesbian and they saw me as male—it was very strange for them to see Emmi “dating a guy.” But that's not my point—the point I'm trying to make is that Emmi knows much more intimately what it's like to be an out Lesbian than I do! So I asked them what it's like, and they said that the very first thing that came to mind echoes what Riley wrote about “the heterosexual male gaze.” Imagine that you're out on a date, you have sat down to dinner, you're enjoying one another's company, everything is great. Then a man approaches and starts to hit on you. Well, maybe he's just clueless—maybe he doesn't realize that you're on a date and that there's no way you'd want his attention right now. You hold hands with your date. Or maybe you share a kiss. You do something that signals in no uncertain terms: This Is A Date! So he apologizes and walks away—actually, no. Oh no, he not only persists, he hits on your date, too. He insists that he doesn't mind, he'll “date” you both! And let me pause for a moment to say—this is not polyamory. This is a straight, cis, monogamous man who assumes that you and your date are available to him for sex. That's what Emmi said it was like to date as an out Lesbian. And it wasn't an isolated incident. Emmi used the phrase “all the time.” And it points to a societal ill that we don't have time to dig into here and now. Because the next thing we talked about was today's lesson. Remember today's lesson? It has become a mainstay for Lesbian weddings, and for some people it is because they see two women dedicating themselves to one another and they see romance. I will admit to some disappointment myself—the story of King David and Johnathan reads like a romantic relationship, but I have not found a story in the Bible that reads like a romance between two women. In fact, there are not many stories of the relationships between women in the Bible at all. The story of Ruth is an important exception—it is the story of the relationship between a mother and her daughter-in-law. Now, in that time and in that place, women couldn't hold down jobs or own property—so when Naomi's husband and both her sons died, she was left destitute. So were both of her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, who were both from the country of Moab.

The only thing Naomi could think to do was return home to Judah, where Jewish law provided some small support for widows.
As for her daughters-in-law, landing a new husband was their best way forward—and Moab was the best place for them to do that.
Even though she loves her mother-in-law, Orpah agrees, says farewell, and exits the story.
Ruth, though. She makes it absolutely clear that she will follow Naomi anywhere. For Ruth, it doesn't matter that Naomi didn't give birth to her—she's family. She's family.
You've heard me say it before, and it's important to say now: there are two kinds of family.
There's the one you were born into, and the one you make with the people you love. In the Queer community, we call that second kind "Found Family," and it is the most important kind for us.
Found Family is the most important kind of family in the Queer community because all too often, when we come out to the one we were born into, we are rejected. Sometimes harshly. Sometimes irrevocably.
But there are people in the world who love us just the way we are, and that is more important than an accident of birth, and that is what Ruth is saying when she proclaims,
"Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried."
This is a story about Found Family—the one you make with the people you love, and who love you for who you are.
So this is a very important story for the Queer community, because it is about Found Family.
And this story of Found Family is important to Judaism, because Ruth is an ancestor of King David—without this Found Family, there would have been no David.
This story of Found Family is important to Christianity—without David, there would have been no Jesus.
Found Family is important. You are important. Never forget that.
And keep making family.
What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

Melissa Etheridge coming out in 1993 was a big deal—meanwhile, this duo of Lesbians—no, they are not and never have been a romantic couple—have been out since 1988.

Their bravery, determination, creativity and success inspire me.

https://youtu.be/30d2_zUtaoE?si=uyBFpzi7VY2z7vCF, "It's Alright" ~Indigo Girls

It's alright forty days of rain

My skin stretched out from the growing pain

It'd be nice to have an explanation

But it's alright

And it's alright if you hate that way

Hate me 'cause I'm different

You hate me 'cause I'm gay

Truth of the matter come around one day

It's alright

I look at this lifeline stretched way all across my hand

I look at the burned out empty like a plague across the land
And for everything I learn there are two I don't understand
That's while I'm still on a search
Through the weather strewn church
I'm doing the best that I can
And it's alright
And it's alright though we worry and fuss (alright)
We can't get over the hump or get over us (we can't get over us)
It seems easier to push than to let go and trust (alright)
But it's alright
When we get a little distant some things get clearer
Yeah give 'em the space some hearts grow nearer
I ran as hard as I could I still ended up here
And it's alright
As I look at this lifeline stretched way all across my hand (lifeline all across my hand)
I look at the fires of hatred (fire)
Burning up the bounty of this beautiful land (burning up the land)
I know that I'm small in a way but I know I'm strong
And it's my thirst that brought me to the water
Well I give it all up then she carries me on
It's alright
Yeah
And it's alright if I feel afraid
My plans in pieces
My plans mislaid
It's the will of the way (the will of the way)
The will of the way (it's the will of the way)
The will of the only way that could have brought me here today
And it's alright
And it's alright

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 and abiding God,

Let it be me

If the world is night

Shine my life like a light

In the kind word you speak

In the turn of the cheek

When your vision stays clear

In the face of your fear

Then you see turning out a light switch

Is their only power

When we stand like spotlights

In a mighty tower

All for one and one for all

Then we sing the common call

Let it be me

Amen. (Adapted from "Let It Be Me" written by Emily Ann Saliers)

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:

This song rather violently depicts the fragile male ego that Emmi described to me—watch for the "look at me, not her" moment.

While I do not condone the violence of the music video, I applaud how it uplifts the Lesbian spirit.

Besides, it's a rather upbeat song, overall, and I invite you all to dance if you like!

https://youtu.be/I0MT8SwNa_U?si=m0sQvHMncsm9DCfP, "Girls Like Girls" ~Hayley Kiyoko

Ooh-hoo boy

Ooh-hoo boy

Ooh-hoo boy (Boys)

Ooh-hoo boy
Stealing kisses from your missus
Does it make you freak out?
Got you fussing, got you worried
Scared to let your guard down
Boys (Ooh-hoo boy)
Boys (Ooh-hoo boy)
Tell the neighbors I'm not sorry if
I'm breaking walls down
Building your girl's second story
Ripping all your floors out
Saw your face, heard your name
Gotta get with you
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Isn't this why we came? Gotta get with you
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Boys
Ooh-hoo boy
Ooh-hoo boy
Always gonna steal your thunder
Watch me like a dark cloud
On the move collecting numbers
I'ma take your girl out
We will be everything that we'd ever need
Don't tell me, tell me what I feel
I'm real and I don't feel like boys
I'm real and I don't feel like boys
Saw your face, heard your name
Gotta get with you
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Isn't this why we came? Gotta get with you
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
I've been crossing all the lines, all the lines
Kissed your girls and made you cry, boys
Ooh-hoo boy
Ooh-hoo
Saw your face, heard your name
Gotta get with you
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new
Isn't this why we came?
Tell me if you feel it too!
Tell me, girls like girls like boys do
Nothing new
Girls like girls like boys do, nothing new

end