

WELCOME

Grace and peace be with you my friends and familia on this lovely Sunday!

Thank you for coming!

Welcome to First United Church of Christ and Conference Center in second life.

My name is Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

One of the most exciting things for me to share is that we are a real life church with real life standing in the Eastern Association; Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC).

And as a real 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."

And as we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have voice and media turned on.

If you don't know how to do that, let someone know and we'll try to help.
There will be a link in Nearby so you can watch it in your browser if the viewer isn't working for you.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder in the back along with a donation bowl.

One of the blessings and responsibilities that come with our being a real church with real standing is that we, like all UCC churches, support the work of the national church not only with prayer but financially.

So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry.
If you prefer, donations can be made on our website, firstuccsl.org.

So Invite you my friends to join me as we start our service with a prayer.

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this digital place, the homes, and places where this is being heard with your presence and touch us with your love.

Thank you for loving us, and for this place where we are all welcomed home!
We pray in your many names. Amen.

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

GATHERING MUSIC

Dante Bowe - Hide Me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DU6gpzVGfkY>

SCRIPTURE

Today's scripture comes to us from the book of John 10:11-18 (NRSV)

I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

The hired hand runs away because the hired hand does not care for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own knows me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.

I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God.

SERMON

JC's got you

This week I wrestled with this text for a number of reasons.

I like the idea of Jesus saying I am the good shepherd.

It reminds me of this picture that hung at my grandmother's dining room table with a white, golden hair, blue eyes.

A framed picture of Jesus, holding a beautiful white sheep with fluffy hair in his arms.

In my Chicana speech I know I must have said, "ay que pretty!"

Which translates to that is so beautiful!

Who does not like that picture?

There was beautiful Jesus telling this beautiful sheep, I am the good shepherd.
This photo when I was young made me all warm and fuzzy inside.
Add to it the text, I am the good Shepherd, pure perfection!

But then why did the scripture stir something inside me?

You know when you just can't put your finger on something.
Pretty White blue eye Jesus.
Pretty White Sheep with fluffy hair and a pink cute little nose.
Pretty Text.
What is it?

Forget the picture I painted for you hanging from my abuelitas comedor.
I'll come back to it.

Let's look only at the text.
Does anything rise within you?

I am the good shepherd. (Check- Pretty Text)
The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Check- Yes Jesus died to give us life and show us love)

The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. (Wait a minute....)

Okay maybe I should not look at this from the fact that I was a hired hand before.
Is it saying that only he JESUS can love people and protect people?
Bells are going off in my ears.

I'm reminded of the often quoted text yelled at protests or rallies, Only JESUS is the ONLY way!
ONLY Jesus can give you life.
ONLY Jesus can give you eternal life!
ONLY.

It is an absolute text, that something it is thrown around with arrogance by not so nice Christians.

Maybe you have never met someone like that.
ABSOLUTES...

It is simple ONLY and period.
There are no commas, put a period.

The absolute powerful statement that has been used as a reason to deny the sacredness, and holiness of others.

Now back to the hired hand.
The hired hand runs away because the hired hand does not care for the sheep.

The hired help will take off running when danger comes, leaving the poor little ovejitas wide open in danger.

Don't you trust that hired help!

I mean maybe back then the hired help was not good!

OR maybe it was a misconception?

Check this out.

I once worked while in seminary as a cleaning person.

I had a van pick me up in the parking lot and along with three other women we would go to assigned houses and clean.

My job was to just vacuum.

Me and my trusted vacuum cleaner went room to room in some really huge homes.

I loved my job.

I was able to listen to pod casts, study if I recorded my notes, or listen to audio books.

But there was this one place I felt uneasy.

I did not know why.

I would enter and feel cold.

But my job was to just vacuum, so onward!

I would vacuum, I would move furniture around and then I would put things back and move along to the next room.

One day, my boss at that time came to me and said I won't be able to take you to that house again when we just clean.

For the next week's schedule, I was given the option to have the day off or wait for half a day at a Star bucks and then they would pick me up for the rest of the shift.

I was curious to know why I could not go back to clean that house.

What did I do?

My boss said it has nothing to do with you.

I'm sorry she pays well. I have to do what they ask.

Turns out that the owner of the house had returned to pick up something she had forgotten that morning and had seen me cleaning her room.

She said that she had caught me going through her things.

I remember being dumbfounded, like I don't even look up beyond the vacuum cleaner. I'm so engrossed in what I am hearing and making sure the darn lines on the carpet look good to touch anything above my knees.

That is not my job to dust, or clean things.

I am the carpet person, I come to each room only after being given the green light

by the person who dusted etc.
This made no sense!

Finally my boss said, I know.
But Yadi when she said you just don't look honest, I had to leave it at that.
Was I too gay looking?
Was I too Brown?

I wore a baseball cap and had air pods (both gifted from a friend) but I figured I looked American and no one had to know I can't afford those things!
I looked American!

But it did not matter, a misconception either of being a hired help, or any other bias had me removed from the job.

So what miscommunication might Jesus have assumed of the hired help?

Non-owners with nothing at stake won't care enough to protect.
You know it's hard to find good people you can trust.
But the good Shepherd, he is good, stoic, protector, caring, loving, all around good guy to be around.
The effective, efficient, best of all!

That was Jesus.
He said, I am the good shepherd.
I know my own, and my own knows me.
And I lay down my life for the sheep.

Now in the scriptures of John 10:11-18, Jesus has not died.
Before these statements, Jesus has been spending time talking about sheep, sheep pens and Shepherds.
He has been teaching a festival (John 7:14, 28,37-38) and almost gets himself stone.

He goes on to say, I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
This part gives me pause.

Is this that text that says there is ONLY one acceptable religion?

Is this text a nicer way to say what a bullhorn man yelling in a street corner is saying all along!

You know the man who will yell "repent for the kingdom of God is near!
Repent, because if YOU DO NOT _____ (fill in consequences of doom, terror, fear, poverty, and all kinds of bad things depending on the person).

One way! One religion!
We have a Jesus and you do not!

So as I am praying about this text, wrestling about this text, I realized something.

I missed the whole point!

I AM the good shepherd.

I am the one you can count on being good to you when those who should are not.
Maybe this text is not about world dominance and Jesus' power but simply LOVE.

Throughout Jesus' life there were mothers, friends of people in need, people in the streets blind, unable to walk, hurt, or dying scattered all around the bath houses, lost in pain and confusion needing Jesus.

Through it all he says I heard them, they hear me.

He is a good shepherd.

He sees the sheep in need, he leaves the 99 for the 100.

Jesus street credit stands on his own.

People search, find, and receive.

I don't believe he is saying this in an arrogant way, but rather reminded us, I AM a good person for you.

I am the one....that in spite, despite, and regardless of anything will still be here.

I AM the one that when everything around you flops, you can find me.

I AM the one that is holding your hand lovingly.

I AM the one here when that person who is supposed to be taking care of you drops the ball and hurts you.

I AM the one

Friends, Church perhaps the hired help won't run when danger comes if they stop seeing themselves just as a hired help.

Perhaps when each of us realize that we are heirs, children of the God most high and therefore will and MUST give a whole lot of concern when danger comes upon others.

Perhaps, as heirs of God, as children of God, as ambassadors of God, there will be no more snatching, scattering, dragging, hurting, and losing the sheep in our fold, the youngsters to gangs and violence.

Perhaps, those in the other fold when they see they are alone might look this way and through our testimony, our work, our fruits, our deeds and walk with the one who loved us first, would see they are welcomed at this sheep pen.

Come to the party!

Here the good news, you belong.

You might be born and subscribe to another religion, and it is okay.

Your relationship with the one I serve or lack off should not be a dividing factor.

We have more things alike that we have apart.

I might call my God, the Holy One, and you might call yours Alah, El Shadie, Jehovah, El omnipotent, Jireh and you know that we are loved the same.

When Jesus says that we might all be one I believe that it is not saying blend, forget your identity, assimilate, fit in a box, get in a mold, but be all of one mind to do good regardless of who sees you or not.

The picture at my abuelitas house was pretty when I was little because a White Man with Blue eyes was pretty, I only knew Brown around me.

I only knew that you had to be perfect, and clean for Jesus to hold you.

I could never measure up!

I was that sheep that probably was limping.

I am the jacked up sheep that got into the mud, ran in the pen I should not have been at.

I'm the sheet that tripped, got caught on the fence I was not supposed to jump to (a warning for my own good more than for control) and got hurt.

I'm the sheep that is smelly probably from all the running from place to place in search for love, understanding, and acceptance not tolerance.

I AM NOT The pretty sheep Jesus is holding.

And you know what?!

Here the good news Jesus scopes me right up just as I am and holds me tight.

This Jesus is also a bit Brown, tan, and I feel loved.

Your not the help my friends, you were perhaps like me running in circles and then scope up by Love set on solid ground and told you are my heir,!

Children of the out most hight you belong!

Jesus got you.

Other sheep in the other fold are welcomed any time!

They will hear my voice because of YOU my friends.

You who are talking, walking, and living your life in the truth of Jesus' love.

So dear church received such a command, to love, live, and BE.

The good Shepherd, the one who said come on when you're ready, and don't stay away because you think you don't belong.

Come on over, we got you.

Jesus got you.

And we got each other.

Thanks be to God!

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We have come to this time of prayers.
Together we will lift our prayers of joy and concerns.
We are a community that holds each other in prayer.

Today, I invite you while this song
plays to type in your prayer request in the chat box.

Crowder, Dante Browe - God Really Loves Us
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG-Y9bWlCw8>

Holy-One 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.

God of mercy, in this holy season, there are people in need of your tender mercies:
we pray for those who are ill and for those who are recovering;
for those whose sadness is made heavier by memories of the past or by some present
pain.
We pray for those who do not have enough: enough food, enough money,
enough companionship, enough hope.

Because there is not yet peace on earth, we pray for those in harm's way.
Protect them from war, violence, and cruel oppression.
For these and many other needs, we offer our intercessions...

Amen

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Let us go forth from this place into the world to find yourself; a cause you can
live for; and a love you can live into.
May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, springing up
like living water, fill your heart, and flow through your life.

Now, let us dance!

Crowder - Prove it
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fsKoK9yLE0>