

WELCOME

Thank you for coming! We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

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

Be Alright - Evan Craft, Danny Gokey, Redimi2  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9NLnlPs-m58>

Grace and peace be with you on this Sunday evening.  
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](http://firstuccsl.org).

Yesterday in the United States, International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

This led me to pray and discern a way to acknowledge this as the church of Christ and learn from this as we continue living a life where Biblical and theological beliefs can pursue people to do unimaginable things.

We want to believe that what happened in Nazi concentration and extermination camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau was something awful that happened in the past. But we must not only acknowledge the lives lost but how all this happens with the church or people of faith quietly and not so quietly playing a part in it.

In today's service we will acknowledge the day, learn together, pray together and revisit our covenant of God's love for human life above creeds, theologians, and religious authorities.

I will be sharing with you links that you can follow later for further information.

Today, I will start our service with a video shared by the United Church of Christ to commemorate this day.

Believe Out Loud International Holocaust remembrance day prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2ajI3jTxB4>

#### PRAYER

From the UCC archives:

(<https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/international-holocaust-remembrance-day/>)

ON this day set aside to remember, we find in the telling of the stories to each other a source of inspiration that leads to hope, healing, and to acceptance of the beauty inherent in every child your hand fashions and your breath animates.

All - Let no fascism take root.

Pastor - Let no new potentate or their minions threaten annihilation.

ALL - Let no new hatred inspire one more holocaust.

All/Pastor - Let our memory of this horror be all that is left of this evil.

Amen

Let us pray:

Holy-One we pray that you guide us today and always to reject all that rejects or targets your beautiful creation.

May our collective courage banish all darkness prevail over hate and good will triumph over evil.

May it be so.

Amen

Chorus "WHO AM I?" @ United Nations Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGBxAdFSmj8>

#### SCRIPTURE

Today's scripture comes from the book of Psalms 102:1-13 NRSV

A prayer of one afflicted, when faint and pleading before the Lord.

Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you.  
Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress.

Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call.  
For my days pass away like smoke,,and my bones burn like a furnace.  
My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread.  
Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my skin.

I am like a desert owl[a] of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places.  
I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.  
All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse.

Indeed, I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink,  
because of your indignation and anger, for you have lifted me up and thrown me  
aside.  
My days are like a lengthening shadow; I wither away like grass.

But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations.  
You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favor it; the  
appointed time has come.

The word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON - We remember -

While reflecting on Holocaust Remembrance Day, a particular passage from the United Church of Christ's sixteenth General Synod resolution titled "The Relationship Between the United Church of Christ and the Jewish Community" stood out to me. If you're interested in learning more, you can find the full text by following this link.  
(<https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/relationship-between-the-ucc-and-the-jewish-community-1987.pdf>)

A section of the resolution reads, "The Church's frequent portrayal of the Jews as blind, recalcitrant, evil, and rejected by God has found expression in much Christian theology, liturgy, and education. Such a negative portrayal of the Jewish people and of Judaism has been a factor in the shaping of anti-Jewish attitudes of societies and the policies of governments.

The most devastating lethal metastasis of this process occurred in our own century during the Holocaust."  
Contemplating the impact and authority held by Pastors, Ministers, Professors of the faith, and Theologians in relation to the emergence of Nazi power has provoked my thoughts.

I find myself pondering their whereabouts during that time, the extent of their influence, and whether they indeed played a role in shaping the Nazi regime. What do you think?

Do you think that the church, and people of faith had a strong high influence in giving rise to power to the Nazi regime?

Type 1 for yes and 2 for no. (I'll keep on sharing while you think about that)

Without a doubt, the value of human life is universally acknowledged as something sacred in the eyes of God.

Undoubtedly, various religious groups such as the church, Lutherans, Wesleyan, Methodists, and others would never have willingly endorsed or condoned the tragic loss of life within a community.

However, despite these beliefs, the unthinkable occurred.

Today, I will share with you the groundbreaking discoveries and life long work done by Dr. Susannah Heschel, an esteemed professor at Dartmouth College and renowned author.

As the daughter of the esteemed Rabi Abraham Joshua Heschel, her expertise in Jewish Studies is unparalleled.

Her findings were mind blowing as she unveils how and why faith communities in particular in Germany and around that time not only supported the Nazi regime but could not wait to be a part of it.

At the end I will share a link to the video where she presents her lifelong research and enlightening insights on race and Jewish studies.

In the 19th century, Rabbi Abraham Geiger, a Jewish theologian, authored a book that drew parallels between Judaism and the Quran.

This work gained immense popularity and continues to be highly regarded.

Geiger further explored the connections between Jesus' teachings in the New Testament and how it parallels with what Jewish Rabbis taught.

However, his assertion that Jesus was a Pharisee caused controversy and hindered the celebration of this publication.

Jesus was a Pharisee!

¡Santo Dios! Gasp from the audience.

How dare he say that?!

One response by Frans Daelich said that "Calling Jesus a pharisee is ten times more horrific than the crucifixion."

Have you ever pondered upon this matter?

Throughout the ages, there have been numerous instances where individuals have felt compelled to protect the teachings of Christ.

Many want to argue when something does not fit their crafted box of beliefs and fight to defend it.

Please know that a way of honoring and defending Jesus is with our actions.

We stand with Christ when we help the least of these, show grace and mercy towards our fellow sibling.

It is such an opposite thing to try to fight on his behalf with words that are

harsh, combative and actions that lead to death.

Nonetheless, people have taken the events described in the Bible of the persecution Jesus endured as a reason to accuse an entire Jewish race for his death.

Missing the entire point of the sacrifice.

But where did all these ideas come from?

Did the rise of Hitler give way to these allegations to become powerful?

Did the Reich uplift a propaganda that people were swept under?

It might shock you, just like it did me, to discover that the response is not what we expected.

Professor Heschel revealed that Hitler initially feared the church and academia would oppose him, but he quickly realized his concerns were unfounded.

It's quite surprising to discover that theologians and numerous religious institutions were eager to join this emerging movement.

Interestingly, even before Hitler's rise to power, there was a concerted effort to assert that Jesus was not Jewish but rather of Aryan descent.

It may sound unbelievable, but it's true.

In 1863, Aaron Ceron made a bold claim that Jesus, originally a Jew, later embraced Christianity and even identified as an Aryan.

This idea gained traction through various publications, books, poems, and the works of German novelists who propagated this belief.

According to them, during the 8th century, when the northern kingdom was destroyed, the entire population was wiped out, allowing the Aryans to reclaim that territory. Fascinating, isn't it?

Consequently, this theory suggests that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem near Jerusalem, but rather in Bethlehem within the Nazareth region, located in the northern part of Galilee.

Interestingly, Galileans were not considered highly educated, intelligent, or devout followers of Jewish customs.

They were primarily simple farmers, which explains why they readily embraced Jesus and his teachings.

Jesus was the leader of these individuals, which led to the creation of the new testament.

However, upon his arrival in Jerusalem, he was tragically killed by the Jewish people.

This event is often supported by references from the book of John, further perpetuating this belief.

It is crucial, my friends, to understand the significance of this differentiation. In our daily lives, do we frequently find ourselves categorizing Jesus in a specific way?

His purpose was not to merely socialize with prostitutes, but rather to save them from their struggles.

As if making such a difference makes Jesus a moral upright person to defend when it is suggested he shared bread with them! Gasp!

Throughout history, there has always been a necessity to modify, disregard, overlook, and reinterpret scriptures in order to re-write, and fit a craft of human morals where the teachings of Jesus can fit perfectly well.

In the 1900's, these concepts circulated widely.

The foundation was strong, it was the people from the bottom up that encouraged the regime (Hitler's party) to rise without obstacles.

Hitler wasn't concerned about the church as he knew they were on his side, initially making it challenging for them to align with him.

Quite a twist!

What happens when someone tells you no?

You want to know why not?

In 1935, the Reich made it clear that only members of the Nazi party could use the swastika, as stated by Professor Heschel.

Interestingly, theologians were also required to become supporting members and pay a monthly fee to join if they wanted to receive a lapel to wear proud.

There are records of letters and images from German churches and pastors desperately pleading to keep the swastika, as they had already incorporated it into their altars, processional crosses, or placed it on top of the altar.

However, the Nazi party insisted on its removal.

It begs the question, why were these individuals so eager to align themselves with a group that mistreated and spoke ill of Jewish people?

The seed of hate and division was sown, taking root and gripping their hearts and minds.

The desire to please this man ran deep, leading to the establishment of an institution dedicated to combating Jewish influence in German religious life, with 80 theologians and professors involved.

Founded in 1939, the institute celebrated its inception, promising to focus on the spiritual war while Hitler waged the physical war.

The use of dogma to divide people and erase their humanity is still prevalent in churches, politics, and everyday life, with individuals who cannot resist falling into this trap.

It's a cycle that despite what history teaches us, repeats itself.

Why?

Look at today and the nationalism platform rising in the United States.

If Jesus gets attacked, or morals, our values, our conservative ideas then we must fight!

Bring Bibles, sell Bibles, sign Bibles, recreate it all and sell it.

Some individuals claim to love God but speak ill of others, which is contradictory and hypocritical.

The Psalms express deep emotions of sorrow and despair, reflecting personal afflictions and feelings of abandonment by God.

These scriptures also highlight the hope for compassion, justice, and the

restoration of Jerusalem.

The history of theologians supporting Hitler's regime serves as a cautionary tale of using religion for power and manipulation.

Professor Heschel's research sheds light on how theologians used the Bible to influence communities during the Hitler era.

(<https://youtu.be/hnnggA-mIJI?si=S02FDYzFvz3I6XY0>)

When a need to serve, to follow, to lift up anything including the Bible over God's creation life, should be called out.

Present-day conflicts in the Middle East continue to divide communities.

Students have taken on to the streets to protest the way that Palestine's are being treated.

And we pray for their safety, and the courage to speak up and bring awareness to what is happening.

Regardless of their religious or cultural backgrounds, whether they are Jewish, Palestinians, immigrants, people of color, or siblings of different faiths such as Islam, Buddhism, or even Paganism, it is essential to recognize that they are all human beings who deserve to live peacefully.

We must stand against anything that contradicts how valuable we are in Christ.

During that era, Theologian and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood out from his peers and the church by refusing to conform, ultimately paying the ultimate price.

The book "The Cost of Discipleship" is a must-read modern classic that I highly recommend.

Bonhoeffer met his end through execution by hanging on April 9, 1945, as the Nazi regime crumbled.

When reflecting on the Holocaust, it is crucial to recognize the valuable lessons we can learn from such a tragic event.

One lesson that stands out to me is how easily individuals with preconceived agendas can manipulate religious teachings to justify hatred, violence, and the devaluation of human life.

However, it is important to remember that the commandment to love, as emphasized by God and reiterated by Jesus, is unwavering and should be the guiding principle in our lives.

The scripture from Matthew 22:37-40 emphasizes the significance of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves, and it serves as a powerful reminder that any ideology or individual who promotes negativity, anti-Semitism, homophobia, or any form of hate should be firmly rejected in the name of Jesus.

It is essential to acknowledge that we all hold different beliefs, influenced by our personal theology, upbringing, and generational perspectives.

While disagreements are inevitable, there comes a time when we cannot remain silent or passive in the face of evil.

Evil, whether personified as the devil or an evil spirit, seeks to destroy, while Jesus came to bring abundant life.

Therefore, we must remember, commemorate, and actively pursue mercy, justice, and peace for all people.  
Let us stand united against hatred and vow to never forget the lessons of the past.

The Psalmist reminds us that our cries, our laments, our prayers they do not go unheard.

We are restored, we are renewed, we are loved.

Amen.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

As this video plays please share your prayer request in the chat box below.

Pentatonix - Hallelujah (Official Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRP8d7hhpoQ>

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.

Holy-One-

Free us from oppressive spiritual teachings that alienate us from our ancestors.  
Let us embrace a spirituality that names and honors those mystical members of the divine community who have been lost to death.  
Let us remember those whose bodies endured the deepest evils, that we might ground ourselves in our own bodies, and in doing so find our belief more whole.  
Let us remember those who preserved our deepest joy, that we might realize we've inherited far more than trauma.  
Remind us that those excluded in life will not be excluded in death.  
Our saints belong and are worthy of honor.  
Amen.

(Arthur Riley, Cole. Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human (pp. 224-225). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

We stand in awe and gratitude of your persistent love for each and all your children: Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and queer too.

We are all precious manifestations of the Divine.

As we stand together in love and light, may our collective courage banish all darkness, prevail over hate, and goodwill triumph over evil.

May it be so.

Peace be with you on your journey today and always, for you are not alone.



Thanks be to God.

Music for the Journey -  
Casting Crowns - Nobody (Official Music Video) ft. Matthew West  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yBzIt\\_z8oY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yBzIt_z8oY)