

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.,
this Third Sunday in Lent.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,
wherever you are

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,
to remind us of God's presence with us,
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .
There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own
browser.

Now let us all take a deep breath,
breathing in the peace of God
breathing out the stresses of the day
we may have carried here with us.

Let God hold them for you, at least for a while,
as we gather on this holy ground to worship God.

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is
a church with full real life standing
in the Southern California Nevada Conference
of the United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.
As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a 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."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be
included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in
life.

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

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry
there is a donation bowl in the back,
or you can go to our website
firstuccsl.org

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

We will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the
Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some
cake or pie,

and something to drink such as wine, juice, or water.

Whatever makes you feel closer to each other and to God.

This is a participatory hymn

The video will cue you how to sing along

GATHERING MUSIC

"Gathered Here"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyEFQHu_ORM

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,
as a community,
join our hearts together,
to connect to God and to each other.

So this time is the essence of what we do here together.

If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at
this time.

As people share their prayers in text
please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord 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, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.

We pray all this in the name of the one who taught us to eat and to pray together,
saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kin-dom, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kind-dom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE

“Abide” – Carrie Newcomer and Parker Palmer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWxgvY5j0HY>

INTRODUCTION

Today's is a little like weaving,
with different strands to explore something that is key to today's gospel passage,
Love, in Greek “agape.”

The lectionary gospel text comes from the 15th chapter of the Fourth Gospel,

And is part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse right after the Last Supper,

But to put it in context, we need first to go back before that holy meal,

When Jesus was teaching outside the temple,

And someone asked him which commandment in the Law was the greatest.

This is his reply, quoting from Hebrew scripture, as recorded in the earliest gospel text,
Mark, chapter 12, verses 28-34a:

MARK 12: 28-34a

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating.
Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him,
“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”
“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this:
‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’
The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’
There is no commandment greater than these.”
“Well said, teacher,” the man replied.
“You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other.
To love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength,
and to love your neighbor as yourself
is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”
When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him,
“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

“Agape Love – Part 1”

I have always felt that there is a problem with this “Greatest Commandment,”
Oh, not the commandment itself,
Loving God, loving neighbor – that’s beautiful.
But we often drop off the last part – “as yourself.”
“Love your neighbor – as yourself.”
Maybe in the early days of our Jewish ancestors in faith,
When the Law was first written down,
That really meant something.
Maybe people had a good sense of their own worth in the sight of God.
Maybe they were more in touch with the divinity within.
So “love your neighbor as yourself” meant love them a whole lot.
But today, when we are bombarded with messages that we are not good enough,
When so many people live with shame,
Beaten down by life in these times,
Or beating themselves up inside for their own perceived failures or lack.
Then there are those who beat themselves up for beating themselves up,
Telling ourselves we “should” be different,
That we shouldn’t love ourselves because it’s conceited or narcissistic,
When, in fact, narcissism isn’t love at all.
Loving your neighbor “as yourself” now feels like we don’t need to love them very
much at all,
After all, we don’t love ourselves much at all,
It’s disordered thinking.
A friend of mine says in these times we need to add a little something to the
“Greatest Commandment”

To understand it the way it was originally understood in Hebrew Law:

“Love your neighbor AT LEAST AS MUCH as you love yourself.”

It’s a high bar, not a low one.

But perhaps the impact of the patriarchy and colonialism of the Roman empire

Had already eroded that knowing of ourselves as beloved of God,

That we had already lost the ability to truly show that love to ourselves.

And so – Jesus – come to remind us of who we are,

The beloved of God.

Jesus showed and taught that love in so many ways,

As recorded in the gospels,

But perhaps most unambiguously he demonstrated and spoke about that love at the Last Supper,

Where Jesus shared bread and wine,

The gentle washing of feet,

And a new commandment,

which will be echoed later, not only in John’s gospel,

But in a later letter attributed to John.

So, let us listen now to John, chapter 13, verses 34 and 35,

Which comes soon after Jesus washed his disciples’ feet.

JOHN 13:34-35 (

[Jesus said:]

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,

if you have love for one another.”

“Love One Another” – Chrissiela

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRQ-dsvsmss>

“Agape Love – Part 2”

Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself

Was the greatest commandment of the Hebrew Scriptures,

But Jesus gives a new commandment

For our lives as his followers going forward.

First we are to receive the love Jesus shows us,

Love that comes from God,

Love that is God,

According to the First Letter of John where it is written:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;

everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4: 7-8)

Some commentators say that this new commandment does away with the first half of the Greatest Commandment,

That we no longer are commanded to “love God,” only to love others,

But I disagree.

I think Jesus, through the author of the Fourth Gospel and the letters of John,

Didn’t replace Greatest Commandment,

But reinterpreted it.

But I do agree that Jesus never asked us to “worship” God, or himself.
His only commandment was love.
If God is love, then we love God by loving “as God loves,”
In the words of St. Ignatius.
How does God love?
Jesus showed us at the Last Supper with his friends,
In a very clear, physical way,
By taking care of them.
In this teaching,
Jesus invites us to feel God’s love,
Not just think about it, or believe it,
But to really feel it, receive it – in our bodies.
As Jesus tenderly cared for his disciples tired feet.
Kneeling close to the earth – the literal definition of humility,
In love.
As we take the elements of holy communion,
The bread, the cup,
Into our bodies.
Receive that love God has for us,
The love that Jesus shows us.
Feel it.
It’s a very physical nourishment.
But then Jesus, as a man of his time and faith, and as a mystic,
Would not have distinguished between the soul and the body,
For him they were one.
“Just as I have loved you,” he said,
Receive the love I have for you,
Which is God’s love,
Because God IS love.
Accept it.
You don’t have to prove yourself worthy of it.
That love is yours.
And any time you feel love,
There is God.
As God’s love has no boundaries,
All are welcome to receive that love
At God’s table.

SHARING GOD’S TABLE

And so, let us take the elements for holy communion we have gathered,
Some bread, a cookie or cracker, or even some cake,
And something to drink.
Hold them in your hand.
Feel their weight,
As we pray.
God whose giving knows no ending,
Bless this bread and this cup,
May they be vibrant with your presence,
Nourishing what is deepest in us.
And as we take these elements into our bodies,

May be know that your love is as real and tangible,
as this bread and drink that we share.

Amen.

Now let us remember that night, in an upper room,
When Jesus took the bread on the table for the evening meal,
Blessed it, and broke it, and shared it, saying,
“This is my body, given for you.

Take, eat, and remember me.”

Let us eat this bread of life together.

[pause to eat]

And in the same way Jesus took a cup of wine
And shared it, saying,

“Drink, and as often as you drink, remember me.”

Let us drink this cup of blessing together.

[pause to drink]

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God,
We have been fed at your table,
Received your love in bread and cup,
And remembered what Jesus showed us,
That there is no place that is not touched by your love,
And that includes within ourselves.
And in this bread and cup shared,
May there be a healing,
As all the hurting places within us and our world,
Feel the touch of your love.

Amen.

“Healing” – Avi Kaplan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpPUgoksg9w>

LAST SCRIPTURE READING

So we come at last to the lectionary gospel reading for today.
Hear it, perhaps, as the first disciples heard it,
After dinner with Jesus,
Remembering his earlier teaching about the Greatest Commandment,
And his “new commandment.”

JOHN 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;
abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,
just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.

I have said these things to you

so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I do not call you servants any longer,

because the servant does not know what the master is doing,

but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.
You did not choose me, but I chose you.
And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.
I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The Word of God for the People of God.
Thanks be to God.

“Agape Love – Part 3”

If we really allow ourselves to accept God’s love,
Feel it in our very bodies,
We, according to John, know God.
And, according to Jesus, we are friends.
It’s not a king and subject relationship between us.
Not a master and servant or slave.
It’s friends.
Mutuality.
Giving and receiving love.
As we receive it, so we are to share it,
The “fruit” of love.
That’s what it means to be his “disciple,”
To be a Christian.
To give and receive God’s love,
To love others as God, through Jesus, loves us.
So that love becomes even more than a feeling,
But a home in which we can live.
“Abide in my love,” Jesus says.
Abide.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY
Our time together today is over.
Our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting,
For love.
Open your heart,
Take God’s love in,
And share it out to a world in need.
Go in peace, come again in hope.
Amen.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY
“Testify to Love” – Wynonna Judd
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1rYmj1AN44>