

WELCOME

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

It gives me great joy to tell you that  
First United Church of Christ and Conference Center is  
a church with full real life standing in the Eastern Association;  
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 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."

Today, we have a guest preacher.  
My good friend, a former Methodist Pastor, Rev. Mike Wright-Chapman.  
Rev. Mike is one of many who now celebrates with many clergy those that had to leave  
the Methodist church and those who stayed and endure.

Rev. Mike's message from the start has been that no one is incompatible, and that we  
are all children of God.

Today, Rev. Mike serves at the North Texas, South Central Conference of the United  
Church of Christ.  
On a personal note, I have know Rev. Mike for a decade now.

He was initially my boss back in the day as I served as a youth pastor.  
Today, he is my colleague, a member of the Board of the non-profit we have  
collaborated and above all my good friend.

Welcome Rev. Mike!

Today's service will be in voice and text.  
Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have your 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.  
Please try not to touch the viewer, I have learned (the hard way) that it is cranky  
and doesn't like to be poked.  
Whenever possible, lyrics are either on the screen, in Nearby Chat or a link to the  
lyrics is provided so you can read along if you wish.

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).

And now I invite you to pray with me as we begin our time together in community.

Holy-One of many names, you have called us friends, beloved, and your children, we thank you for this Sunday.

We thank you for those celebrated today in the U.S. as mothers, as caregivers, as your ambassadors of good.

On this complex day for others, we pray for their hearts, their tender memories both good and bad that you sooth with your Holy Spirit.

Holy-One you have said that you yourself are like a hen bringing all your children in to protect under your wings, so we are thankful for you and all those who have cared for us.

May this service be inspiration, trans formative and filled with your presence.

In your many names we pray,

Amen

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

#### GATHERING MUSIC

Blessing Offor, Dolly Parton- Somebody's Child (Official Music Video)

<https://youtu.be/ytmDNu-QWC8?si=QolIM8WdOMgc41uT>

Today's scripture comes from the book of....John 6: 1-14

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias.

A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick.

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples.

Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down."

Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all.

Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost."

So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world."

Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks Be to God

SERMON

We all have those favorite stories we share with our family and friends.

When we get together with certain family members or friends, the conversation will get around to an old favorite story which begins with, "Do you remember that time when...." and people will start to groan or chuckle with delight.

This afternoon's Gospel story is one of those stories about Jesus and his disciples we tell over and over.

There are some stories which are told only one time in the gospels.... such as the story of the Good Samaritan, told only once; the story of the Prodigal Son, told only once; the story of the Sheep and the Goats, told only once.

These are favorite, great stories but they are told only once in our Gospels.

But the story for today, about five loaves and two fish, is not told merely once, not twice, not three times, but four times in its variations. It is the only miracle story told in all four Gospels.

People often wonder why this story is told repeatedly. I believe it is because this story captures an essential truth about Jesus, an essential truth about the disciples, and an essential truth about God.

It's often overlooked that three of the most important interests in Jesus' ministry were education, health care and food security.

And the last of these three is never seen more clearly than in the many feeding stories of the Gospels.

Both John and Mark have two feeding stories each.

So, either (a) both of them thought the story was so important that they wanted to share it twice

(which would attest to its significance to the early church) or (b) Jesus did more feeding than most of us had assumed (which would attest to its significance in the ministry of Jesus).

Either possibility testifies to its importance.

John's version of the story is laden with symbolism, and John starts right at the very beginning giving us interesting messages.

Notice, for example, that he begins with Jesus getting off of a boat at the Sea of Galilee.

All of the four gospels agree on this.

But only John adds that it was also known as the Sea of Tiberias.

Why did he add that?

Possibly because Tiberias was one of the most hated and politically volatile cities in Palestine, and he wants the reader to take note. It had been in existence for only about 10 years at the time of Jesus' ministry.

It was built at the edge of the Sea of Galilee to facilitate trade with the people who lived on the opposite side of the Sea.

What made it a hated name and avoided by many locals was that it was built upon a local Jewish graveyard and was therefore considered unclean to observant Jews. Only people from outside of Israel would ever dare living there.

This background is tied closely to this story and is related to why the author of the Gospel of John wanted you to know that this took place close to the hated city of Tiberias.

Have you ever wondered why it was that so often when Jesus was in the countryside he was swarmed by great crowds of people? Where did they come from?

When he is in the towns, you may not see them by the thousands, but there are still hoards flocking after him.

Even allowing for some exaggeration from the Gospel writers, it still is an interesting phenomenon.

For a few minutes I'd like to retell this story, including some essential elements from the other Gospel versions, and maybe a couple of stories that are connected.

It was springtime in Israel. The rains of March and April had come, and the land was now fresh and green.

The brown hills had soaked up the spring rains and the flowers were blooming, and the hills were green again.

It was Passover time in Israel.

That meant that many people were traveling on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

It was a time of religious energy, of fasting and feasting and traveling.

It was a time of popularity for Jesus. He had healed people of their diseases, and his popularity was becoming enormous.

He was like a new rock star, and thousands would gather to hear him preach just as thousands gather over in the desert in central Washington at the Gorge to hear a rock concert and see a star in person.

It was also a time of tragedy in Israel.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist had just been executed.

John, the Baptist, was the greatest moral force, the greatest spiritual force, the greatest prophet the land of Israel had experienced for four hundred years.

He was the person that everyone looked to for moral and religious inspiration. Everyone was stunned by this tragedy, including Jesus, who had been baptized by John.

Jesus wanted to get away by himself to grieve, to pray, to remember.

He wanted to get away to a lonely place and so he got into a boat to sail across the Sea of Galilee to a remote point, some four miles away, to get away from the massive crowds who were following him.

However, the crowds could see him from the shore where he was sailing.

And so, they followed along the shoreline, keeping an eye on his boat, so when Jesus' boat landed, many of the crowd had already arrived.

And what was Jesus' reaction to the thousands who had shown up? Irritated? Angry? Imposed upon? No, he looked at the massive crowd with compassion.

As Mark says in his Gospel, "they were like sheep without a shepherd," like people who needed feeding for their spiritual hungers. And so, he taught them, and healed them.

The day quickly passed.

It got to be later, long into the day, and one of the disciples said: "Lord, the hour is late, the people don't have any food, and we are a long way from any villages.

Maybe you should send them home now."

And, according to John's version we've read today of the story, Jesus says to Philip, "How are we going to buy bread, so that people can eat?"

Philip replies, "It would take more than two hundred denari, more than two hundred days of wages, and even that wouldn't be enough bread to feed all these people." Jesus says, "Look around the crowd and see what you can find."

Andrew finds a young boy with five loaves of bread and two fish, and brings the boy, the fish, and the bread to Jesus.

Jesus invites everyone to be seated on the green grass.

Jesus takes the bread...looks up into heaven...gives thanks...and breaks it... gives it to his disciples...who give it to the crowds.

And they all eat until they are satisfied ...and... there were twelve baskets of bread left over.

The number fed are five thousand men, plus women and children.

We might notice that the story of the feeding of the 5,000 resembles the story of the Last Supper.

Jesus takes bread, he gives thanks, he breaks the bread, and he distributes it.

This sounds just like what Jesus did in the Last Supper, just like what we will do in a few minutes.

The Greek for thanks is eucharistesas (ukareesteus) or Eucharist.

The word used to describe the broken fragments of bread collected after the feeding is a rare Greek word, klasma, and in early Christian literature it appears in all four versions of the feeding of the 5000 as well as in the earliest Christian Eucharistic liturgy.

Jesus does not offer food that will disappear, but food that remains to eternal life.

Throughout the Gospel of John, characters often speak better than they know. Those who (probably sarcastically) respond to Jesus, rightly request of him, "Lord, give us this bread all the time!"

The feeding of the five thousand is also radically inclusive.

Meals were events where social barriers were upheld.

There is always a certain theater to meals. You are what you eat, but who you eat with also defines you.

People did not just eat with anyone.

Sharing a meal meant sharing fellowship, extending hospitality. It meant acceptance, friendship, loyalty.

Meals are often restricted by national boundaries, political boundaries, ideological boundaries.

Out in the wilderness, at that meal Jesus doesn't check their passport, he doesn't care if they vote democrat or republican, he doesn't ask about their sexual orientation, their gender or gender identity, look at the color of their skin, worry about their age, check their bank account, ask them to submit to an IQ test, write an essay about why eating with Jesus would be a benefit to their career path, or even ask about their theology.

He basically doesn't observe any of the normal barriers of meal sharing in his own day, or in ours.

He simply says, everyone who comes to me will eat the bread of life.

Those who come to Jesus are fully accepted at God's feast.

Fully welcomed. Beloved.

When I come to this meal I always think of my dear friend, Rev. Kathleen.

In the late 1990s, Kathleen was appointed by the Dallas area United Methodist Bishop to start a new church in West Dallas.

Like the city of Tiberias, West Dallas was an avoided and forsaken part of the city of Dallas.

It was for many years, a place of poverty built on a former lead smelting plant (in other words, a dangerous source of lead poisoning much like the water was in Flint, Michigan), neglected abandoned by the city.

The population is primarily Latino.

The Church was named Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) and they met in a little building next door to the Wesley-Rankin Community center where many children and teens went to play and learn in safety.

Many also found showers and health care at the Wesley-Rankin.

Not long after Kathleen started leading worship each Sunday, she noted that a lot of the children would go to her, receive communion, and then get back in line.

It eventually dawned on her that the bread and juice she was giving them was sometimes the only food they would eat all day.

One day Kathleen started saying to the congregation, "We serve this meal every Sunday and you are always welcome to come and celebrate with us.

As long as there is bread, you are welcome to come and receive it."

She started buying more bread so that people started to stand around the table after worship to finish the bread.

As we come and receive the bread that Jesus offers, doubts and fears melt away, fading into the background.

They're just not that important in this place. And we find the bread of life was always already waiting for us here.

So let us come like those who come to Jesus in this story and say, "Lord, give us this bread always."

Amen.

PRAYER PREPARATION:

We have come to the time where we come together in prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gift of this day  
and pray for the life of the world ...

If you have a prayer of joy or concern that you wish to lift to God, and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, we invite you to share.

As this song plays, in the silence of our hearts or type your request in the nearby chat.

#### SONG

Katy Nichole & Naomi Raine - "My God Can" (Official Performance Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnsdMC8gipU>

#### 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.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER -

I wait.  
I wait for peace.  
I wait for what Jesus promised in my life's routine.  
I wait and I extend my hope  
To believe  
That God will deliver me  
And I will be made new.  
Amen  
(Body Prayer: The Posture of Intimacy with God.)

#### BLESSINGS FOR THE JOURNEY

And now I invite you to go into the world knowing you are loved beyond imagination, cared for by this community, and part of the everlasting family.  
May your days be filled with joy found in unexpected places, peace despite any circumstance, and love.  
Go in peace!

#### Music for the Journey

Brandon Lake - TEAR OFF THE ROOF  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQA6fbSoq-g>