

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 with me, or in the aisles, or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you at any point in the service—I say go for it!

GATHERING:

Sunday is the Christian holy day of Pentecost, with its wild imagery of thundering winds and inexplicable fire.

Not a fire of anger, though. One of Spirit and Love.

In this song, Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls writes, “i come to you with strange fire / i make an offering of love...”

<https://youtu.be/ujY0o-D-Gyk?si=wf0f3b7sFvjcaoAY>, “Strange Fire” ~Indigo Girls

i come to you with strange fire
i make an offering of love
the incense of my soul is burned
by the fire in my blood
i come with a softer answer
to the questions that lie in your path
i want to harbor you from the anger
find a refuge from the wrath
this is a message
a message of love
love that moves from the inside out
love that never grows tired
i come to you with strange fire
fire
mercenaries of the shrine
now who are you to speak for god
with haughty eyes and lying tongues
and hands that shed innocent blood
now who delivered you the power
to interpret calvary
you gamble away our freedom
to gain your own authority
find another state of mind
you know it's time we all learned
to grab hold
strange fire burns
with the motion of love
fire
fire

when you learn to love yourself
you will dissolve all the stones that are cast
now you will learn to burn the icing sky
to melt the waxen mask
i said to have the gift of true release
this is a peace that will take you higher
oh i come to you with my offering
i bring you strange fire
this is a message
a message of love
love that moves from the inside out
love that never grows tired
i come to you with strange fire
fire
fire
i come to you with strange fire

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 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

Acts 2:14-42

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

'You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

"I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
moreover, my flesh will live in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One experience corruption.

You have made known to me the ways of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence."

'Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

"He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption."

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. For David did

not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,
“The Lord said to my Lord,
‘Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.’ ”

Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

SERMON “Spirit of the Messiah”

Once upon a time, when I was a younger human, I was the Associate Minister at First Congregational Church of Stratford.

We had just upgraded some of the technology in the sanctuary—we had a huge screen and a projector—and the Senior Pastor asked me to find some video footage of wind to run on that big screen during his Pentecost sermon.

I found some fantastic storm videos—high, hurricane-force winds just dominating every man-made structure in it’s path.

It was awesome, in the truest sense of the word.

Then he asked me to turn it off—the congregation was so engrossed by the video that they were not paying attention to the message!

Which, looking back on it, is kind of perfect!

After all, the crowd of witnesses at the Pentecost event didn’t know what to do with all the mighty audio-visual effects and linguistic superpowers happening right in front of them!

Some were simply in awe, engrossed in what they were witnessing.

Others refused to bear witness to what they were experiencing and insisted that there was nothing to see here—nothing but a bunch of drunks.

Harvey Milk was kind when he referred to this kind of “fake news” as “myths.”

Sometimes we don’t like the truth. And sometimes, when we don’t like the truth, we use rhetoric designed to stir up people’s emotions—fear, anger, hate.

This kind of rhetoric is called propaganda, and it is designed to obscure the truth.

But then Peter spoke up. And he does not sound drunk to me!

No, not drunk, but speaking the Truth about his experience—his witness—and his interpretation of this powerful New Thing in light of the Hebrew Scriptures.

First of all, he denies the propaganda:

No. Not drunk.

What everyone is witnessing is the power of the Holy Spirit at work.

He interprets the Holy Spirit in light of the prophet, Joel, “In the last days it will be, God declares, / that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...”

But Joel isn’t the only source for his belief that this is the Holy Spirit poured out upon them.

Jesus is Peter's primary source.

Peter argues that it is, in fact, Jesus who is responsible for this pouring of the Holy Spirit.

That's why he feels the need to assert that Jesus has the authority to do such a thing.

Peter is very specific about who we're talking about:

Jesus of Nazareth, the one through whom God performed deeds of power, wonders and signs.

Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified and killed by the hands of "those outside the law."

It's worth pointing out here that "those outside the law" refers to the Gentiles—but Peter does not let the crowd of Jewish people off the hook. He says "you" crucified him with those Gentile hands.

Yes, that Jesus of Nazareth, the one who performed miracles and was crucified and killed,

"God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power....

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses."

Peter interprets what he has witnessed—the Risen Christ—in light of Psalm 16.

The interpretation goes like this: In Psalm 16, King David speaks about one who has not gone to the land of the dead, nor has their body decomposed.

David, however, died, was buried, and all of Israel knew where that tomb was and could go visit it any time they wished.

David wasn't just any old King, however. He was a prophet. David knew that God swore an oath to put one of his descendants on the throne.

"Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah" in Psalm 16.

To summarize: God told Joel that They would pour the Holy Spirit out upon all people.

God promised David that the Messiah would one day come and David wrote about the resurrection of the Messiah in Psalm 16.

Everyone is witnessing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples have all witnessed the resurrection of Jesus.

Therefore, having been exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus poured out the Spirit that the crowd both saw and heard.

Therefore, God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah!

Jesus is Lord and Messiah is the core of Peter's message. How he delivered that message was for the purpose of changing hearts and minds.

Remember when I said that it was worth pointing out that Peter doesn't let the crowd off the hook for the death of Jesus?

He does it again in his thundering conclusion, "Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."

I honestly believe that the sign of the Holy Spirit—the sound of the wind, the speaking in tongues, the weird light show—would not have captured the hearts and minds of the people on their own.

But Peter's witness—his heartfelt and challenging words—that made all the difference in the world:

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the

other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?'

Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

I wonder...

I wonder what Truth we don't like.

I wonder what propaganda we buy in to—what rhetoric we have allowed to fan our anger, fear, and hate?

More importantly, I wonder how each of us can walk in the ways of Peter.

I wonder what you have witnessed that needs to be spoken.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

I'm probably dating myself a little bit with this next song, but it remains one of my favorite examples of the power of speaking out.

https://youtu.be/ReLOz1HWk-k?si=Vn_1fEKeQBIm6UHi, "Silence Is Broken" ~Damn Yankees

Never again you say the words

And let the sunshine in again

You can close your eyes

And know it's safe inside to sing you lullaby

Now I lay me down, you broke the chains

And you won't be silent anymore

Oh, no, now you're gonna shout about it

No, no more, yeah, yeah, this is the end

The silence is broken now

It's over now, the words have been spoken

And with every word you say, you blow away

The tears of another time

Face to face anyone can see you're not

The child you were before

Now, I lay you down, you take your place

No one can take away your heart

Oh, no, there can be no doubt about it

No, no more, yeah, yeah, this is the end

The silence is broken now

It's over now, the truth has been spoken

And with every word you say

You blow away, yeah

Never again you say the words

And let the sunshine in again

You can change the world

But no one can take away your heart

The silence is broken now

It's over now, the words have been spoken

And with every word you say, you blow away

The tears of another time

The silence is broken now

It's over now, the truth has been spoken
And with every word you say, you blow away
The scene of another crime

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:

Blessed Spirit, we thank You for all Your good gifts—for the ways we show love and care and concern for one another.

We thank You for the gift of courage to speak up and act for justice in a world of oppression.

We thank You for the gift of wisdom to know when to listen and to be open to change in our hearts and lives.

We thank You for the gift of insight to know when we can contribute to the community in caring for each other's needs.

We thank You for all the gifts You have given us.

May we remember we always have a gift from You, that we always have something to give to each other and to participate in this world, and that Your gift of love is available to all.

We know this gift best through Your Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we live, move, and have our being.

Amen. (Rev-o-lution Resources by Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell
<http://rev-o-lution.org>, (c) 2021. Used by permission.)

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—

“These are the days

Oh

These are days you'll remember

Never before and never since, I promise

Will the whole world be warm as this

And as you feel it

You'll know it's true

That you are blessed and lucky

It's true that you are touched by something

That will grow and bloom in you

These are days you'll remember

When May is rushing over you with desire

To be part of the miracles you see in every hour

You'll know it's true

That you are blessed and lucky

It's true that you are touched by something

That will grow and bloom in you

These are days

These are the days

That you might fill with laughter

Until you break

These days you might feel a shaft of light

Make its way across your face

And when you do

You'll know how it was meant to be

See the signs and know their meaning

It's true

You'll know how it was meant to be

Hear the signs and

Know they're speaking to you

To you”

CLOSING:

<https://youtu.be/Z-HLxpWGCzc?si=6OpDKBMTEnZuLmuL>, “These Are Days” ~10,000 Maniacs

end