

WELCOME

Thank you for coming! We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today on this Pentecost Sunday!

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, Rev. Nan Baker.

Rev. Baker serves at the North Texas, South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ.

On a personal note, I have served in the same church with Rev. Nan for many years before accepting this amazing call at SL.

Rev. Nan, is my colleague, a member of the Board of the non-profit we have collaborated and above all my good friend.

Welcome Rev. Nan!

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.

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.

And now I invite you to pray with me as we start this service together.

Prayers of Invocation or Closing

Come, O Holy Spirit!
Come as Holy Fire and burn in us.
Come as Holy Wind and cleanse us.
Come as Holy Light and lead us through the darkness.
Come as Holy Truth and dispel our ignorance,
Come as Holy Power and enable our weakness.
Come as Holy Life and liberate us.
Convict us, convert us, consecrate us,
until we are set free from service to ourselves
to be your hands in the world.
Amen.
– John Henry Newman (add)

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

GATHERING MUSIC

"Holy Spirit Come" (Official Lyric Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoTNHiFq0p0>, Patrick Mayberry -

Today's scripture comes from the book of....Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.
Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks Be to God

SERMON

Welcome to one of the most dramatic and important celebrations of our tradition: the Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost means fifty days and our celebration is 50 days after Easter and is built on the Jewish Festival of Weeks – one of 3 major festivals for which Jews from all places were required to go to Jerusalem, filling this small town with people from widely diverse nations and cities.

It celebrated the life-giving food of the harvest as well as the giving of the Ten Commandments and covenant which created the Jewish people's identity.

Amid this bustling activity, the followers of Jesus had withdrawn to the upper room .
Shocked by the crucifixion, perplexed by the resurrection, and pursued by both the church and the state, they huddled together not knowing what to do next.

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2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

2:6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

2:7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"

2:8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

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2:10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,

2:11 Cretans and Arabs--in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

2:12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

Thus, the setting of our story is one of danger and isolation: Danger from those

outside
their community, danger from those inside as the shocking betrayal of Judas represented,
and danger from their purposelessness.

Who were these people gathered in the upper room?

Some were emotionally devastated by grief and the loss of Jesus, his ministry's purpose, and their expectations for the future.

Others who were angry at how their neighbors and their church had acted. Many must have felt betrayed and wondered how a loving god had allowed Jesus to suffer and die.

I know there were individuals who were lost, confused, and unsure of the future. All of them, in one way or another, were hurt and had withdrawn to protect themselves.

Do you see any descriptions that look familiar to those you know?
Perhaps today you can see yourself in a similar state.
I know that one day to the next, I can be in more than one of these groups.

Sometimes I feel such loss that I vacillate between pain and anger.
I can respond by feeling driven to "fix the world" –or at least my life–or to withdraw and think, "What's the use?"

I often feel stunned by what I see in society, my friends and family, politics, or more, and feel overwhelmed and confused about what my next steps could be.

Yes, the folks in that upper room are familiar to me.
They are the people I pass on the street. They are my friends and my enemies.
They are me.
They are you.
These are the people to whom God sent the violent wind, the tongues of flame, the Holy Spirit on that day.

In some ways I wish I could have been there.
I want to feel the rush of the Spirit and the certainty of God's presence.

However, just as I realize that people are still people like those in the upper room, I know God is still that close, challenging, confusing, calling God of the Pentecost. Just like that first Pentecost, God still crashes our parties and invites in the people we are trying to avoid.

God still says yes even when we doubt ourselves.
When times were tough and I felt unable, my grandmother would quote the book of John: "The Spirit blows where she pleases."

I assume she meant to comfort me, but...This is what is dangerous.
The Spirit fills the world, and the Spirit is not tame.

She is not just a white dove on a Hallmark card.
She is a powerful agent of change who will not leave us alone.

She brings the comfort of Truth and that is not a cuddly puppy sort of comfort.
It is a call to action.

When the women and men gathered in that upper room were filled by the Spirit, it overflowed their personal lives.
They began to talk, but not quietly just among themselves.
They were so loud that people in the street heard them.

A motley crowd gathered comprised of people from many places who were in town for the festival. At first, they were shocked because one of the people on the street said "They must be drunk!

How indecent they are to be carousing at nine o'clock in the morning!"
Then, a true miracle happened.
The crowd paused their self-righteous judging and began to listen.

And each person heard Jesus's followers speaking to them in THEIR OWN LANGUAGE.
Can you imagine?

People of many cultures, many backgrounds, many lives, who typically would not communicate with each other were able to hear the Spirit in the way each individual person could understand.

In this story, an isolated group of battered, defensive, hurting people, once filled with the Spirit of a steadfast, loving god, reached out to others who also had been incapable of connection.
Once trapped, fearful, and lonely, these people began a new community based on communication and understanding.

We tend to think of the Holy Spirit as the answer to a problem, but the Spirit's work is to create for us a new task: to tell the story of liberation, to show mercy, to spread love, and to build a just world.

Some people call this the birth of the church, and our church, the UCC, takes that seriously.
Since 1957, the motto of the United Church of Christ remains a citation from John 17:20-24, "That they may all be one!"

One scholar once said that the UCC is a movement for ecumenism more than it is a traditional denomination.
It is a United Uniting Church.
That mission is much of what drew me here.

But "the Spirit blows where she pleases" and I know that she is not contained in any one church or faith stance.
We are the heirs of the challenge of the Spirit that day so long ago.

Because the Spirit is with us, we are called to speak to others in ways they can understand.

We are called to liberate those imprisoned by relationships, finances, circumstances, addiction, and hopelessness so that they all may know community.

We are called by the Spirit to embody the courage, the justice, the decency, and the love of God in our chaotic world. In the Spirit, we—not even one of us—are not alone.

Pentecost is transformation.
Confusion becomes calling.
Crowds become communities.

Existences become lives.
Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote:
"Holy Spirit,
River of love, divine delight,
flow through me.
Flame of sun, burn in me.

Wind of heaven, breathe in me.
Tongues of strangers, speak in me.
Love of God, sing in me.

Lead me beyond myself,
to return to you in the other,
to love you in my stranger,
my foreigner, my enemy.

Burn with your fire in me,
that it may be mine.
Breathe yourself into my life,
that it may be yours.
I am your song, and your singing.
I am your candle; you are my flame.

Holy Spirit,
love the world
in me."

May it be so within us and among us. 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

Holy Spirit Song | Pentecost Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDhWLF6MC0c>

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 -

God of every tongue, We are grateful that in the presence of the Spirit, we are not asked to forget ourselves but to remember.

To remember where we came from, to recall the sound of our own cultures and languages.

Help us to heal from those spaces that have demanded assimilation from us under the guise of unity.

Teach us the kind of belonging that it is not threatened by those things that make us different but comes alive at the site of inclusion.

Protect us from communities who only welcome our cultures as a theatrical symbol of their own benevolence.

Lead us into spaces where our presence is longed for not as a mark of achievement but out of the deep recognition that hope cannot survive on one tongue alone.

Breathe INHALE: I won't forget myself.

EXHALE: I will listen for my voice.

Amen

Arthur Riley, Cole. Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human (p. 309). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

BLESSINGS FOR THE JOURNEY

And now I invite you to go into the world filled with the Holy Spirit!
May your days be filled with joy found in unexpected places, peace despite any
circumstance, and love.
Go in peace!

Music for the Journey

Fire fire fire fall on me. On the day of Pentecost - Hot Reggae by DANIEL
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqqphnYgXIE>