

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:

Today I am continuing my sermon series for Pride month, and I'll be responding to something Harvey Milk said—and what is probably the most famous destruction of an entire city in literature.

This song is about hope and features imagery of a city-wide destruction. I hope that you can hear the convergence of Harvey Milk and Sodom as you listen to it.

<https://youtu.be/fSye1-TBeqg?si=yBH9xros1XgBPesv>, "The Only Hope For Me Is You" ~My Chemical Romance

Remember

Remember me

Remember me

Remember me

Remember me

Remember me

Where, where will we stand?

When all the lights go out

Across these city streets

Where were you when

All of the embers fell

I still remember there

Covered in ash

Covered in glass

Covered in all my friends

I still

Think of the bombs they built

If that's the best that I could be?

Than I'd be another memory

Can I be the only hope for you?

Because you're the only hope for me

And if we can't find where we belong

We'll have to make it on our own

Face all the pain and take it on

Because the only hope for me is you alone

How it should you be

Many years after the disasters that we've seen

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 Eastern Association of 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

Genesis 19:1-26

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom.

When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground.

He said, 'Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.'

They said, 'No; we will spend the night in the square.'

But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.'

Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.

Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you,

and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.'

But they replied, 'Stand back!' And they said, 'This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.' Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down.

But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

Then the men said to Lot, 'Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place.

For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it.'

So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, 'Up, get out of this place; for the Lord is about to destroy the city.' But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Get up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or else you will be consumed in the punishment of the city.'

But he lingered; so the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and left him outside the city.

When they had brought them outside, they said, 'Flee for your life; do not look back or stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, or else you will be consumed.'

And Lot said to them, 'Oh, no, my lords; your servant has found favor with you, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die.

Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!'

He said to him, 'Very well, I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.' Therefore the city was called Zoar. The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

Ezekiel 16:49-50

This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it.

SERMON "Interpretive Gymnastics"

Last week I shared a little about Harvey Milk's wishes, should he be assassinated. Which he was.

To be honest, the recording he left behind was very stream of consciousness. It kind of meanders between beautiful hopes and dreams and practical considerations. One of those practical considerations was a funeral:

"I would hope there's no religious services whatever—God—first off all, I don't think we need any services of any kind whatsoever,

but I know some people are into that, and you can't prevent it from happening, they want to happen.

By God, nothing religious!

I mean, until the churches speak out and say Anita Bryant has been playing gymnastics with the bible with the church—

churches that have been so quiet—

have the guts to get out and speak in the name of Christianity or Judaism, or whatever, and confess!

But no services whatsoever.”

God, I wish he'd known about the Open & Affirming Resolution passed by the United Church of Christ at General Synod in 1971!

Or the ordination of Rev. William R. Johnson by the United Church of Christ in 1972—the first openly gay minister to be ordained in a Protestant denomination.

Perhaps we didn't speak loud enough, then. God knows that we have been attacked by other corners of Christianity as “the gay church” since.

Nevertheless—I confess. The Anita Bryants of the world have been playing gymnastics with the Bible in order to condemn people for simply being who they are.

Take today's story from the book of Genesis. The word “sodomy”—not to mention the laws enacted against it—was taken from the name of the city in this story: Sodom.

Why? Well, the interpretation goes like this—

Actually, wait. Here's an important thing.

Biblical literalists talk about a “plain reading” of the Bible—simply taking the words at face value—and would argue that they are not engaging in interpretation at all.

That is Grade-A, 100% bull-cakes! “...interpretation simply means getting the meaning out of a text.

In this sense, there is no reading the Bible or anything else without interpreting. Without a reader, a text is only words-markings on a page. In themselves these markings mean nothing.

To have meaning, they have to pass through someone's mind.

Understanding the words, determining the meaning of the text, is interpretation.

Any time people read anything, they are interpreting.” (Daniel A. Helminiak, Ph.D., Ph.D., L.P.C.)

So, the literalist interpretation of today's story is that the sin of Sodom is the desire of the men of the city to “know”—

to have sexual intercourse with—

the men that Lot is trying to protect.

They will further argue that it was ok for Lot to offer up his virgin daughters because they were female.

And there you have a running leap, a flip into handstand position on the vault, and then a push-off to complete the flip—stuck the landing!

How about we just walk from point A to point B? Point A, being the gate of the city.

In that time and in that place, the gate of the city was where one could find witnesses for legal contracts.

It was a place to find a judge. It was a place where prophets came to preach. It was a place of Wisdom.

This is where we find Lot, and where Lot finds the two men—the angels of the

Lord—and he shows them hospitality. Insists upon it, really.
So at first blush, this is a story about hospitality, and there's strong imagery indicating that hospitality is just, holy, and wise.
In contrast, we have "...the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man..." surround Lot's house.
I don't know about you, but if every man in Durham surrounded my house at bedtime and demanded that I sent out my guests to be—let's use a euphemism, too. Let's say, "humped"—
I don't think my first thought would be, "Ew! Intercourse between men? That's a sin!"
I would assume that the mob surrounding my house wanted to rape my guests.
That's pretty transparently Evil.
And it is a hard "no" from Lot. On the other hand, he does not have the ability to fend off every man in the city—he therefore offers up his daughters.
And that plan is immediately given a hard "no" from the angels. And I think that's important.
Nobody in this story is given to the rape mob surrounding the house.
Which means that the genders of the players are irrelevant. The sexual orientations of the players are irrelevant!
What we have on one hand is just, holy, and wise hospitality. On the other we have a rape mob the size of a city.
To me, that is a more logical, simpler walk from the city gate to the destruction of Sodom.
No gymnastics required.
But if you're worried that my interpretation is flawed, we can always look to the other places Sodom is mentioned in the Bible.
The clearest Biblical declaration of what the sin of Sodom was is given to us by the Prophet Ezekiel, who said,
"This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."
I don't know how you interpret that verse, but to my way of thinking, it fits in nicely with the interpretation of the Sodom story that I just laid out:
The people of Sodom could have shared their resources with the angels visiting their city.
That's not what they did. That's not what they did at all.

I think of Harvey Milk a lot, especially during Pride month.
His views on coming out of the closet and how that positively affects public opinion are largely responsible for my coming out as a non-binary person.
And as a Christian, I am so saddened by the Christian voices he heard so loudly. The same voices I heard growing up.
And let's be honest—those same voices persist. They have dressed their bigotry up in the language of freedom.
They have dressed up their bigotry in the misuse of grammar and science.
They have shifted their primary targets away from gay men and onto trans women—especially trans-feminine children and youth.
But they persist. And as a Christian, I am ashamed of those voices.
I think of Harvey Milk a lot.
And I pray that from his place in heaven he rejoices in the victories of the movement—and cheers us ever onward.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

This song has become a Queer anthem, the singer-songwriter created a charitable organization to combat homelessness in the LGBT+ community, it has a lot to do with seeing the truth, and—has been covered by the Electric Mayhem.

<https://youtu.be/PItNY3lDXsE?si=nWbnqupae-tlanMK>, “True Colors” ~The Electric Mayhem

You with the sad eyes

Don't be discouraged

Oh I realize

It's hard to take courage

In a world full of people

You can lose sight of it all

And the darkness inside you

Can make you feel so small

But I see your true colors

Shining through

I see your true colors

And that's why I love you

So don't be afraid to let them show

Your true colors

True colors are beautiful

Like a rainbow

Show me a smile then

Don't be unhappy, can't remember

When I last saw you laughing

If this world makes you crazy

And you've taken all you can bear

You call me up

Because you know I'll be there

And I'll see your true colors

Shining through

I see your true colors

And that's why I love you

So don't be afraid to let it show

Your true colors

True colors are beautiful

Like a rainbow

If this world makes you crazy

And you've taken all you can bear

You call me up

Because you know I'll be there

And I'll see your true colors

Shining through

I see your true colors

And that's why I love you

So don't be afraid to let it show

Your true colors

True colors

True colors

Shining through
I see your true colors
And that's why I love you
So don't be afraid to let them show
Your true colors
True colors are beautiful
Like a rainbow

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:

A Prayer for Father's Day

Abba God, we come to You on this day knowing that it may be a difficult day, for those who are missing their fathers and for those who have difficult relationships, for those who are estranged and for those who never knew their fathers.

We thank You for those fathers who demonstrate Your love, and for stepdads, uncles, coaches, grandpas, teachers and neighbors.

We thank You that we know Your love like a father to Jesus Christ, who called You "Abba."

Abba God, may we know Your love surpasses our human understanding and that You are beyond gender, but You love us, Your children, far beyond what we can comprehend or

imagine.

Abba God, may we draw closer to You, to abide in You as Jesus abides in us, and it is in Your Son's name that we pray.

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 amen!

CLOSING:

In the Hebrew, "abba" means "Daddy."

It's also the name of a band that recorded this beloved favorite of the Queer community!

https://youtu.be/xFrGuyw1V8s?si=MGsmF-VLVixB_42I, "Dancing Queen" ~ ABBA

You can dance, you can jive, having the time of your life

See that girl, watch that scene, dig in the Dancing Queen

Friday night and the lights are low

Looking out for the place to go

Where they play the right music, getting in the swing

You come in to look for a king

Anybody could be that guy

Night is young and the music's high

With a bit of rock music, everything is fine

You're in the mood for a dance

And when you get the chance...

You are the Dancing Queen, young and sweet, only seventeen

Dancing Queen, feel the beat from the tambourine

You can dance, you can jive, having the time of your life

See that girl, watch that scene, dig in the Dancing Queen

You're a teaser, you turn 'em on

Leave them burning and then you're gone

Looking out for another, anyone will do

You're in the mood for a dance

And when you get the chance...

You are the Dancing Queen, young and sweet, only seventeen

Dancing Queen, feel the beat from the tambourine

You can dance, you can jive, having the time of your life

See that girl, watch that scene, dig in the Dancing Queen

end