

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:

In today's sermon, I make a quick reference to this song, so I thought it'd be a fun place to start!

<https://youtu.be/nnjQZ2mxU1I?si=0hLZPAyD6ZuPnyly>, "Holding Out For A Hero" ~Frou Frou

Where have all the good men gone  
And where are all the gods?  
Where's the streetwise Hercules  
To fight the rising odds?  
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed  
Late at night, I toss and I turn  
And I dream of what I need  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast  
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light  
He's gotta be sure, and it's gotta be soon  
And he's gotta be larger than life  
Larger than life  
Somewhere after midnight  
In my wildest fantasy  
Somewhere, just beyond my reach  
There's someone reaching back for me  
Racing on the thunder  
And rising with the heat  
It's gonna take a Superman to sweep me off my feet, yeah  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast  
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light  
He's gotta be sure, and it's gotta be soon  
And he's gotta be larger than life

I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
Up where the mountains meet the heavens above  
Out where the lightning splits the sea  
I could swear there is someone, somewhere watching me  
Through the wind and the chill and the rain  
And the storm and the flood  
I can feel his approach like a fire in my blood  
(Like a fire in my blood, like a fire in my blood  
Like a fire in my blood, like a fire in my blood, blood)  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast  
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light  
He's gotta be sure, and it's gotta be soon  
And he's gotta be larger than life  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night  
He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast  
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light  
He's gotta be sure, and it's gotta be soon  
And he's gotta be larger than life  
I need a hero  
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night

#### 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](http://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 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

1 Samuel 17:50-18:5

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand.

Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

The troops of Israel and Judah rose up with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

The Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp.

David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armor in his tent.

When Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, 'Abner, whose son is this young man?'

Abner said, 'As your soul lives, O king, I do not know.'

The king said, 'Inquire whose son the stripling is.'

On David's return from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with the head of the Philistine in his hand. Saul said to him, 'Whose son are you, young man?'

And David answered, 'I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.'

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.

#### SERMON

"What The Bible REALLY Says About Love Between Two Men"

Last week we talked about the Biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and the

interpretive gymnastics it takes to make it about being gay—  
I concluded that the Prophet Ezekiel had it right, that the sin of Sodom was inhospitality and that the genders of the people in that story were irrelevant. So, in the end, I do not believe that the story of Sodom has anything to do with homosexuality.

So, what does the Bible say about it?

There's a wonderful book that proposes to answer just exactly that question—but be careful, if you want to pick it up for yourself.

The book I'm talking about is entitled, What the Bible REALLY Says About Homosexuality and was written by Daniel A. Helminiak (STL, PhD, PhD, LPC).

There is another book whose title is one word off from that one which makes the same old Fundamentalist arguments while claiming to come out of the Reformed tradition—I wouldn't suggest it.

And I wouldn't suggest it for lots of reasons, but the main one for today is that I prefer an interpretation that takes into account the historical context of the scriptures—

I've said it before, and I'll say it again here—context matters.

Anyway, here's how Dr. Helminiak summarizes his own work:

“Understood on its own terms, the Bible was not addressing our current questions about sexual ethics. The Bible does not condemn gay sex as we understand it today. Only five texts in the Bible express an opinion about male-male sex: surely Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and Romans 1:27 and perhaps 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 .

All these texts are concerned with something other than homogenital activity itself, and these five texts boil down to only three different issues.

First, Leviticus forbids homogenitality as a violation of the ancient Jewish aversion to the "mixing of kinds," a confusion of the idealized roles of penetrating males and penetrated females.

The concern about male-male sex is impurity, an offense against the Jewish religion, not violation of the inherent nature of sex.

Second, the Letter to the Romans presupposes the teaching of the Jewish Law in Leviticus, and Romans mentions male-male sex as an instance of impurity. However, Romans mentions it precisely to make the point that purity issues have no importance in Christ.

Finally, in the obscure term arsenokoitai, if taken to refer to male same-sex acts, 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy would condemn abuses associated with homogenital activity in the First Century: exploitation and lust.” (Helminiak)

I want to return to the beginning of that summary, “Understood on its own terms, the Bible was not addressing our current questions about sexual ethics. The Bible does not condemn gay sex as we understand it today.”

It is true that in those five texts, the Bible condemns male-to-male sexual acts. But when we talk about being gay, we're talking about more than just sexual intercourse, aren't we?

Now, even if we weren't, the most we can say about the Bible's condemnation of the acts is that if you're Jewish it would be considered “impure,” and if you're Christian, none of that matters any more.

Oh, and don't abuse your partner, naturally.

But when we talk about being gay in today's society, it is about more than just sexual intercourse.

We talk about love and marriage and living together and dancing and holding hands... We talk about \_romance\_, am I right?

So what does the Bible have to say about \_that\_?

Well, precious little, actually. But when I think about two men loving each other, I can't help but think about David and Jonathan. Personally, I find the set-up a little distressing, because it is so violent. It's kind of like that stereotype of the princess falling in love with the knight in shining armor simply because he was best at knocking the other guy off his horse with a lance.

Mmm, mindless violence, how romantic!

But still—here comes David “fresh from the fight” as the song goes. Comes rolling up to Jonathan's father, the King, with Goliath's head in tow.

And as soon as the King and David finish their conversation, “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

Ok, put the head down and clean him up a bit, and I can find the romance in that description!!

“...the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”

In fact, Jonathan's love is so profound—as his own soul—he made a covenant with David then and there.

Now... the text doesn't tell us what kind of covenant he made. It's an awfully general term for a particular kind of legal agreement between you, the other person, with God as your witness.

In fact, God makes covenants with people in the Biblical narrative quite a bit. Anyway—we don't know the terms of this covenant. The author chose not to tell us.

And yet... how gay does that sound to you? Cause it's sounds really queer to me!

Because \_I\_ can't help thinking about the primary covenant that I've entered into—the one with my spouse.

Oh! And less you be getting that rom-com feeling, do not worry: the feeling is mutual.

It is painfully obvious when Jonathan dies in battle exactly how David feels about him,

“...greatly beloved were you to me;  
your love to me was wonderful,  
passing the love of women.” (2 Samuel 1:26b)

Passing the love of women... hm. That sounds like David knew both the love of women—multiple women—and the love of Jonathan. Maybe he was bi!

I can hear a certain corner of Christianity crying out against that interpretation right now. They are arguing that the relationship between David and Jonathan was friendship, or a kind of brotherhood—you know: straight, cis-gender, man-stuff. The truth is—we can't tell from the text exactly what their relationship was. We do not know what covenant they made with each other. We do not know if their deep and abiding love was platonic, romantic, or sexual.

Which means that my interpretation is just as good as theirs.

And.

If what it means to be gay in today's understanding incorporates more than sexual

intercourse—and it does—then it is unfair to use the Bible to speak about what it is to be gay. Because that isn't what the Bible is talking about. But I will say this: David and Jonathan loved each other. They loved each other.

Jonathan loved David so hard and so deep that his soul was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.  
David loved Jonatha so hard and so deep that he found it wonderful—even better than the love of women.  
David and Jonathan loved each other.  
They loved each other.  
And it was good.  
What do you say? Amen?

#### PRAYER PREPARATION:

My spouse introduced me to this next band years ago—and we've been giggling about the appropriateness of their name to me personally ever since!  
I'm sharing this cover with you know because it says something about interpretation and queerness—sometimes the only difference really between one interpretation and another is who is doing the interpreting.  
And, well, I don't see how this version is any better or worse than Dusty Springfield's.

<https://youtu.be/xjd4FJTUUnU?si=4DwkaMu4M1GfLjot>, "Son Of A Preacher Man" ~Girlyman

Billy-Ray was a preacher's son  
And when his daddy would visit he'd come along  
When they gathered round and started talkin'  
That's when Billy would take me walkin'  
A-through the backyard we'd go walkin'  
Then he'd look into my eyes  
Lord knows to my surprise  
The only one who could ever reach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
The only boy who could ever teach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
Yes he was, he was  
Ooh, yes he was.  
Being good isn't always easy  
No matter how hard I try.  
When he started sweet-talkin' to me  
He'd come and tell me everything is all right  
He'd kiss and tell me everything is all right.  
Can I get away again tonight?  
The only one who could ever reach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
The only boy who could ever teach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
Yes he was, he was  
(Ooh) Lord knows he was  
(Yes he was.)  
How well I remember  
The look that was in his eyes.

Stealin' kisses from me on the sly  
Takin' time to make time  
Tellin' me that he's all mine  
Learnin' from each other's knowing  
Lookin' to see how much we're growin'  
And the only one who could ever reach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
The only boy who could ever teach me  
Was the son of a preacher man.  
Yes he was, he was  
Ooh, yes he was.  
The only one who could ever reach me  
He was the sweet-talking son of a preacher man.  
The only one who could ever teach me  
I guess it was the son of a preacher man.  
The only one who could ever move me  
Sweet talking son of the preacher man  
The only one who could ever move me  
Was the son of the preacher man

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:

Holy One, help us to live into Your ways of holiness.  
Help us to cultivate a practice of holiness in our life, setting aside time for You.

Guide us into ways of living that are sustainable, that care for the earth and all of creation, and do not waste resources for others.

Lead us into Your ways of deep compassion for ourselves and for one another.

Help us to find the holy in our everyday lives—in the dandelion that grows between the cracks of cement, in the simple acts of kindness that someone has shown us, in the pauses between the busy.

Remind us to breathe, for this simple act is the first act of human life, when You breathed Your spirit, Your breath, into the first human being.

May we cultivate holiness in our daily life, and be holy for You.

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:

I first became aware of this next artist through a documentary about what happened to the band Queen after the death of Freddy Mercury.

I don't know how musical you are, but that man had a staggering vocal range, and singing Queen songs a challenging proposition.

But Adam Lambert can.

<https://youtu.be/dB7NsWHCQv4?si=cSRTMHpf8WRvv0WT>, "Holding Out For A Hero" ~ Adam Lambert

\*end\*