

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 reference to a particular horror icon because he is rightfully associate with camping—and creative uses of camping equipment.

So, just in case you don't know him by name, this is the guy I'm talking about:

<https://youtu.be/dhwhVq40Zvs?si=MTeY14lqH1JPCQrF>, ~A Scene from _Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives_

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 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

Judges 4

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. So the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goim. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years. At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgement. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him,

'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand." '

Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.'

And she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.'

Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, that is, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him, from Harosheth-ha-goim to the Wadi Kishon.

Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. The Lord is indeed going out before you.'

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him.

And the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak;

Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot, while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goim.

All the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left.

Now Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.

Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, 'Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to

me; have no fear.’

So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.

Then he said to her, ‘Please give me a little water to drink; for I am thirsty.’

So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him.

He said to her, ‘Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, “Is anyone here?” say, “No.” ’

But Jael wife of Heber took a tent-peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died.

Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said to him, ‘Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.’

So he went into her tent; and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent-peg in his temple.

So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

SERMON “Women in Leadership”

Have you ever heard that Christians don’t allow women leadership in the church?

Have you ever wondered where that comes from?

If I understand it correctly, it comes from the Epistle of 1 Timothy, which references Genesis as the basis for the argument:

“I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument;

also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

That... is certainly an argument I’ve heard. It’s not the conclusion that I draw from the Genesis stories, but it has been a popular argument in certain corners of Christianity.

And—well, who is “I” in that passage?

According to the text, it’s the Apostle Paul—but most Biblical scholars today disagree.

It’s pretty clear that three of the Epistles, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, belong together. There’s even a name for them, “the pastoral epistles.”

The pastoral epistles use no fewer than 306 words that Paul does not use in the rest of his work.

The style of the writing of the pastoral epistles is different from the unquestioned Pauline letters.

The pastoral epistles assume conditions, including the organization of the early church, that did not exist when Paul was alive.

And speaking of the early church, the pastoral epistles are not included in early

lists of Paul's work.

I personally do not believe that Paul wrote them, and I do not give them the same weight that I do other parts of our scripture.

But honestly, their authorship isn't my biggest reason for lending them less weight.

The pastoral epistles make conclusions that seem to me to be morally antiquated. What do I mean by that? Well, for example, there are references to slavery all over the place in the Bible, and we no longer understand owning other human beings to be moral.

And there are certainly Biblical arguments to be made which conclude that being human is very important indeed. As one Priest put it, "There is nothing more important than being human." (Martin Bell)

Similarly, most of us find the argument that Eve sinned, therefore women should be modest, silent, barefoot-and-pregnant to be an immoral stance.

And! Biblical evidence to the contrary:

Jesus broke all of the societal boundaries regarding how he should interact with women—he spoke with them and ate with them and taught them and traveled with them and gave credence to their arguments.

In fact, there's a strong argument that Mary Magdalene was the first Apostle.

And then, of course, there's Deborah, right?

I think we should uplift her story more often, because her story plays with gender norms pretty hard.

The norm would be for the men to be brave and honor-bound warriors. The norm would be for those noble men to be guided by God through the voice of a male prophet.

Right off the bat, we have a female Judge in this story. Right off the bat we are told that she is also a Prophet.

And the word of God is—go fight the Canaanite army.

Now, our brave and honorable warrior-man is Barak hears Deborah say "jump" and he says "how high?"

Just kidding, she tells him where to go, with what forces, and fight the Canaanite army and he says, "I'll go if you go."

And I have compassion for him. I do. Chariots were the armored Humvee of the day, and the Canaanite army had 900 of them. I mean... there's brave, and then there's stupid, right?

Surely this woman will back down from this stupidity and they can all live another day.

Nope.

Deborah is braver than Barak is _and_ she calls him on his gender assumptions, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."

Sisera was the leader of the Canaanite army, and his end is worth mentioning.

As his army was routed, he ran—made a "tactical retreat." And as he ran—"retreated"—he came upon the tent of someone who belonged to a third tribe—not any of the Israelites, but not a Canaanite, either.

He asks for and receives hospitality—grand hospitality, actually. He asks for some water, and she gives him milk. She does not complain when he lays down in her tent.

She does not argue when he orders her to hide him from the world so he can sleep.

All that "retreating" takes it out of a guy, you know?

Then she quietly grabs a tent stake and nails his head to the ground with it.

That is another haunting image—feels like something Jason Vorhees would do, not some

Biblical hero!

But I think that's kind of the point. It wasn't Barak, mighty warrior, leader of the Israelite army who killed the rival commander.

It wasn't even Deborah, Prophet of God and Judge of Israel, who killed the rival commander.

It was Jael wife of Heber, also known as some woman in a tent and access to milk.

We don't know anything more about her than that. Well. I guess we know that her name means "mountain goat" or "climber." Which might say something about what she was like!

Now that I mention it... the fact that we know her name is pretty significant, considering the rest of the Bible. There aren't very many women who are mentioned by name. And in this story, we have two.

And these women were far from being the victims.

Here's the thing: different people have different gifts. Male, female, both, neither—it doesn't matter. Everybody has something they're good at, and things they don't do as well.

To me, what that means, is not that everyone should be treated equally, but rather with equity—given equal opportunities to prove themselves.

To me, what that means is that keeping someone out of a leadership position because of an accident of birth is unwise—because you never know who the next Jael or David might be, who the next Deborah or Samuel might be.

You never know, unless you provide opportunities for everyone.

What do you say? Amen?

PRAYER PREPARATION:

https://youtu.be/J91ti_MpdHA?si=Me0w00YOZTjEGfeU, "Girl on Fire" ~Alicia Keys

She's just a girl and she's on fire

Hotter than a fantasy

Lonely like a highway

She's livin' in a world and it's on fire

Filled with catastrophe

But she knows she can fly awa

Oh, oh-oh-oh-oh

She got both feet on the ground

And she's burnin' it down

Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh

She got her head in the clouds

And she's not backin' down

This girl is on fire

This girl is on fire

She's walkin' on fire

This girl is on fire

Looks like a girl, but she's a flame

So bright, she can burn your eyes

Better look the other way

You can try, but you'll never forget her name

She's on top of the world

Hottest of the hottest girls, say

Oh, oh-oh-oh-oh

We got our feet on the ground

And we're burnin' it down
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh
Got our head in the clouds
And we're not comin' down
This girl is on fire (Fire, fire)
This girl is on fire
She's walkin' on fire (Fire, fire)
This girl is on fire
(Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)
Everybody stares as she goes by
'Cause they can see the flame that's in her eyes
Watch her when she's lightin' up the night
Nobody knows that she's a lonely girl
And it's a lonely world
But she gon' let it burn, baby, burn, baby
This girl is on fire (Fire, fire)
This girl is on fire
She's walkin' on fire (Fire, fire)
This girl is on fire

Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh-oh
Oh-oh-oh-oh, oh
She's just a girl, but she's on fire

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:

Unstoppable One, You are unrelentless in Your love and You never stop pursuing us. Remind us not to give up on one another.

In our ever-expanding world it is easy to take what one person says or does in one moment as an example of their whole being.

Open our hearts to forgiveness, reparation and restoration.

Help us to be healers in our own lives, and to seek forgiveness where we have harmed others.

Guide us in Your ways of love, and may we be as unrelentless in our pursuit of justice and peace in this world, all done in the name of Your Son's love for us.

For Christ was undeterred, even to the cross, to show us how much he loved us.

It is in his 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:

<https://youtu.be/PHz00QfhPFg?si=xKhuUhlF0pBIVeWH>, "Just A Girl" ~No Doubt

Take this pink ribbon off my eyes

I'm exposed and it's no big surprise

Don't you think I know exactly where I stand?

This world is forcing me to hold your hand

'Cause I'm just a girl, oh, little old me

Well, don't let me out of your sight

Oh, I'm just a girl, all pretty and petite

So don't let me have any rights

Oh, I've had it up to here

The moment that I step outside

So many reasons for me to run and hide

I can't do the little things I hold so dear

'Cause it's all those little things that I fear

'Cause I'm just a girl, I'd rather not be

'Cause they won't let me drive late at night
Oh, I'm just a girl, guess I'm some kind of freak
'Cause they all sit and stare with their eyes
Oh, I'm just a girl, take a good look at me
Just your typical prototype
Oh, I've had it up to here
Oh, am I making myself clear?
I'm just a girl
I'm just a girl in the world
That's all that you'll let me be
Oh, I'm just a girl, living in captivity
Your rule of thumb makes me worrisome
Oh, I'm just a girl, what's my destiny?
What I've succumbed to is making me numb
Oh, I'm just a girl, my apologies
What I've become is so burdensome
Oh, I'm just a girl, lucky me
Twiddle-dum, there's no comparison
Oh, I've had it up to
Oh, I've had it up to
Oh, I've had it up to here

end