

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of the Holy-One-of-All!  
Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

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 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."

This month of July, we acknowledge disability, mental health awareness months, and international self care day. These are only some of the things that came up when I searched awareness causes for July.

In the United Church of Christ we have a Disability Ministry that envisions a world in which all people are included in the fullness of life because they are created in the image of God. Here is a link for further reading: (<https://uccdm.org>)

Here at First UCC in 2nd life we recognize the challenges of underrepresented groups, and that not everyone has access to all aspects of the church's life and ministry.

We thank the Holy-One for this space that is access for all.

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](http://firstuccsl.org).

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in

Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

#### GATHERING MUSIC

Matthew West - Don't Stop Praying (Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r0eA49MZ0w>

#### SCRIPTURES

Today's scripture comes from the book of Mark 6:30-34 and 53-56 NRSV

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.

As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

53- 56

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks Be to God

#### SERMON

Chasing the Miracle

Today's political climate in the United States has everyone at edge. A party excited to see the former President return and grateful he was not killed. Praise be.

While others fear the man at the White House should probably step aside while another part of the party says keep moving forward.

To say that people are at edge in good and in a bad way perhaps is an understatement.

So much is up in the air.

So much is unknown.

Fear for our country's future creeps in.  
Political satire, dooms day predictions, and maybe a few who simply say it wont' matter things will be as they are meant to be.

How do we as followers of Jesus Christ deal with all of this?

Well, we do not stand here to endorse, or to walk the edge of the line to talk politics.  
But we do deal with the matters of the heart, our soul, and our bodies.

As such we look into the gospels and to each other for community, for peace, and comfort.

The world today probably looked the same way in the Nixon era, or the Reagan era or the JFK era.  
Or perhaps not and things are more dangerous than before.

Society, and people of all communities look at the news, hear the speeches, and cringe or celebrate.  
I do not recommend the rabbit hole of Youtube.  
Perhaps that is what makes it all loom larger than life and before.

What is coming?

Well, we can speculate, and we can be in fear but instead let us clothe ourselves with the promise from above that all shall be well.

As the church, and people of faith we look at the gospels and see how in Biblical times there was a Roman Empire, a political unrest, a need for a miracle.

Jesus was the perfect candidate, the person's savior, the awaited messiah.  
But was he political?

In his own home town he was not seen as such a miracle.  
While others knew he was the one they awaited for and the prophets of God spoke about.

In the book The Politics of Jesus by Obery M. Hendricks says that Jesus was a "Political revolutionary."

Jesus was that perfect candidate that healed, helped those in need and wield the power of the crowds to follow him.

Jesus called for a change of heart, a change of behavior of how we treat "the least of these," and he inspired and empowered people.

Could Jesus have raised an army of insurgents, a group of people to rise against the Roman Empire?

Perhaps, but he knew that his part to play went beyond that time into the vision to make way for more than the Jewish people in that area and that era.

Well, that did not help those who needed freedoms and a revolutionary at that time.

And I believe that Jesus knew that and perhaps that is why he kept moving and traveling to villages, towns, and places in the fringes to show them that change was happening.

The scriptures say, they were like sheep without a shepherd. They were looking for that person to lead them.

Hendricks says in his book, "The reality, then, is that most Christians DO recognize a political dimension to the message of Jesus in some shape or form."

He continues to say that what is rejected by many is that Jesus, "did not only sought to address the SYMPTOMS of the people suffering but alleviate the SYSTEMATIC CAUSE of their suffering.

Jesus was calling for a systematic change.

Such change is to acknowledge that Christianity and being Christocentric is NOT the same.

At face value we say that it is, at least it would make sense that they are the same thing.

But Christianity in its own word carries so much baggage!

Sheep without a shepherd is common. I hear this from parents of LGBTQ+ Youth.  
I want to go to church.  
I want to know more about God.  
But the Church and God wants nothing to do with my child.

Or the opposite happens.  
I want to go to church and know God.  
And because of this...I want nothing to do with my child.

So it is not the same thing.

To have Jesus at the center of our lives means that we do not exploit the shepherds to fulfill our own message or interpretation of the law or the WORD.

Jesus was going to places that not many went.  
Jesus was doing things that not many did.  
He sat with a lady of the night for God's sake!  
Yes for God's sake he showed that no one was turned away.

Jesus was moving beyond piety, actively opposing oppression, seeking the poor, radically changing minds and hearts.

In today's scriptures we see that there was so much to do that Jesus and the disciples did not have even time to eat.  
There is just so much to do!

The scriptures say in Matthew 5:9, "Blessed be the peacemakers."  
Noticed the revolutionary stances of peace makers not peace keepers.

To make peace, to act upon seeking rest, is an action, a verb.

I feel that as clergy, as faith leaders, as progressive Christians there is so much to do!

People are misquoting scriptures and preaching in the open death, hate, anger, and retaliation.

As peacemakers we must cleanse the world of oppression.

People are out there presenting a vengeful God that will take out people for rejecting salvation.  
How dare you reject spilled blood?

You have words such as conservatism and liberals.  
Everyone claims to have God on their side and to be following in Jesus' way.

What do you say?

It can be exhausting to try to untangle such words filled with so much baggage.  
It is important to know that political conservatism is not the same as moral conservatism.

So who decides the moral, the ethics, the way to live?  
In these scriptures you see Jesus healing, moving, talking, preaching, teaching, and being so busy that the scriptures say there was no time to even eat!

He tells his people to get on the boat, let us go somewhere quiet, somewhere to go rest.

Did they rest?  
Did the boat ride help them rest?  
Perhaps they did with the soothing of the ocean, the calming of the water, and time alone.  
Did they finally eat?

In the time of Jesus there were the Jewish people, the hereditary Jerusalem, the priestly aristocracy, the rich of Jerusalem elites, that are the Sadducee, Pharisees, men of wealth and influence.

But here is this guy going to each town, to each village, to each outpost, taking a boat to get to other areas, seeking those in need.

And the people would follow.

Again how on earth without twitter, or find my Jesus app, did they know where he was going?!

But there they are following, dragging if one must to get to Jesus to touch the fringe of his cloth.

Perhaps the miracle of the woman in need that touched the fringe of his garment and was healed gets out there!

And people know they can also be healed!

Jesus had to be found for a miracle to happen.

One had to chase the miracle, and find Jesus.

We must do the same and through the Holy Spirit that fills our lives with joy seek the one who through the gospels showed us what compassion and grace really means.

Today, it is unfortunate that invoking the name of Jesus is done when bombing abortion clinics, oppressing transgender people, or same loving gender people.

Divine liberation and salvation has given others the right to stand in supremacy of Judeo Christian as the only religion, and moral authority to mock people with disabilities, or on the spectrum.

Christianity has often been called arrogant in its beliefs and behaviors.

So easy to see when Margaret Atwood created The Handmaid tale.

Where do we stand?

Perhaps not in a party as much as with the Holy-Ghost influence to take seriously the call of Jesus to care for our neighbors, to love one another, to seek decent standards of living for all.

To believe that liberation against the oppression and denial of rights is for all regardless of color, sexuality, gender expression or identity, mental capacities, class, or race.

In the gospels all who came across, around, and in the shadows of Jesus were healed, and transformed.

The complexity of today's life when politics are talked to on the table brings forth so much anxiety, anger, frustration with both sides if not on the same side expressing being right.

Hendricks says, "Treating the people and their needs as holy should be the perspective of everyone whose purpose is to be a love of God and humanity, it most certainly is the perspective of every religious and political leader who claims to follow Jesus."

The goal of Jesus was to teach, inspire, empower, and help those in lowly places

rise from whatever held them down.

Not by their own boot straps, for many do not have boots to even grab.

But by being in community, supporting and helping each other.

Church, let us strive to practice what we have learned, reading, and exploring in these gospels, and let us also take the time to rest.

Rest, for there is much to do.

Take your time on the boat, sleep, go away to a secluded place, make your family a priority, honor them, love them, care for them and then when your boat reaches the shore carry the message of truth, the power of healing and liberation in the name of Jesus.

May it be so.

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

Natalie Grant - You Will Be Found feat. Cory Asbury (Official Music Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjipTBGNTYE>

Have you ever felt like nobody was there?  
Have you ever felt forgotten in the middle of nowhere?  
Have you ever felt like you could disappear?  
Like you could fall, and no one would hear?

Well we know that one is always there listening.

In fact even when you don't speak the Holy-One-of-those-in-need is there.

For example, 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 -

Prayers For when courage feels far from you God of those who tremble, Courage can  
feel foolish when we've seen the world in all its terror.  
But, protect us from life lived in perpetual vigilance.

Keep fear from monopolizing our relationships, our desires, our motivations, so that  
we can act without rehearsing the worst of our imaginations.  
Help us meet our fear with kindness and mercy.

There are times when we feel small and exhausted.  
Harness our courage.  
Grant us contentment in our limits, and community in our battles.

Send others who tremble alongside us, who will speak truth with calmness.  
Show us we need not be giants if we have good friends.  
And lead us beside still waters.

The space is thin between bravery and rest.  
Remind us that fear is as bodily as any emotion.  
Slow our breath, ground our attention.  
Lie still with us as courage finds us.

May it be so.

Amen

Arthur Riley, Cole. Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying  
Human (p. 127). Random House 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  
challenges in our lives, and hope that the Holy-One-of-All is with you always!  
Go in peace!

Amen

#### Music for the Journey

Rachel Platten - Fight Song (Official Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xo1VINw-SKc>