

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 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!

Rev. Nan Baker, is preaching tonight.
I am grateful to be co-creating and collaborating with my colleague and fellow clergy in RL and now here in SL.

So thank you Rev. Nan for returning to preach and worship with us today.

Friends, 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 Sunday service is 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.

August is International Peace Month; it was designated as such in 1926 as a time to reflect on the First World War in hope of peace.

Will you join in prayer as we acknowledge this together and pray for justice and peace.

Let us Pray:

We lift our hearts to you, O Christ.

Make us instruments of your peace.

Merciful, loving and all powerful God we come into your presence with hearts of thanksgiving and praise as we unite for world justice and peace.

We pray for peace among people of various cultural traditions that are different from our own.

Amen

(Rev. Alice Harper-Jones UCC)

If there are any announcements about the life of the church please share with us while our gathering music plays.

GATHERING MUSIC

Mumford & Sons - The Cave (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNy811TLvuA>

Today's scripture comes from the first book of Kings 19:7-16

The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation

Later Yhwh's angel came to him a second time.

The angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat.

If you do not, the journey will be too hard for you."

So Elijah got up and ate and drank.

The food made him strong enough to walk for forty days and nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.

There Elijah went into a cave and stayed all night.

Then Yhwh spoke to him: "Elijah! Why are you here?"

He answered, "God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could.

But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords.

I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Yhwh said to Elijah, "Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you."

Then a strong wind blew until it caused the mountains to fall apart and large rocks to break in front of the Yhwh. But Yhwh was not in the wind.

After the wind, there was an earthquake, but Yhwh was not in the earthquake.

After the earthquake, there was a fire, but Yhwh was not in the fire.

After the fire, there was a quiet, gentle sound.

When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat and went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "Elijah! Why are you here?"
He answered, "Elohim All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords.

I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."
Yhwh said to him, "Go back on the road that leads to the desert around Damascus. Enter that city and pour olive oil on Hazael to make him king over Aram.

Then pour oil on Jehu son of Nimshi to make him king over Israel. Next, pour oil on Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to make him a prophet in your place.

Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks Be to God

Let us pray:

Guide us, O Yhwh, by your Word and Spirit, so that in your light we may discover wisdom, in your truth find strength, and in your will discover peace.
This we pray in the name of all the helpers of humankind.

Amen.

SERMON

Story of Elijah

His is a familiar name, but perhaps that is all we know about him.
He was called and anointed by Yhwh to be his "prophet," that is, to speak with the authority of God to the people.

Elijah had not asked to be God's mouthpiece, but he had accepted the responsibility when Yhwh called him to prophesy.

His country was in a terrible condition.
They had suffered a three-year drought and food was scarce.

The rulers, Ahab & Jezebel, had accepted—and required of the people—the worship of Ba'al, a powerful deity that was part of the long-established, polytheistic religion of Canaan and the lands that the Hebrew people were now claiming.

Ba'al was, in part, a fertility god, believed to oversee bountiful harvests and healthy livestock for the people.
However, the most defining characteristic of the Hebrew people was a commitment to monotheism: One God.

It is right there in the very beginning of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Sovereign God.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not worship a graven image of any other god."

The cult of Ba'al was diametrically opposed to these commandments.

Ba'al, the God of Rain and Dew, was a powerful member of a whole pantheon of local gods.

He was represented by statues (graven images) of a mighty bull and the rituals of his worship involved sacrifices of diverse types upon his altars.

While creating a unified, monotheistic people out of the Hebrews and protecting them, Yhwh would not tolerate the worship of Ba'al.

As Jezebel and the priests of Ba'al tightened their control of the people, Yhwh called prophets to speak the commandments of their One God to those in power. In this process, Elijah was called to directly confront the Ba'al worshippers and, with the help of God, had killed 450 of their priests. Jezebel was furious.

Her priests had been killed, the religious structure decimated, and, therefore, her own personal power was threatened.

In a rage, she promised to kill Elijah in retribution.

To underscore her commitment to destroy him, she cried, "May the gods kill me if I have not killed Elijah by this time tomorrow."

Elijah took her seriously and ran away in terror.

He did not get far before he was overwhelmed by fear and hopelessness.

He fell to the ground and begged God to let him die.

Instead, God sent an angel to encourage and feed him.

Still, he remained lying there, depressed, exhausted, and unwilling to go one step further.

The angel comes again, this time telling him that his work was not finished, that he must go meet Yhwh on the holy mountain (Mt Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments).

The angel gave Elijah more food and told him to eat well because the trip would be long and arduous. Indeed, it was.

After eating the heavenly meal, Elijah set out through the wilderness, walking forty days and forty nights until he reached Mt Sinai.

Finally reaching the destination that the angel had set for him, he did not celebrate.

No, he found a cave where he could crawl in and sleep.

I can imagine how he might have felt.

There have been times in my life that I have sought out my own cave.

Haven't you?

I have faced tasks that seemed impossible and did my best to do what was right.

Sometimes, like Elijah, my efforts seemed very impressive to others, although I knew that I did not do the job alone.

Doing the "impossible" is hard enough, but then to face the credit and the consequence is even more of a challenge.

Think how you feel when you have done even more than you thought you ever could do, only to be told that the job was not finished and that your duties continue to grow. I can imagine wanting to crawl into a hole and tune out the world. Anger and hopelessness and exhaustion and, yes, self-pity can decimate a person just as surely as Elijah's fiery sword had decimated the 450 priests.

In a sense, Jezebel had destroyed him when she delivered her threat. His cave was as much a grave as it was a haven. Yet, Yhwh is nothing if not persistent. It is fascinating how God deals with Elijah.

Yhwh does not yell at him or drag him out of his burrow. Neither does God squeeze in there with him to hold his hand and coddle him. No, God requires Elijah to account for himself, to take responsibility for his actions.

Scripture reports it this way: "Then Yhwh spoke to him: "Elijah! Why are you here?"

Why am I here????

If I were Elijah, I would say, "God, I am here because you told me I had to come here!

This was not my idea!

I have been a dutiful son and done my best, but you just won't let me go!"

The text puts Elijah's answer this way: "He answered, "God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could.

But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords.

I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Yhwh simply replies to his whines by telling Elijah to come out of his hole and stand up while God passes by him.

This is a big deal.

Even Moses was not allowed to see God, but now Elijah, poor, self-doubting, irritated, frightened Elijah is told to stand to face God.

He must expect something dramatic, powerful, God-worthy. Ah, here it is!

A mighty wind that breaks the mountains apart!

But...no. God is not in the wind. Oh, wait!

The earth heaves! But...no. God is not in the earthquake.

Now, fire!

But...no.

God is not in the fire.

Elijah is buffeted, shaken, blasted by the fire, finally beyond all expectation or assumptions. Then, in the calm, there is a gentle sound.

God's presence whispers and beckons him.

Elijah crawls out from his temporary grave to face the repeated question: "Elijah!

Why are you here?"

His words in reply are the same, but the whine is gone.
He is describing not just where he is, but WHO he is.

He is back on his feet, receiving his calling from his Sovereign God. "I am the only prophet left and they are trying to kill me, too."
Yhwh acknowledges the frail, fallible but resolute human that Elijah is, and gives him the next tasks in his divine mission.

God looked at Elijah, and knew he was good.
Evening passed, and morning came.
This was the next day.
May it always be so for you and for me, this and every day.
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

My Prayer For You (Official Lyric Video) - Alisa Turner
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj_0pvIGkks

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 -

Creator God,

You call us to love and serve you with body, mind, and spirit through loving your creation and our siblings.
Open our hearts in compassion and receive these petitions on behalf of the needs of the people and the world.

Amen

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Grant to us, YHWH, we pray, the spirit to think and do always those things that are right, so that we may be enabled to live as your hands of love and compassion in the world.

This we pray as the family of God.

Amen.

Let us go to serve the world.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

I Won't Let Go - (Lyrics With Bible Verse) Rascal Flatts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qA0YKJ0_Ivk

Go in Peace!