

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. Mike Wright-Chapman, 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. Mike 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."

August is International Peace Month, and also the fall season of returning to school for those in grade school, secondary school and higher education including seminary.

In our prayer time we will acknowledge all those returning to any type of learning, certifications, seminary, technical school, college or universities and petition heaven for their safety at campuses across this nation, and their minds.

As well as their parents, and caregivers.

Today is also our first day of the month so we will be partaking in holy communion.

I invite you to gather the elements for after the Message of Hope to share together in our sacred time of remembering Christ in the breaking of bread.

Gather something to eat, such as bread, a cracker, or a cookie.

As well as a cup of grape juice or wine to drink after we pray over the elements remembering our savior Jesus Christ with the ritual of Holy Communion.

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](http://firstuccsl.org).

#### Invocation

Will you pray with me?

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place and the digital realms that connect us to many with your presence.

We thank you for this place and for those here today.

Amen

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

This next song talks about Christ as a cornerstone, a reference to Ephesians 2:20. A cornerstone is the solid visible support of a structure. So even if we feel wobbly at times we have solid support.

#### GATHERING MUSIC

TobyMac - Cornerstone ft. Zach Williams  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws5Jnoq96qo>

Amen!

But even in the shifting winds  
You are who You've always been  
You're the only rock that I could ever stand on  
Through it all You remain.

Alleluia!

#### SCRIPTURES

Today's scripture comes from the book of John 16:12-25  
The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation

I have much more to tell you, but you can't bear to hear it now.  
When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all

truth. She won't speak on her own initiative; rather, she'll speak only what she hears, and she'll announce to you things that are yet to come.

In doing this, the Spirit will give glory to me, for she will take what is mine and reveal it to you. Everything that Abba God has belongs to me. This is why I said that the Spirit will take what is mine and reveal it to you.

Within a short time you won't see me, but soon after that you'll see me again."

At that, some of the disciples asked one another, "What can he mean, 'Within a short time you won't see me, but soon after that you'll see me'? And didn't he say he is going back to Abba God?"

They kept asking, "What is the 'short time'? We don't know what he means."

Since Jesus was aware that they wanted to question him, he said, "You're asking one another about my saying, 'In a short time you'll lose sight of me, but soon after that you'll see me again.'

"The truth of the matter is, you'll weep and mourn while the world rejoices; you'll grieve for a time, but your grief will turn to joy.

When a woman is in labor she cries out, because her time has come. When she has borne her baby she no longer remembers her pain, because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.

In the same way, you are now grieving but I will see you again and then you'll rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

On that day you'll no longer question me about anything. The truth of the matter is, if you ask Abba God for anything in my name, it will be given to you.

Until now you haven't asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive so that your joy will be complete. I have spoken these things to you in veiled language.

Priests for Equality. The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation (p. 2332). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks Be to God

## SERMON

### The Dance of Give and Take

It was a world of many gods. As Abraham set forth from Ur of the Chaldeans into an unknown future, he brought with him a new kind of faith.

One God, who could no more be carved in stone or cast in metal than the sun be bottled up in some portable container.

This was indeed novel in a world where deities of all types abounded in great mythical pantheons, deities more often than not at odds with one another.

One God, Abraham declared. One God, Moses proclaimed.

One God, Isaiah announced, who was holy, holy, holy, beyond all human attempts to package and control.

Then, along came the Christians.

"Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

What's this? Still a Unity of Being, but also a Trinity of Persons?

The concept was...confusing to those who had dispensed with multiple deities, who had fully embraced the notion of one God, who wanted to keep things plain and simple.

Why complicate things? And what does it mean anyway?

Throughout the centuries, many scholars of the Church have tried to explain the conundrum. It is like the sun, one said, which we experience as a ball of energy we see in the sky, but also as the beams of light that stream down upon us, and still again as the emanating heat that warms us.

And explanations like this make a kind of sense.

St. Augustine, that consummate theologian of the West, used what we would now call psychological categories to explain the Trinity in terms of memory, understanding, and will.

In our own time, some with a sensitivity to the obviously male-dominated language of Father and Son have chosen alternative ways of formalizing the Trinity, speaking of the God who creates, who redeems, and who sanctifies.

But there is another truth to be gained this day, one that originates in the language of Jesus. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. For all that the Father has is mine."

In another place in John's Gospel, we hear Jesus declare, "Do you not know that the Father is in me and I in the Father?"

Still elsewhere he prays that his disciples may be one "even as the Father and I are

one."

This is not the language of form and function; no, this is the language of relationship, the language of mutual devotion.

A twelfth-century scholar, Richard of St. Vincent, reflected on this and spoke of God in terms of shared love, a community in which that love is expansive and generous. It is love that cannot be self-contained.

It overflows from Parent to Child to Spirit and back again. The love of God, the love that IS God is like a divine Dance of give and take, a dynamic and graceful and deeply intimate movement.

In this movement, the God who is "I AM" is not alone, never alone, for the very essence of God is relationship.

This is far different from those mythological deities of old who were always fighting with one another, rivals and annoyances of one another.

No, what we see in the Trinity is a dance of Persons who are mutually affirming, mutually caring. For the very essence of God is relationship, community, unconditional love.

It is even more remarkable then that God, who in this Dance needs no other, did choose to create and redeem a people--no, even more, chose to create and redeem you, me, each and every individual we encounter--so that we might join in this Dance.

The invitations have been sent. There are to be no mere spectators on the dance floor. No outcasts, no outsiders.

We are called by God to see ourselves as God sees each of us and thus discover ourselves to be, like the Persons of the Trinity, truly beloved.

The prophet Isaiah said it beautifully: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

It is no anonymous form letter that invites us to participate in the Divine Dance. Each one of us is invited...by name.

All of this might sound good, but what does this look like when it is actually lived out?

Chuck Robertson, an Episcopal priest, writes that years ago, he was walking through the grounds of Emory University in Atlanta when from a distance he saw Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate and Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa.

He was guest-teaching there at the time and accompanied by a large handler.

Eager to meet this legendary figure, Chuck ran up, only to be immediately put off by his companion. "The bishop is busy," he was told.

"Turning away and feeling like little more than chopped liver," Chuck writes, "I suddenly heard a small but powerful voice: "Come, come."

As I approached him, Bishop Tutu smiled and said, "Tell me your name." I did, and he responded, "And tell me about yourself."

For the next ten minutes, I received his full and complete attention. For that time, I was someone of infinite value.

As I turned to leave, the bishop looked me in the eye and quietly said, "I will remember you, Chuck Robertson."

Not chopped liver. No. Beloved. God's Beloved. Part of the Dance.

The Apostle Paul spoke of such care, such "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13.

This charity is no mere handout given to an anonymous person on the street while taking care not to make true eye contact.

No, the charity that Paul speaks of is that classic King James Version, put-your-feelings-into-action kind of love, patient, and kind, not jealous or self-centered, not keeping a checklist of wrongs done against us.

It is a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." It is "a still more excellent way" of relating to one another.

It is love that, as Jesus said, we see in God's own self.

As I look around, all too often I see people who desperately need to know what this is like, people who feel alone, cast out, not beloved.

What would happen if we looked at all those around us with fresh eyes, seeing not rivals or annoyances or, perhaps worst of all, as invisibles...but rather God's Beloved ones, God's Dance partners?

How often I have been on flights and seen individuals trying to carry on board huge, oversized bags stuffed to the brim.

They pant and sweat and curse under their breath as they struggle to fit their baggage into the overhead compartment, refusing to let go of a burden that their airline hosts stand ready to take off their backs.

In ancient times, people had many gods in their image; now we all too often try to be gods ourselves, carrying the weight of the world on our all-too human shoulders, feeling guilt and responsibility and resentment.

On this Sunday, God gives us a priceless gift that we can share with all those we meet, all those whose life's baggage has become so full, so heavy, that they have forgotten who they are and whose they are.

We can dare to look them in the eye and quietly remind them "not only with our lips but in our lives" that they are not God and don't need to be.

There is one God, who is relationship, who is Divine Dance, who is Love.  
And they are God's.

Amen

#### SHARING GOD'S TABLE

We have now come to the time to share in Holy Communion together and I invite you  
gather your elements.  
Place them before you and let us take a moment to take a deep breath as we remember.

On the night Jesus was betrayed he shared a meal with his friends, his followers the  
people he called family.

At a simple table Jesus gathered with friends, he remembered the liberating story of  
the Passover,  
shared the bread, passed the cup, and asked us to do the same, and remember -  
remember God's liberating work in the world - work embodied in Jesus.  
We remember how the greatest gift he gave to us was very life.

This table is open to all who seek nourishment for the soul.  
Join together in this holy communion  
not because you must, but because you may  
not because you are full  
but because in your emptiness you are in need of God's mercy and assurance  
come just as you are  
It is the Lord's table  
And it is spread for you.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:  
God of liberation, with this bread we remember.

Let us pray  
Come Holy Spirit upon these gifts of grape and grain.  
Make them before us the life and love of Jesus, that we may  
become the life and love of Jesus, for the world.

In Real Life, in Second Life,  
We are connected to each other  
Through our faith in you,  
In and through this community,  
we may find that your love  
Is as real and tangible  
As this bread and cup  
We share.

Amen.

Now take the bread.

Feel it in your hand.

And let us remember another time, and another table,  
when Jesus gathered in a upper room with his disciples,  
his closest friends.

When he took the bread on the table for the evening meal, blessed it, broke it, and shared it saying "This is my body, given for you. Take. Eat. And remember me."

Let us eat this bread of life together.

Now pick up your cup of drink,

Because at the end of the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine, the juice of the vine,  
And said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, a new relationship in my blood.  
Drink, and as often as you drink, remember me."

Let us drink this cup of blessing together.

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

Crowder - Even In EXILE (Official Lyric Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOb2iW1otdI>

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.



Today we begin our prayer time together lifting up all those younglings returning to grade school, secondary school, trade school and those who support them.  
God of those who are students and caregivers hear our prayers.

Prayers for those returning to seminary, university, college, or any certification or educational program.  
God of wisdom hear our prayers.

Prayers for the teachers, counselors, support administrative staff, maintenance, coaches, lunch and cafeteria support staff.  
God all who teach, inspire, seek, and serve, blessed it be their work and blessed be their lives.

Prayers for our pastoral staff and clergy friends. For Pastor Jamie, and Pastor Kris along with their families.

For our friend Doug and the endless always blessed behind the scenes work of Second Life. May blessings, healing and restoration be with our brother Doug.

Prayers for Pastor Jerry, may the best that may be.....be. Prayers for peace, for comfort, for support and for us all.  
God of those in need hear our prayers.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER -

Spirit of God, we ask you to help orient all our actions by your inspirations, carry them on by your gracious assistance, that every prayer and work of ours may always begin from you and through you and be happily ended.  
Amen.

O'Brien, Kevin. The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life (p. 64). Loyola Press. Kindle Edition.

#### BLESSINGS FOR THE JOURNEY

After the service I invite you to the Rainbow Room to dance and share in community.

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 grace!

Go in peace!

Amen

Music for the Journey

WE SHALL OVERCOME: LOVE WILL RISE AGAIN | nimo patel & daniel nahmod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6FN0EmK87c>

