

WELCOME

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 the Eastern Association;  
Southern California Nevada Conference of the  
United Church of Christ (UCC).

Our service will be in voice and text.  
Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have 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 Chat 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.

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.

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).

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna, I am one of the Pastors in this community.  
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

Today, we welcome back Rev. Nan Baker from the South Central Conference of the  
United Church of Christ. Rev. Nan will be preaching today and sharing the message of  
hope.

This month of October is Breast Cancer awareness month, and it also observes  
Indigenous Peoples Day.  
Today is also the first Sunday of the month and we will be sharing 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.

Would you pray with me?

Amen

I have a quick announcement before we move into our gathering music. On Thursday's if you would like to join me we are gathering in the upper room, that is upstairs for theological conversations using pop culture, and scriptural readings from the UCC weekly seeds found in their website.

I'll add the link here if you would like to read them or just show up with your favorite beverage, snacks and lets engage in these topics together.

This coming week we will be talking about belonging.

Link: <https://www.ucc.org/weekly-seeds/>

And now for our gathering music.

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

#### GATHERING MUSIC

The Creation Song

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I7KuvV8wfE>

Today's reading comes from the book of Genesis 2:18-23 NRSV, Updated:

Then God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

So out of the ground God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called Woman,

for out of Man this one was taken.”

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God  
Sermon

There are some passages in the Bible that we have heard a zillion times.  
At times, hearing them again can be comforting.

However, these scriptures are still the hardest to preach on—everyone already has their own ideas about what these verses mean and, frankly, we may hear so many old sermons in our brains while they are read that we do not listen to them again.

This passage is certainly one of these, familiar to the point of fading like old wallpaper.

How can we hear it anew?

My first step in encountering scripture is to see if I know what it actually says.

When we read the Bible in any of the translations we may prefer, we are already consuming a predigested version of the text.

Each translator brings their own understanding of the original language and of English to the task.

They bring their knowledge of linguistics and the role of the translator.

They translate in ways that make sense to people who share their life experiences, cultures, faith stances, and expectations.

Any one Hebrew word, for example, may be translated by a dozen English ones.

Their choice among them reflects what they know, believe, and expect.

Many modern translations try to deal with these inescapable biases by translating in committees: Ideally, using a group of translators means that each person's biases are balanced by the inherent biases of others, giving a broader pool.

This process helps, but most of these committees lack a wide diversity.

For example, they may involve people who are all educated in the west and who are Christian.

To investigate the text more deeply, we must go to the original language. Let me be honest: this is not foolproof.

We bring our personal biases and the biases in which we were educated to the original text just as we do to a translation.

Yet sometimes we gain a flash of meaning that has eluded us before.

Looking at the original Hebrew of this text that is familiar in translation gave me a new perspective.

Bear with me through a little word study and see if you hear this scripture in a fresh way.

This passage begins with God.

God is the first actor, the creator, the evaluator.

In the previous creation story, God created all that is, step by step, and with each creation, scripture tells us God saw that it was good.

However, in this second creation story, God begins by saying, ““It is not good that the human should be alone” –For the first time, God sees a problem in creation, and that problem is isolation and alone-ness.

We call the first person “Adam” because that is the Hebrew word that scripture uses. However, a’dam is gender-inclusive, neither male nor female. “Human” is a more exact translation.

This human is alone, and God realizes that the being is not complete by themselves: they need relationship. Thus, God creates a partner. Now, this is where English translations tend to go off the rails.

You may be familiar with the one created described as a “helper” or, in older translations, a “helpmeet.” The problem with this word choice is the fact that “helper” in our language is usually an assistant to another.

In fact, you may have heard sermons saying that a woman should be subservient to a man because God created Eve to be a helper to Adam. The Hebrew can clarify this relationship. The Hebrew word for this new creation is ’ezer which is a word which scripture uses to refer to God!

It is best understood as “assistance from a superior”–quite different from the modest, subservient “helper” we have often heard from preachers. Then the text goes further by saying the new creation would be a “partner.” In other words, God saw humans as needing relationship and created for us the possibility of constructive connections among equals.

In this story, God tries to find this partner for the human by creating every “animal of the field and every bird of the air.” But, when God brings them to the human for naming, none are a suitable partner.

Here, the Hebrew gives us a puzzle: it is not clear whether it is God or Adam who finds no partner among them. Is the responsibility for finding this relationship solely the human’s job or is it a co-creative effort of God and the human?

Perhaps the first explanation makes sense to us at a particular time but the second does so at other times. I know sometimes my relationships seem to be solely my own doing, while in other situations, I sense the divine at work.

As it often does, scripture leaves room for both. The other part of this creation story that has created struggle comes from the description of the creation of the partner. God puts the human to sleep and creates the other from him.

In Sunday school, it is often told in this way, "God took one of Adam's ribs and made Eve."

Simple, right? Unfortunately, many have interpreted this as seeing the woman as derivative: the man is complete in himself, and the woman is just a part of him.

It is closer to the original text to see it differently.

First, God sees that it is not good for the human to be alone.

After many tries, the Holy One sees that the only suitable partner is one of the same substance as the human and creates this partner from the core of the first one, taking substance from the side of the human so the partner will exist beside (not above OR below) the first human created.

God differentiated the new creation from the first one to be unique, to offer the human a difference.

It is only at this point that gender enters the story.

The Hebrew introduces 'ish and 'ishah, words for the male and female creation—made of one substance, equal and yet different, capable of relationship and partnership.

The human celebrates by saying "At last!  
Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh."

When I study this text, four ideas stick with me.

First, the compassion and insight of God: the human is not just a trophy to God's creative genius but is instead an individual whose aloneness calls to the divine heart.

Second, the humility of God: the Holy One evaluates their work and admits it is incomplete.

Creation is not once-and-done but is an ongoing experiment.

Third, the co-creation that creates the world: Whether it is in the process of searching for the suitable partner by both the human and divine, or in the creation of the woman through an act of god out of the very substance of the man, both God and people, together, create the good result.

Fourth, the joy and celebration that comes in relationship.

The concern and effort of God for the human speaks of the possibility of connection with the Divine, and the story celebrates the essential need for connection among people.

The nature of God, compassion, humanity, relationship – what more can we ask of a few scripture verses? Let us pray:

Creating God, you make us for each other,  
to live in loving community as friends, sons & daughters, sisters & brothers,  
spouses, companions, coworkers, & partners.

Teach us to seek equality in relationships.

Encourage us to build compassion and love.  
Inspire us to learn, to wonder, to question, and to trust.  
Empower us to co-create the community that will embrace us all.  
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.

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

Alanis Morissette - Empathy (OFFICIAL VIDEO)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EbHermSjXy>

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.

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PASTORAL PRAYER -

Creating God, you call us to love and serve you with our body, mind, and spirit,  
through loving your creation, and our siblings.

Open our hearts in compassion, and receive our prayers, on behalf of the needs of

the church and the world.

Holy One, we come to this gathering and to your presence mindful that this day celebrates our human connectedness. The reality of our daily life lies far from your vision of beloved community.

You call us to remember the poor, the marginalized, the immigrant, the isolated and abandoned.

You command us to love our neighbor and have blessed us to live in a time in which we may know our neighbors from across the world, and even to gather as we are today here in Second Life, without the separation of distance and time.

Yet, we cling to our selfishness and isolationist tendencies.

We place our desires and comforts over the good of the world.

We demonize difference rather than dignify diversity.

Extend your grace to transform our petty attitudes and prejudices and to infuse us with openness, curiosity, and love.

In your spirit, we pray for all those with whom we are gathered, for the prayers we have shared and for the unsaid prayers in our hearts.

We pray for peace and renewal for countries and groups torn by war, terror, and chaos.

We pray for security for people inundated by crime, competition, and dangers of all kinds.

We pray for safety for those who live within violent and destructive relationships.

We pray for our sisters and brothers who struggle with poverty, isolation, or desperation.

We pray for restoration and strength for siblings who face physical and mental illness.

We pray for serenity for those of us who struggle with issues of faith, belief, and commitment.

In your compassionate heart, O God, there is a place for us all.

No one is excluded.

Give us today a share of your compassion, Divine One, so that your unlimited love may become visible in the way we love my siblings. AMEN.

Benediction

May the Holy One be our ever-present companion and partner as we encounter the tests of life.

May our softened hearts break over the pains, pangs, and problems of the world.

May the strength of the Spirit fill us, the power of the Spirit embolden us, and the leading of the Spirit guide us as co-creators of the realm of God...now and forever.

Go in abundant hope, peace and love.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY



Bruno Mars - Count on me lyrics  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yc6T9iY9S0U>

Go in Peace!