

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, in the aisles, or in the back of the sanctuary, so if the mood strikes you—I say go for it!

GATHERING:

Today's service explores the ideas of Storytelling, of Light & Dark, and asks the question "What are you going to be?"

So does this song.

[https://youtu.be/3LtmZM0W08?si=F0\\_2Wki30qX4ZudN](https://youtu.be/3LtmZM0W08?si=F0_2Wki30qX4ZudN), "[Ghost] Riders in the Sky"

~Johnny Cash

An old cowboy went riding out  
One dark and windy day  
Upon a ridge he rested  
As he went along his way  
When all at once a mighty herd  
Of red eyed cows he saw  
Plowin' through the ragged skies  
And up the cloudy draw  
Their brands were still on fire  
And their hooves were made of steel  
Their horns were black and shiny  
And their hot breath he could feel  
A bolt of fear went through him  
As they thundered through the sky  
For he saw the riders coming hard  
And he heard their mournful cry  
Yippie-yi-o  
Yippie-yi-yay  
Ghost riders in the sky  
Their faces gaunt  
Their eyes were blurred  
Their shirts all soaked with sweat  
He's riding hard to catch that herd  
But he ain't caught 'em yet  
'Cause they've got to ride forever  
On that range up in the sky  
On horses snorting fire  
As they ride on, hear their cry  
As the riders loped on by him  
He heard one call his name  
'If you wanna save your soul

From hell a-riding on our range  
Then, cowboy, change your ways today  
Or with us you will ride  
Trying to catch the devil's herd  
Across these endless skies  
Yippie-yi-o  
Yippie-yi-yay  
Ghost riders in the sky  
Ghost riders in the sky  
Ghost riders in the sky

#### 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](http://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 the 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

John 1:1-9

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Matthew 5:41-16

'You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

SERMON "What Are You Going To Be?"

My name is Jamie, my pronouns are They and Them, and in Real Life I am an Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ and a Hospital Chaplain at Yale New Haven Hospital.

In Second Life I've been a Staff Pastor of this ministry from, well, the beginning. I imagine that most of you already know me, at least a little. But maybe you haven't put who I am together in quite this way:

I love Story. I love Story as a sacred, powerful thing. I believe that we were created in the image of God—and that surely one of the ways we are the Image of God is that we, too, are creative. And so I believe that all art, all Story, is sacred. In fact, that's one of the reasons that I love being a Hospital Chaplain: I get to hear and receive each of your stories, every one of them sacred.

That feels important, so I'll say it again:

Your story—the story of you, your life, all the things that make you who you are—your story is sacred to me.

Even made-up stories and make-believe are sacred to me.

The autumnal equinox was over a month ago and as the nights grow longer and longer I find myself turning to stories about darker things.

I watch scary movies. I read Stephen King. And I am drawn to Halloween. I know that such things are not for everyone.

Please bear with me.

But these stories, too, I find sacred.

At their core, scary stories are about darkness, yes—but you cannot tell stories about darkness without also telling stories about the Light.

That is, in large part, why I love Halloween.

Now, I don't know if you celebrated Halloween when you were a child, but the way I remember it, part of the excitement leading up to the holiday was one all-important question:

"What are you going to be?"

That was the big question, right? "What are you going to be for Halloween?"

It's a big question, because with a little bit of creativity you can be anything you want to be on Halloween.

I believe that creativity is sacred. It is Story. Deciding what you are going to be for Halloween and then creating that costume is one way to tell a story. To tell your story.

I think my favorite costume from when I was little was one that Grandma Jonas sewed for me: I was an Extra-Terrestrial. Actually I was the Extra-Terrestrial: E.T.

It was a beautiful, elaborate, padded suit with feet that Velcro-ed on over your shoes, and this wonderful skull-cap-mask combo so if you were having difficulty seeing where you were walking you could just flip the mask up...

Oh how I loved that costume!

I don't remember why I wanted to be E.T. But the artistry of that costume still amazes me as an adult.

I believe that one of the ways in which we were created in the image and likeness of God is that we are creative—we create things, we make art of all kinds, including costuming.

Whether you're piecing something together from your local Big Box Store or you're lucky enough to have a grandma willing to sit for hours at a sewing machine, there's creativity involved.

I said that art is sacred, but since we're talking about darkness and the Light today, I'll say it this way, too: Art is one of the ways we let our light shine. At least that's what I believe.

And it's still a worthy question:

What are you going to be?

On Halloween you can honor a character that you particularly love or have an affinity for.

If I'm brave enough to read my own story, I can see that the story of E.T. is that of a person who doesn't really fit in, but who nevertheless has a great deal of compassion and touches the lives of the people around them—who loves and is loved.

Can you see how a non-binary person might resonate with that?

What are you going to be for Halloween? What story do you want to tell? What's your story? What light are you going to shine?

And having practiced letting that light out on Halloween, don't you think maybe you could be brave enough to do it at other times of the year?

I know. I know.

Baby steps.

And yet—

Who are you going to be?

What are you afraid of?

What light can you shine in the face of that darkness?

Actually, that reminds me of a story.

And I don't get to tell it often enough. It's one of my favorites.

It's an old Irish tale.

And it goes a little something like this:

Once upon a time there was a man named Jack. He was incredibly smart, but he used his intelligence to make other people feel stupid.

He was a con-man who loved to drink, but it wasn't really the alcohol he was addicted to. You see, Jack loved nothing more than tricking other people into paying for his drink.

He loved the power of being clever.

In fact, he was so accomplished at conning people that he became known far and wide as Stingy Jack.

So far and wide, in fact, that Satan began to hear stories of Jack's legendary wit and trickery.

One evening, on his way to the local pub, Jack came upon a body lying in the road. So Jack did the only thing he could do.

He ran up to the body and began to search it for loose change.

That's when Satan leapt up from his place in the road and laid ahold of Jack.

"Oh, I've heard of you, Stingy Jack! Your soul is forfeit and you are coming with me!"

"Before you take my soul, I have a fantastic idea.

I know that you can assume any shape that you like. We'll go into the tavern just over the rise over there and run up a huge tab.

When it's time to pay up, you'll turn yourself into a gold coin. I'll use you to pay our tab, and then you can disappear!"

Well, that sounded like a good trick and a fun time, so Satan and Jack immediately put the plan into motion.

They drank all night, and when the pub was ready to close down in the wee hour and it was time to pay their tab, Satan turned into a gold coin.

Jack took that coin, and immediately dropped it into his purse, which also held a crucifix. He quickly tied his purse shut, trapping Satan!

"I'll let you out," said Jack, "if you promise to never collect my soul."

With no alternative, Satan did as Jack demanded—he promised never to take Jack's soul.

Well, time went by and years of hard drinking finally caught up to Jack and he died. His soul went up to the Pearly Gates and he was met by Saint Peter, who denied him entry.

"You were a very intelligent man, Jack. You could have brought so much light into the world. But you waisted your God-given gifts on cheating people and belittling them.

There is no place for you here."

So Jack's soul went down to the Gates of Hell, where he was met by Satan, who denied him entry.

"You made me promise never to collect your soul.

There is no place for you here."

Then Satan bent down and picked up a live coal from the fires of Hell and threw it at Jack, driving him back out into the world.

Some people say that Jack took that coal with him—that he took a turnip and carved out the inside and put the coal inside, creating a makeshift lamp.

They say that his soul is doomed to wander the earth for all eternity, finding his way through the darkness by the light of that coal.

And if you're unfortunate—especially at this time of year, when the veil between this world and the next grows thin—you too, might encounter the wandering spirit of Stingy Jack.

If you're afraid, keep this in mind—there is a way to frighten away wandering spirits like Jack.

It involves making light in the darkness, of course.  
Take a turnip—or here in America, pumpkins are much easier to hollow out—and carve a scary face into it.  
Then put your own light into it and put it in your window to frighten away wandering spirits—  
spirits like Jack of the Lantern.

I find that most people do not know that the story of the Jack o' Lantern has such Christian roots, but that's not really the point I'm trying to make today.  
I'm more interested in your stories. They are sacred to me.  
What are you going to be?  
What are you afraid of?  
What light are you going to shine in the face of the darkness in the world?  
It is my hope and my prayer that you overcome your fears, that you are brave enough to share your sacred story, and that you let your personal light shine on all people.  
What do you say?  
Amen?

#### PRAYER PREPARATION:

<https://youtu.be/uGFuTYz60KI?si=6nWilNzezfdcQCwJ>, "End Credits" ~John Willams (from E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial)

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:

Hear this old Scottish prayer:  
From ghoulies and ghosties  
And long-leggedy beasties  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord, deliver us!

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:

When I think of music and storytelling and Halloween, I invariably come to Danny Elfman.

You probably know his name from his work scoring films, but he was also the lead singer / songwriter of Oingo Boingo.

All to say that this is one of my favorite fun Halloween themed songs! Don't be afraid...

<https://youtu.be/yhN8Sdul0Fc?si=phHyB6CSuUC8qsib>, "Dead Man's Party" ~Oingo Boingo

Yeah, yeah, let 'em in

I'm all dressed up with nowhere to go  
Walkin' with a dead man over my shoulder  
I'm all dressed up with nowhere to go  
Walkin' with a dead man over my shoulder  
Waiting for an invitation to arrive  
Goin' to a party where no one's still alive  
Waiting for an invitation to arrive  
Goin' to a party where no one's still alive  
I was struck by lightning, walkin' down the street  
I was hit by something last night in my sleep  
It's a dead man's party, who could ask for more?  
Everybody's comin', leave your body at the door  
Leave your body and soul at the door  
Don't run away, it's only me  
Only me

I'm all dressed up with nowhere to go  
Walkin' with a dead man, with a dead man  
Ooh-ooh, waitin' for an invitation to arrive  
Ooh, walkin' with a dead man, with a dead man  
I got my best suit and my tie  
With shiny silver dollar on either eye  
I hear the chauffeur comin' to my door

He says there's room for maybe just one more  
Hey, I was struck by lightning, walkin' down the street  
I was hit by something last night in my sleep  
It's a dead man's party, who could ask for more?  
Everybody's comin', leave your body at the door  
Leave your body and soul at the door  
Don't run away, it's only me  
Don't be afraid of what you can't see  
Don't run away, it's only me  
Don't be afraid of what you can't see  
It's only me  
I was struck by lightning, walkin' down the street  
I was hit by something last night in my sleep  
It's a dead man's party, who could ask for more?  
Everybody's comin', leave your body at the door  
Leave your body and soul at the door  
Don't run away, it's only me  
Don't be afraid of what you can't see  
Don't run away, it's only me  
Don't be afraid of what you can't see  
It's only me  
It's only me, only me  
It's only me, it's only me  
Only me, it's only me  
It's only me  
It's only me

\*end\*