

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.

This month of November we come with hearts of thanksgiving.  
This upcoming week of November 28th, in the United States we celebrate thanksgiving  
day.

It is a day of gathering with family eating turkey and enjoying a football game.  
Or at least that has been our family.

For others it is just a day to gather with family.  
Whatever the day might bring for you, may you have a blessed one.

Would you pray with me?  
Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.  
As we gather on this day may your bless our lives.

We pray for those here today and those who are not here but are part of our community, our family, your church, your children.  
May all honor and glory be yours now and forever.

Amen

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

Crowder - Good God Almighty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TzECToPYIk>

Scriptures

Today's scriptures comes from the book of John 20:19-20.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.  
The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON - Behind closed doors -

This week on November 20th, was Transgender Day of Remembrance.

I had the privilege to have been invited to my alumni seminary at Brite Divinity School to lead the TDOR service of remembrance during chapel.

Such service is one of those difficult services that I wish was not necessary to have.

Twenty-eight people were named who lost their lives to violence.

And if you visit the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) website and read the manner of death of each of these individuals you will be shocked even more.

The amount of violence perpetrated upon a group of people is unbelievable beyond murder, and beyond death.

Dismemberment, decapitation, and the list of atrocities goes on.

What makes these services even more difficult (as if this was not enough) is the

threat of a new regime, an empire rising against our

Trans siblings with even more misinformation that will affect our young people and families.

A former Pastor boss said to me once TDOR is so depressing, why don't you make it more lively?

In the words of my friend Monica Roberts (may she rest in peace), you have 364 other days to celebrate us, today we mourn, today we say their names.

She followed with saying, "It is supposed to be heavy, because it is devastating the manner in which our siblings died."

How can anyone dare to imagine new possibilities?

How do we go on when a political campaign ran ads across our nation making a mockery of Transgender individuals?

A youngling from our Color Splash Out fellows asked me, "How do we go on, when they want to see us dead?"

As I was thinking about these questions and listening to my trans siblings these past few weeks, I could not help but think about the disciples after Jesus died.

The scriptures say they were behind closed doors wondering what their new normal might look like.

So are we.

Do we go hide?

Do we go back in the closet?

Do we sit behind closed doors to make sure we are safe and protected?

Do we cancel camp this year and move it next year to another state like New Mexico or Chicago?

But what about those who can't move, or travel?

I wonder if the disciples were trying to adjust to live without Jesus.

There is so much uncertainty as they gather behind closed doors.

And so, it is this story that I thought about when I was thinking about today.

We can certainly relate to today's reading because many of us are also behind closed doors trying to figure out what is going to happen next in our world.

This world around us is in chaos, and so was the world and times when Jesus lived and died.

Chaos, confusion, fear, over who is right, or who is wrong also played back then. Today, we hear that the doors of the house where the disciples met were locked.

So, I do wonder if the disciples fear that the authorities were going to round them up and kill them?

Perhaps they fear that they will be labeled a rebel, instigator, and traitors of the empire?

Will they be found guilty by association?

What if people fear helping Transgender people in the years to come for fear of association?

Trans-association?

The fear is real!

Their fear was real, and the scripture we heard say they were hiding for fear of the Jews.

I must acknowledge that this verse, as well as others in John, have been used in anti-Semitic ways.

So it is important to say that at that particular time a group of people is named and that is all.

During the time of the scriptures we read, there was a real fear for the Roman empire.

So, I believe it is important to do justice and place the text in context.

Perhaps the way to see this text is to understand that the fear was for those in power that could crush and hurt them.

Such fear goes on through the ages because people in power can decide what rules apply to them and what rules are only for those in the margins.

The disciples fear to go outside their home after their messiah, their rabbi, their friend, their leader who had just been executed by the cross was gone.

Additionally, there was that question about having lost the body.

Where did the body go?

So hiding and regrouping seems like the most logical thing to do.

How do we imagine new possibilities?

It's best to hide.

I can relate, how often have we hidden our anxiety, or the reality that we don't have it all together.

What if the disciples who had a growing following went out there and revealed that they did not have it all together?

Maybe you have hidden that way before?

Within my imagination, I can almost see the disciples inside this place huddle down, perhaps with a dim candle.

Then Jesus appears bringing joy.

This man faced rejection, humiliation, hurt, and death.

Even after all this, he stands there and says peace be with you.

What peace?

And how did you get in, Jesus? (That would be my first question.)

In the middle of such overwhelming confusion Jesus tells them it is going to be alright with just four words, peace be with you.

Peace the antidote of anxiety, the reminder of the one who gives us peace that is different from the one the world gives.

For this peace comes with the promise of courage and strength.  
And if I might add it is such courage and strength that gives us a new way of thinking and imagining a new world.

Yes, there is chaos in today's world and there was chaos in Jesus' world.  
And yes, in our rooms, in our hearts and minds as we fear about what this new year will bring next.  
Where is there room for imagining a new reality?

Well, that is what imagination is.  
A new reality emerges before us, and we look at the circumstances before us and create a new path.

We should not feel any shame or feel bad if we are feeling fear, if we doubt, or if we need some time alone.

On November 20th, we said the names of those taken, we fear what is to come but we also hold on to those words uttered in the upper room to a group of people also in fear, peace be with you.

Sometimes it takes someone to tell their story to see ours.  
I am reminded of singer Rebeca Lane from Guatemala, who wrote a song called "Cumbia de Memoria."

It translates as "the ballad that remembers."  
In her song, she says that indigenous people have always been afraid to report the genocide that has happened to their ancestors and them.

Through this song, Rebecca Lane says, it is now those in power who fear that the people without education, will rise from the ground and demand to be treated with dignity.

These people did not know that they had it in them to rise from living in fear.  
It was not until someone with a voice helped them imagine a new reality.

It took somebody coming to them in their hiding place to invite them to receive words of peace, or courage, or strength and a new way of living.

It took someone to teach them to come together in community and organize.

Jesus meets us in our hiding place and says, when you are ready to stand, I'm there with you, it is going to be okay.

How does Jesus' love show up for you?

Does it come and meet you through friends, good news, changed circumstances, spiritual leaders, or even the warmth of the fuzzy four-legged family member?

Where do you feel such love and intention of good news in your life?  
When Jesus left, the disciples still had to figure things out.

But now they had a re-new hope that things were going to be okay for they had received the Holy Spirit.  
The world is still in chaos.

We are still trying to figure out this new normal or what our new reality looks like.

But we have the Holy Spirit upon us, and no one can take our imagination, our creativity, our resilience and our ganas (Will) to not only to survive, but thrive!

In the words of Womanist Theologian Karen Baker,  
"The Holy Spirit inspires the dance of God, calling all to participate in the dance of divine love, creativity, healing, justice, and renewal."

Friends, through your struggles, in the dark rooms, behind closed doors, and anxious spaces, I say, peace be with you.

Jesus comes and says it's all good, rest in divine love.  
Dance, connect virtually, through calls, and digital platforms.  
Let us continue to check, encourage, and hold each other in prayer.

To us all in the community I invite you to breathe in the air of those who suffer and to release their name in power, those who died living their truth.

Send up a prayer for those you might know in your circle who this holiday season will be going through a hard time.

Sent up a prayer for those who live with mental challenges and fear and anxiety makes it harder, difficult even to see or hear Jesus' words today.

Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes says, "The work of remembering and the work of grief enable us to a point of self-restoration perhaps when we feel that we can respond then we can move forward."

Becoming whole may look different for each of us. So be kind to yourself and breathe, rest, and know that you are not alone.  
For we are in solidarity with you, and we hold on to a joy that even at a distance it circles us for we know it's there.

We are a community of faith that in time we will find creative ways to stand and walk again.  
Grief, and lament is uncomfortable but take your time as we sit with you.

When we go through it, remember to seek those who might help you stand, reach out. Let us imagine together a new world of creating safe and brave spaces for our families and friends.

¡Sí se puede! Yes, we can.

Because we find our strength at times in each other.

We find that strength to move on, to heal, and to rise in due time.

James's cone said that "theology starts where it hurts."

Oh and we have been hurting!

BUT, we are grounded in a faith that reminds us that we are not alone.

Perhaps, that means that as Dr. Carvahaes would say, "sometimes we will pray with a lump in our throat while holding on to hope." If that is all we have, we pray.

But hope must prevail and the courage, and strength to dare to imagine will remain.

So let us dare to imagine together!

May Peace be with you.

May it be so.

Amen