

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of our Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit.

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 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 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.

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 January we remember and honor the civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin
Luther King Jr.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of the civil rights movement we also recognize
that there is still much work to be done.

For we believe that all people are created equal in the image of God and should be
treated with dignity and respect.

Will you pray with me before our gathering song?

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place and the homes of your people with your
presence.

May your spirit keep leading us, filling our hearts with joy, peace, and love for one another and ourselves.
As we remember our beloved Martin Luther King Jr., we pray for racial equity., and for siblings who still struggle with discrimination.
May your Holy Spirit lead us to a more equitable world.
Amen.

GATHERING MUSIC

NEEDTOBREATHE - Fall On Me (feat. Carly Pearce) [Official Music Video]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIPOg_ayNBQ&list=RD0ghyp0J6XW8&index=49

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the book of John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you?"

My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it.

When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Word of God for the People of God,

Thanks be to God.

SERMON - The first public miracle

Upon encountering this passage in the lectionary, my instinct was to skip it entirely.

The text was simple Jesus, mom, wine out and wine back!

However, the persistent nudging of the Holy Spirit compelled me to pause and truly engage with the message there was something else.

So off to my lectio divina group I went.

This group I belong to is a group of clergy that meets on Monday at noon Central via Facebook.
This is led by an Episcopalian priest who founded the community Backstory Preaching.

During this hour we engage in Lectio Divina.
What we do is read the scriptures multiple times in various translations, engaging with thought-provoking questions, prayer, and traditional lectio divina practices.

For those unfamiliar, Lectio Divina is a contemplative reading method that invites us to immerse ourselves in a text—the group I meet with is based on the weekly scriptures.
The part of this is to allow ourselves to listen deeply and remain open to whatever resonates, challenges, or inspires us.

Here in Second Life we practice Lectio Divina on Mondays, and Fridays at the Peace Grove place at 10 a.m. central and 7 a.m. pacific times.

For Epiphany, Pastor Kris has put together the meditations adapted from the book “Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day” by Kaitlin B. Curtice, an enrolled member of the citizens of the Potawatomi nation.

So if you're in world come give it a try.

Let's explore the text together.
Today's scriptures said that “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.”

Perhaps Jesus and the disciples were friends of the party because according to the scriptures we read he had not yet started his ministry; it said that this was his first sign.

“Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.”

Consider this: a Jewish family is celebrating a wedding in Cana of Galilee, where every guest undergoes the rites of purification.

What does this mean?
The washing ritual stems from the commandments outlined in the book of Moses.
Its primary aim is to ensure ceremonial purity before engaging in religious practices or sharing meals.

Imagine a Jewish family throwing a celebration, and in my context that reminded me of how in my culture we are known for huge celebrations.
One example is a Quinceñera.

In our Mexican culture, a Quinceañera is a significant event filled with food, music, dancing, and all the elements of a grand party.
Relatives travel from across the country and even from Mexico if they can.

It may sound like a typical celebration, but it's much more—it's akin to a wedding with a large cake, huge elaborated dress, food and wine.

I can only imagine that if a Jewish wedding shares any similarities with a quinceañera, it must be an unforgettable experience!

Nonetheless in Jesus' wedding party the wine was running low and in any party that can be devastating!

There is no running out to the store to get more.

I can only imagine Jesus' mother saying, 'boy we need your magic, let's go!'

Now friends this makes me curious about whether Jesus was already using his powers secretly.

It brings to mind a show I once watched about Superman's early life.

The series, titled Smallville (2001), follows a young Clark Kent in Kansas as he navigates the challenges of mastering his extraordinary abilities while keeping them hidden.

At home, he occasionally uses his super strength to get through chores, much to his earthly father's disapproval.

I wonder if Jesus did something like that.

Did mom run out of greens and said here Jesus touch this grass and bam we have a salad.

Or did Mary just know because of how he was born.

Now remember that the scriptures tell us that it was the first of the signs of his power.

So before this nobody had seen the mystery, the power and abilities.

Now here he is at a wedding and his mother is asking for him to show his power.

But he replies, "Woman, it is not my time."

In the message translation it reads "Jesus said, "Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me."

Both translations of the NRSV and The Message can be translated in our own context, "mother mind your business!"

I can hardly picture myself ever saying something like that to my mother, "Woman, or even Mother...no..mind your business."

Nevertheless, Mary encourages those around him to follow his instructions, leading to the miracle.

This act not only convinces his disciples but also fills his mother with pride, while the person in charge (I call him the party planner, or the operations director) exclaimed, "Wow, you saved the best wine for last!"

The help, those in the background who are nameless and often overlooked played a

vital role in this moment.

Even from the beginning, Jesus gave them a first hand look at the first miracle and presented Jesus to both his world and ours.

This miracle they witnessed was beyond just filling the jars with water.

Now think about this they filled six (6), seis, jars of water, each holding 30 gallons because the scripture says they were filled to the brims. That's a lot of wine that Jesus converted!

Now let me ask you if you have ever heard the expression/question, "If Jesus made wine what is so bad about it?"

The answer is, nothing.

Wine is not bad.

But like everything else it can be detrimental when it controls, enslaves or endangers our lives.

It may come as a surprise to some to know that many clergy, pastors, and spiritual leaders have a form of substance abuse.

And that many avoid seeking help due to the social stigma they face within their religious communities.

I have witnessed the impact of addiction both personally and in a professional setting.

A former fellow clergy whom I believe strongly struggles with addiction, rationalized the love for alcohol by referencing the biblical story of the wedding at Cana.

Jesus transformed water into wine, demonstrating his divine power as a blessing for the joyful couple and illustrating that with him all things are possible.

This week while meditating about this I messaged a fellow clergy friend of mine who has been sober for more than two decades but often talks about his struggles with addiction.

I asked my friend how he grapples with addiction and his faith.

My friend said, "My recovery has been instrumental in my faith.

But it takes that mustard of seed to believe that something might help after you think you've tried everything else."

Despite the belief by many the Bible does not prohibit drinking.

Are you shocked?

In the 1920s, women in the United States played a significant role in the prohibition movement. This was the movement to prohibit alcohol.

The prevailing belief was that eliminating alcohol would eradicate poverty, reduce

domestic violence, and prevent men from squandering their earnings on drinking and immoral activities.

Did it work?
Does it work?

The Bible addresses the topic of drinking, emphasizing caution and the importance of not becoming enslaved by it.

See I believe that as children of God we are given the free will, but there are warnings not to allow alcohol to enslave one, to control one.

Ephesians 5:6: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit"

Romans 13:13: Speaks out against drunkenness .

Galatians 5:19-21: Speaks out against drunkenness .

1 Peter 4:3: Speaks out against drunkenness.

Drunkenness, the overpowering of one's body, the impairment of seeing clearly enough to drive, the incapacity of making decisions, the inability to control behaviors that can be aggressive, embarrassing, hurtful and even deadly.

Yes, my friends, Jesus indeed consumed wine during Passover, turned water into wine, and never condemned drinking.

However, the truth remains that excessive drinking can lead to a loss of control to various spirits, distancing one from the Spirit of God, which desires for us to embrace joy, peace, and love.

So let me ask you, why would anyone want to drink?

But then there is the one that is to try to forget something terrible.

Or perhaps to have courage to speak, act, perform, or deal with anxiety or stress.

The list goes on.

But in my time visiting AA the words from those given testimony such peace was never found at the end of the bottle.

Why would someone choose to drink?

Well just like JC here to have dinner, or gather with friends.

However, some may turn to alcohol to escape painful memories or to muster the courage needed for social interactions, performances, or to cope with anxiety and stress.

The reasons are varied and numerous.

Yet, during my time visiting AA for a seminary class in pastoral care, I often heard that true peace is never discovered at the bottom of a bottle.

The stories of lives ruined because of addictions were painful, real, and heavy.

Prohibition despite the attempts of many did not change all the bad things.

Drinking can be replaced by the abuse of prescription medication, sex, gambling,

eating, dieting, exercising, shopping, shoplifting, pornography and even video gaming.

Anything and everything that runs your life can be harmful.
Even the simplest of things in excess can become controlling.

For example exercising.
But how can exercising be wrong?

My son recently asked me to pray for his friend who was in the hospital.
He was shaken to hear that he was in the hospital for over exercising.
My son said, "evidently your muscles and tissues break down and mess up your kidneys."
I had to look it up and the condition is called "rhabdomyolysis."
That is nuts!

So I asked my clergy friend who I mentioned is sober what he would say to someone who is struggling with a form of addiction.

He said, "I would ask them to really sit with themselves, unaided by their substance of choice, and make a list (in writing) of the things that substance has done for them and what it's done to them. This might look like booze that gave me the courage to talk to my partner or allowed me to feel comfortable in community. But then writing negative things like booze put my job at risk because of tardies and absences or some of my family doesn't trust me."

Fear, my friends, frequently drives our actions and decisions.
Jesus reminds us in John that He came to grant us life in abundance (John 10:10b).
We are assured of a love that surpasses our greatest expectations, one that nothing—be it high, low, deep, wide, or beyond—can be lost. (Romans 8:38-39).

Despite this profound love, we often find ourselves grappling with fear.
We fear solitude, embarrassment, ridicule, condescension, job loss, or losing loved ones, prompting us to seek sources of courage. However, when these sources are relied upon excessively, they can end up dominating us instead.

Riley Cole in her book *This Here Flesh: Spirituality. Liberation* said that fear tends to hide behind one thing or another.
She listed abandonment, embarrassment, death or loss.
Each of these brings a fear that perhaps is triggered from something else wrapped up in survival mode, and traumas.

And I believe that alcohol or anything else that we might overdo can be based in fear.

Church fear is real but bravery, courage and Jesus' power can be much greater.

If Jesus had the ability to transform six jars of each holding 30 gallons of water into wine he has the ability to transform our lives.

I hear Mary saying do what he says.

And what has he said or what he has said is love our neighbor, to love ourselves to love our God.

Transformation is possible because I have been transformed.

Jesus not only has transformed my life but provided the tools and the people and community around me to see it through.

Transformation does not happen in a vacuum.

Church, Cole Ryle said, "We need other people to see our own faces-to bear witness to the beauty and truth.

Audre Lorde said, "Without community there is no liberation."

In the Red Binder I have placed a notecard with information that can help with any struggles dealing with addiction or substance abuse.

Because Jesus' liberating power comes with community and the support of each other.

Perhaps that is why the Spirit wanted me to really look at this story again.

This story moves beyond a simple wedding and a miracle that I had read.

It goes to the need for community and the abundance of God towards all their children.

Perhaps as we look at our own needs we can reflect that Jesus has the transformative power to give, and we the ability to receive.

And perhaps we have to think about doing things in moderation while knowing that grace, forgiveness and love from above will flow freely.

Thanks BE to God.

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.

CeCe Winans - Goodness of God (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sE5kEnitqE&list=RD0ghyp0J6XW8&index=49>

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 as we bring our prayers I want to continue to lift those in Altadena Community Church, United Church of Christ family in California that has lost their church in the fire.

PASTORAL PRAYER -

God of presence we need to come close to you in these difficult days.
Remind us of your love and care.
We are mindful of our vision "United in Christ's love, a just world for all."
Help us to stay the course and to live by Gospel values.
Keep us committed to the Way.
May your Spirit empower us on the journey ahead. In Jesus' name.
Amen
-Kent Siladi, Stamford, CT

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Our worship is over
our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting.
Go in peace, come again in hope.
Amen.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Queen : "We Are The Champions" (1977) • Official/Unofficial Music Video • HQ Audio • Lyrics Option
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tEEvsYZmxk>