

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 January, we pay tribute to the civil rights icon Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King
Jr. while also recognizing National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

We extend our thoughts and prayers to those impacted by organizations that have
scaled back their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives.
Our hopes are with those striving to liberate individuals exploited by systemic
injustices, as we affirm the importance of fairness and equity for everyone.

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.
May your Holy Spirit lead us to a more equitable world and help us to believe in you and each other.
Amen.

GATHERING MUSIC

RHETT WALKER - Goodness of God: Official Lyric Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHG6Ak5Jqkc&list=RD0ghyp0J6XW8&index=38>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the book of Luke 4:14-22 NRSV

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph's son?”

Word of God for the People of God,

Thanks be to God.

SERMON - You must believe and act

Before today's scripture, we discussed Jesus' baptism, the wedding at Cana, and the start of his ministry at the age of 30.
In the book of Luke, after his baptism, the scriptures indicate that Jesus was taken

to the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days and nights while confronting temptations from the devil.

The devil, el diablo, the enemy of our lives, the one who is the opposite of all things is there to offer Jesus bread, food, glory and fame. In the midst of his wilderness experience and the temptations he faced, Jesus comes out winning and is moved by the Spirit to journey into Galilee.

The scriptures reveal that he goes to the synagogues, where he openly reads from the book of Isaiah.

This practice of him reading from the scroll was a regular occurrence, particularly in Nazareth and especially on the Sabbath. The scriptures tell us that reports of him through the surrounding areas spread and he began to receive praise by everyone.

At first glance Jesus is doing what he has done many times before, he is reading in the synagogue so what changes? What changed my friends was his bold public statement, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

With this bold statement, Jesus reveals his ministry starting with those in the margins, highlighting its foundation of good news, liberation, and a challenge to the existing economic and social norms.

According to Jane D. Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe in the Women's Bible Commentary, the book of Luke is considered highly provocative within the Bible. It features substantial content focused on women, emphasizing themes of empowerment and liberation. And today we are seeing Jesus reading words from the prophet Isaiah's and his hope (Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2) for the restoration and liberation of Israel.

Powerful words that were promised and fulfilled.
Words that were now becoming a reality and many of them could not see it.

The admiration Jesus had received before will soon turn unsavory while people ask, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"
Is he not one of us?
They question how a common person was claiming fulfillment of the scriptures and a path to liberation.

During my childhood, I spent my summers in Mexico, where introductions often included the phrase, "This is the grand-son, grand-daughter, grand-children of el Maestro (teacher) Joel."

El Maestro Joel was my father's grandfather, a respected and beloved figure in the community known for his exceptional carpentry skills. I was proud to be the youngling of El Maestro Joel. If someone would have said, "Is this Yadi from El Maestro Joel?" I would have beamed with pride, yes I am.

However, the questions posed to Jesus were meant to disregard his words; instead, they aimed to challenge the legitimacy of someone proclaiming, I am the one who you have been waiting for.

This is not something uncommon to us who are often dismissed because of the way we look, who we love, our past, or who our family is.

In fact it is often difficult for people to believe who we are as children of God. Many times because they assume we live in sin as if who we are in the image of God is sinful.

Other times people do have a reason to wonder if someone is a child of God because of their track record not just myths or misguided beliefs.

The world might not believe in the power of forgiveness and a new life because people who often claimed to be redeemed act the opposite way of kindness.

I had a family member who would pray, preach, read the bible and then curse the hell out of us when we were not doing right or following a set of highly placed standards. Oh and she loved the "chisme" (gossip).

I mean think about how many people are "Christians" but we often say I'm not one of those.

Especially now with Christian Nationalism muddying the waters.

Theologian and German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in "The Cost of Discipleship," introduces the idea of cheap grace, which took me a minute to grasp.

Grace, is God's unconditional love and mercy, and is fundamental to Christianity, symbolizing salvation and forgiveness.

So how can grace be called cheap?

For something to be cheap it means it has lost its value, it has been overused, or often implied that it might be of poor quality not worth the value of its price. How can grace, a gift of immense significance, be considered cheap within the church?

Bonhauffer says, "That is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs."

See Pastor Dietrich Bonhauffer was killed by the Nazis he opposed and spoke against.

Bonhauffer often spoke of the sin of mass murder happening in concentration camps, the torture, the hate and division caused by them.

See Nazi Generals went to church, and proclaimed to be given authority to kill those who opposed the plan of God to be superior, and inferior. This is an example of cheap grace.

Bonhauffer says, "Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

It is doing the same thing over and over because in the end God will forgive us.

In Romans 6:1-2, Paul asks, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"

That is the incarnated Jesus living and breathing within us.

See when you meet this Jesus, when you really get what this movement is all about your mind must be transformed.

When Jesus reached for the scroll in Isaiah he read - “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Jesus' vision statement emphasized that those in poverty deserve to hear the good news.

The good news that moves beyond our prayers and a proclamation of being love by God while excluding people in the church.

See, poverty extends beyond mere absence; it signifies a deeper sense of deprivation.

It's not just about addressing food insecurity or checking off a box by running a food pantry.

The question remains: why do they experience this lack?

What partnerships can we forge to ensure they have the resources they need to thrive?

Feeling spiritually and emotionally drained can be overwhelming.

The uplifting message for those in need transcends mere comforting prayers; it calls for a game plan. Why are you feeling this way?

It calls for us to ask the questions beyond just a prayer, Who can we connect you with?

Here in our church I ask, how can I listen to you while the Spirit of God guides you to find a solution?

And I remind you that I am available to meet. Just send me a note card and let's start moving in that direction.

We will find a time.

Church, can you believe that the Spirit of the Lord is upon you?

Can you believe in your heart that you have been forgiven, changed and renewed—not through superficial grace or empty words, but by the liberating power that comes from releasing everything that hinders you?

Only then when you genuinely believe in your heart that you are anointed by the spirit of God can you effectively preach, teach, and speak truth to power.

But it takes *ganas*, the desire to move from whatever it is that is holding you back.

Engaging in activities like a Bible study, meditation, or personal discussions can enhance your understanding of the scriptures. Pairing these practices with deeper exploration encourages thoughtful reflection and inspires meaningful change in your life.

A video has recently gained widespread attention featuring Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde delivering a powerful message of unity at the Washington Diocese, with the 47th president of the United States in attendance.

During her sermon, the Bishop made a poignant connection with the president, earnestly advocating for compassion towards the LGBTQ+ community and immigrants.

Unsurprisingly, this did not sit well with the president, or the attendees. Currently, there have been reports of death threats and a furious message from the president, demanding an apology.

Speaking truth to power, and calling out the things that are not right around us takes courage, bravery and the Spirit of God that compels us to take action and speak out.

In an interview with Rachel Maddow on MSNBC, Bishop Budde was questioned about whether she had anticipated the viral video's impact and if it was part of her plan. She responded with a clear no.

Evidently the church was not full at all.

She said the church had been closed for 47th, his family and close friends to be in service.

During her sermon, she felt a persistent worry that she was overlooking a crucial element of her sermon and that was to speak about mercy, so she did.

As Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah's he continued by reading, "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind."

Jesus was also compelled to speak mercy.

See in its own context the prophet Isaiah was speaking in to the Israelites who were facing the reality of being held captive.

Yet in spite of such captivity they married, they produced, they grew, they continued to live.

Church the world around us might seem dark, confusing, frightening but we MUST live.

We must not get distracted by the orders of an executive desk that will be empty with promises to those who seek to harm, hurt, or destroy unity among us.

We must not get distracted and let fear overpower us, we MUST live.

Rachel Maddow assumed and said to the Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde, we all know you were brave and courageous because you preach and are used to talking publicly to people, but did you ever think you would get so much attention?

The Bishop responded, "before I answer your question I must say I always get nervous when preaching and talking to the people because I must speak with integrity. Now to answer your question, no I did not realize how much people would be angry."

We must like Jesus proclaim the release to captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind.

In Jesus times the miracle of sight is seen in the parables and through his ministry.

In our time we have removed the blind of the enemy that wants to confuse us and placed a blindfold of fear, shame, and despair.

The good news is that people like Bishop Budde called out for mercy and showed the reality of what is going on.

She pulled the blind fold of those sitting content and called upon the one who claims to have been anointed by God to lead with mercy.

Her actions not only called upon him but have been showcased around the world, this is what is going on in our country, have mercy!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, that "Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock."

And we are knocking on heaven's doors with our prayers, our pleads, our fasting, our community, our faith, our trust that God not only sees us but hears us.

Oppression is based on fear and there is much to fear.

Our siblings are threatened to be deported for having been born to non-American people.

Am I going to be deported after having lived here all my life?

In Jesus times the Roman empire was among them creating mistrust, fear, and the need to control the church, speech, and power.

Today we have books banned, our binary status being disregarded and our trans siblings being threatened.

AND YET, and yet...

We have been anointed by God and we must believe that you and I are anointed to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed.

We will continue to pray in community because el pueblo unido jamas sera vencido.

The people united will not be silent and defeated.

The good news is that we are loved, that we are not selling cheap grace but real transformation, liberation, hope and joy beyond the circumstances around us.

Because if we move by the feelings and emotions determined by the media, social media, and those who see only the negative and frightening reality around us then we will certainly lose.

Here is the good news, there is power, liberating power in action, grace with transformation, hope and liberation and you must keep believing.

With a lump in your throat like Dr. Claudio Carvalhaes, says, keep praying, keep writing to congress, to your senators, to your church, to your friends, to your dairy but do not let despair take you down.

Empires come and go and the people rise.

The cost of discipleship is heavy because of transformation liberation and the belief in the one who has called your authentic self to live and live life abundantly.

So I invite you to do an inventory of your life to determine where you're allocating your time and energy.

What aligns with the vision of the God-of-the-margins, to speak truth to power, and to proclaim the good news around you?

You don't have to preach,

You don't have to teach.

You don't even have to speak sometimes, just LIVE a life that is abundant.

What is God calling you to do?

And how is God calling you to engage?

I'm here for you if you wish to speak, to meet, to pray.

You don't have to speak at Cathedrals or challenge authorities that will imprison you. Perhaps your assignment might look as simple as offering friendship, aid or comfort to those who might not know yet of the liberative power that moves beyond religion.

But believe in your calling to share and spread the good news of God's unconditional love that calls us into action.

May it be so, 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.

Go Light Your World Video by Chris Rice Music Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpkwBkHq3n8&list=RD0ghyp0J6XW8&index=51>

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.

PASTORAL PRAYER -

God of bended knee, We kneel before you.

We thank you for showing us what it means to give, not out of a desire for recognition or personal gain but out of deep humanity.

Grant us compassion for all those who suffer, that our vocations would affirm the dignity of the systemically excluded and oppressed.

Keep us from shallow callings that are only concerned with the self, and how we might advance in this world. Keep us from discernment that only draws us into our own interior worlds.

As we make sense of our callings, may we do so with an unflinching awareness of the exterior world—the weeping of our neighbor, the groans of creation—so we would and relationship.

Grant us the patience to withstand this hopelessness, that we might someday look up and find intention and meaning where we thought it was void. May it be so.

Amen

Black Liturgies, Prayers, Poems and meditations by Cole Arthur Riley.

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

Imagine Dragons - Believer (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wtfhZwyrcc>