

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 February, we recognized Black History Month, National Cancer prevention month,
Teen Violence awareness month.
We close the month of February acknowledging that we still have much work to do
especially now as the country, and many companies scales back in honoring diversity,
equity and inclusion.

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 this service be a blessing to your people.

May all glory and honor be yours in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

GATHERING MUSIC

Alicia Keys - Underdog (Official Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izyZLKIWGiA>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the Gospel of Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Word of God for the People of God,

Thanks be to God.

SERMON - BLESSED BE

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 was one of my grandmother's favorite passages.

I remember being young and listening to her reading them one by one pausing at each for dramatic effect.

The story of Jesus teaching his disciples and talking to an eager crowd who would listen to every word he was saying.

Grandmother would emphasize a few verses more than others.

Like...

Blessed are the meek.

To be met means to be gentle, humble, patient, not complaining.

My abuelita really wanted me to chill.

It was te calmas (you chill) o te calmo (I chill you).

She would often say after this, its biblical.

I might have been too young to understand that some of these blessed are the poor in spirit.

I understood this as if I do not cause trouble, and live a good righteous life, God will bless me.

There was nothing about being poor in spirit.

It was really translated as poor as in unhouse, no money, and or having nothing.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

To me it means not having that richness of being deep within spiritual things.

But who decides what that really means?

We can go down a rabbit hole about mercy, grace, love, humility and what does it mean to be rich in spirit.

The way I see it is to need, to want, to crave, to know that one is always seeking to be filled with the spirit of God which translates to being merciful, loving God as we love ourselves and each other.

Today it seems that it's not just about working hard but rather knowing how to get ahead by only trusting yourself.

Or seeing that the rich, the well off and centered people within power are going to be okay in today's world.

What would these Beatitudes look like in today's world or based on today's social expectations?

How about...

Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.

Blessed are those untouched by loss.

Blessed are the powerful.

Blessed are those who are "realistic" about righteousness, compromising at every turn.

Blessed are those who demand and exact an eye for an eye.

Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.

Blessed are those bold enough to make war and strike first.

Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.

Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

Blessed are those who know best and the right people.

Will these blessings make more sense than the blessings we read in our scriptures

today?

Each of these are an obvious blessing.

The rich are blessed with more money.

The powerful are obviously blessed when they control everything.

The crafty and opportunities seemed to be blessed when they got ahead in life.

It's a dog-eat-dog world.

A Darwin thinking of survival of the fittest.

These modern blessings totally make sense because they appear to be working for many.

Right?

However, in a classic manner, Jesus consistently manages to turn things upside down.

You see, Jesus had this peculiar method that defied logic, much like algebra.

I once debated with my dad, claiming that all the money he invested in my algebra tutoring was pointless, as I have yet to find any practical use for that knowledge.

But perhaps that was the point to sit through things and figure things out when they are not obviously there or make sense.

Same thing with Jesus he had these sayings:

"You have heard this..."

"BUT I say to you this...."

You have heard if someone hits you, hit them back. (This makes sense right?)

Or as Madea, a Tyler Perry character says, "I'm not angry. When you are getting got...I'm gonna get them first."

Put that in Jesus' formula and it comes out like, "When you are gettingdon't go get them back."

Now that's not what people expected to hear.

The popularity of shows like The Mold, The Traitors, The Deck, Big Brother, and The Amazing Race can be attributed to the competitive nature of reality television, where participants compete for prizes.

However, it's important to note that these aren't truly live broadcasts.

A friend of mine who worked on one of these productions revealed that the editing process involves sifting through countless hours of footage to highlight the most dramatic moments that captivate viewers.

Audiences are drawn to conflict and confrontation rather than the gentle bonds of familial love.

This might reflect a deeper game of life, where challenges test our resilience and commitment, perhaps echoing the lessons Jesus imparted about maintaining inner peace amidst sabotage.

Ultimately, these life hurdles may reveal our true strength and dedication as we

navigate our journeys.

Today we live in a world of instant gratification.

The news at your fingertips.

Buying things right off your phone on an app as soon as you think about them.

Teens today are not used to researching or going to the library to look for anything, they got Goggle, they got their phones.

So perhaps when Jesus was saying you will receive a blessing, you will see the face of God. It was a future promised that honestly seems to take way too long.

We would have to wait to see and receive those things, as if.

Now you know the obvious question is, when?

When do you see the blessings?

Perhaps it was my upbringing in a conservative evangelical mindset that I equated being blessed with finding favor before the eyes of God.

Like the Modern Beatitudes I will be blessed and rich.

But...

If I lost my job, I did something wrong.

If I could not pay my bills, I did something wrong.

I must have short changed God somewhere and my prosperity went out the window and now I am sooo not blessed or highly favored.

Does any of this sound familiar?

When the world says blessed and highly favored people are those who have a table full of food.

Jesus flips it and says blessed are those who have nothing.

Now how does this make sense?

Perhaps at first glance it does not make sense.

But if you look again it's showing us this new way of thinking.

In all he did, Jesus would teach his disciples a new way of looking at things. He would do it by walking alongside them, by performing miracles and this case sitting around talking to them.

Jesus was showing us all a new social and economic practice filled with hope.

This was a way of looking at the empire and the realm of God side by side.

The difference of putting all your hope on what the world gives you or what you can earn for yourself.

Right next to the blessings that God gives you regardless of what you did, have done, or will do.

You don't have to fight each other to receive a blessing.

See despite a change in your finances, or a loss, you are still blessed, God is there.

Jesus was talking about blessings that had nothing to do with what the Roman empire said or did.

Today they have nothing to do with what the empire says we deserve or not.

God's favor is yours and it is not measured on attitude.

The world wants us to believe you have to deserve things.

Food, water, shelter, and safety should not be something that only those who deserve the good stuff has.

It should also NOT be only for those who in their eyes God has found favor.

You are blessed when you are authentic and know wholeness.

Be kind so you can see others benefit from your awesomeness.

Comfort, because you know what it means when someone comforts you.

Live your life in a way that is marked by justice, practices of piety, and shared accessible resources. You will see blessings all around you, my friends.

Jesus very well could have been telling us today you have heard your life is a game and you deserve to win at all cost.

But I tell you, there is no need to stress, the blessing is yours.

Name calling, bullying, rumors, social antagonisms are inevitable when the Empire puts people against each other and when the powerful are challenged.

But the challenge that the Holy one gives you is to stand against the Empire and to know your truth by the way you live.

We are a community united by the belief that comfort is attainable, especially for those in pain. This promise not only speaks to the future but also embodies the hope we find in Christ today.

As a church, let us embody compassion and righteousness, actively pursuing justice. For you and I continue to dedicate ourselves to illuminating the way for those who feel lost in despair, providing solace and a welcoming space within our community that honors the Divine.

May those who continue to seek the realm of God through prayers, and faith in action find the assurance of God's call.

For we are assured that amidst life's challenges, great rewards await us now and always.

Friends, I wrote this blessing for Transgender day of visibility and I want to share this with you.

I have added a note card in the red binder in the back.

Please, feel free to share with people who might need a blessing.

Blessed be

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.

for KING + COUNTRY - Shoulders (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfiYWaeAcRw>

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 -

Will you pray with me as your feel comfortable saying -

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father (Mother, Creator) who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kind- dom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

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.

Now lets dance with some Kirk Franklin.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Kirk Franklin Will Have You Dancing in Your Chair with "Love Theory"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30IH3NzXLnU>