

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.,
this Last Sunday in Epiphany..

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday this week.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,
wherever you are

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,
to remind us of God's presence with us,
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .
There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own
browser.

Now let us all take a deep breath,
breathing in the peace of God
breathing out the stresses of the day
we may have carried here with us.

Let God hold them for you, at least for a while,
as we gather on this holy ground to worship God.

. 'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements
underneath.

GATHERING MUSIC:

"I Love to Tell the Story"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrCpKa_x0cE

First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is
a church with full real life standing in the
Southern California Nevada Conference of the
United Church of Christ (UCC).

And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.
As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a 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."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be
included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in
life.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder
in the back.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry
there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website
firstuccsl.org

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

We will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the
Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some cake or pie,
and something to drink such as wine, juice, or water.
Whatever makes you feel closer to each other and to God.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,
as a community,
join our hearts together,
to connect to God and to each other.
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.
If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at
this time.
As people share their prayers in text
please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.
Those voiced here today.
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.
Those for which we have no words.
We lift them all to you, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.
We pray all this in the name of the one who taught us to eat and to pray together,
saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kin-dom, 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 kind-dom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

“Light Within” – Nathan Pacheco
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMZPiuAd6GE>

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Today is the last Sunday in Epiphany,
which according to the liturgical calendar is Transfiguration Sunday,
when we hear the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus.
This is a story told in all 3 synoptic gospels,
but also a story I never heard as a child growing up in the church,
I suspect because it is one of the few mystical stories in the gospels.

Today we'll hear the story as told in the Gospel according to Luke. In this story, Jesus takes 3 disciples, Peter, James and John, up a mountain to pray.

Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Luke 9:28-36.S

LUKE 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings
Jesus took with him Peter and John and James
and went up on the mountain to pray.
And while he was praying,
the appearance of his face changed,
and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.
Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.
They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus,
which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem.
Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep,
but as they awoke they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.
Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus,
"Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents:
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah," not realizing what he was saying.
While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them,
and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.
Then from the cloud came a voice that said,
"This is my Son, my Beloved; listen to him!"
When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.
And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks be to God.

"Finding My True Self" - Music Studio

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcoMAWo9Mf4>

"True Self"

Let us pray . . .

There are some details in Luke's version of this story that are interesting. First, Luke is the only one of the gospels to record that the reason Jesus, Peter, John, and James went up on the mountain was to pray.

They separated themselves from their other companions to get some quiet time communing with God.

Though one wonders why they had to literally go up on a mountain to do this. Mountain climbing is not easy, and they would be pretty tired when they stopped to pray.

Perhaps, contrary to tradition that calls this a "mountain top" experience, they only went a little way up the mountain, not all the way to the summit.

Going away to pray is a common theme in the Gospel of Luke, but it's usually Jesus praying alone.

This time he took these 3 friends with him,
something he will also do in the Garden of Gethsemane.

I've often wondered - why those three?

Were they special in some way?

The answer I always come to is no, they weren't special,
they were just the ones that said "yes"

when Jesus made the invitation.

A point in their favor.

But foreshadowing that soon to come fateful night,

Peter, John, and James can't seem to stay awake as they pray.

They were "weighted down with sleep."

I'm sure the difficult trek up the mountain and the thin air at higher altitude
didn't help.

The sequence of events described here are a little confusing,

but as I read it, the 3 disciples were sleeping, and Jesus was still praying.

While he was praying something happened to him, Though Luke doesn't use the word
"transfigured":

the appearance of Jesus' face changed in some way,

and with a flash, like lightning, his clothes became "bright."

They shone or glowed,

what Luke called "his glory."

Luke is also the only one to tell us that Elijah and Moses and Jesus were not just
there,

they were talking to Jesus,

and that conversation was about: Jesus' "own exodus,"

or departure, from this world.

They were talking about his death and showing him by their very presence that death
is not the end.

Death would not have the last word.

But given the presence of Moses, Luke's use of the word "exodus" echoes back to the
Exodus,

which was a journey of liberation.

I feel like in this time of prayer, Jesus was communing with his ancestors,

who were comforting and supporting him,

giving him strength for the journey to come.

His journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, through death, and beyond.

Then the disciples awoke to see Jesus glowing

and in that light they also saw who was talking to him.

In Luke's version this doesn't freak them out.

Perhaps because they were just coming awake,

in that state between sleeping and waking,

so that it almost seemed like a dream.

It was only when the cloud came over them,

interrupting Peter's stupid babbling about putting up tents for ghosts,

that they became terrified.

Then they heard the voice, naming Jesus as God's beloved son,

and ordering them to keep listening to him.

Some commentators note that in the Hebrew Bible God gives 10 imperative
commandments.

In the New Testament, God directly gives only one:

To listen to Jesus.
Given that command, it is not surprising that they then stay silent.
After all, you can't listen and talk at the same time.
So as I'm praying with this story,
I wonder what it has to say to me at this time.
This is a story of revelation, right?
Of epiphany.
What is it revealing to me?
The traditional reading, of course,
is that what was revealed up there on the mountain was Jesus' unique divinity;
that he was the only son of God.
But the text doesn't say that.
Sure, the divine voice from the cloud says, "this is my son,"
but it doesn't say this is my "only son."
That Jesus was God's son doesn't exclude anyone else, including Peter, John, and
James, including ourselves,
from also being children of God.
And yet, I do think that what this story revealed was a truth beneath the surface,
a truth within Jesus.
What came to me when praying with this story
was that this was a moment when, while praying himself,
Jesus was reminded of who he was,
in words that echoed back to his own baptism.
Celtic Christianity holds that Jesus was the one who remembered the truth of our own
divine nature,
and came to help us remember that truth in ourselves.
That we too are children of God.
Most religious traditions teach that there is a core essence to each of us,
a sacred light within that endures.
It may be covered up, unrecognizable, forgotten,
like a light bulb covered in mud.
Wash the mud away, though, and it shines bright.
This Self essence is called different things:
Imago Dei (the image of God), Buddha Nature, Atman in Hinduism,
Jung's True Self, or Richard Rohr's Immortal Diamond.
Some call it heart, some call it soul.
This core, authentic or true Self within each of us, is a well of deep compassion,
because it is directly plugged into the compassionate loving Source that is God.
And yet, we, each of us, manifests that light in our own unique ways.
God greatest desire for each of us is show up in all our uniqueness
and to shine our light in the world.
As the second century Christian teacher Irenaeus wrote:
"The glory of God is humanity fully alive."
Up there on that mountain,
I think Jesus was able to drop all the faces he showed to the world and stand in his
true Self.
To be a human fully alive, and in that to show his own inner divinity, the glory of
God.
His appearance changed, which is what "transfigured" means,
but his essence did not.

By contrast, the 3 disciples were not able in that moment to be in their true Selves,
signified by the cloud that overshadowed them,
hiding their light, hiding the light from them,
and they were afraid.
They still needed to learn, to remember.
to listen to Jesus, not so much about who he was,
but about who they were in their own unique essence.
To be like Jesus, in their hearts.
We have all experienced moments
of being in our self essence, our true selves.
Sometimes it feels like being in the Flow, in the Zone, engaged in activities we
experience as life-giving.
They could be moments when we feel at the height of our personal power,
when we claim our own voices, when we feel capable, expansive,
when we are the calm in the center of a storm.
Perhaps it is when we are doing work we feel is our true calling,
work that gives us purpose and meaning;
it could be times when we acted in ways that embodied the values, virtues, and
qualities of who we most long to be.
We have all experienced moments of being our truest, most compassionate connect
selves,
whether or not we recognized them as such at the time, or noticed the presence of
God in those moments.
We can look back and see them, remember.
We have also all had moments when we felt far from connected to our authentic, best
selves,
when we acted contrary to the human beings we want to be,
denying the compassionate better angels of our true natures.
Unfortunately, the past several weeks it has seemed that the US has forgotten that
as well.
As the story of the Transfiguration shows,
it takes one who remembers, who is able to stand in his best and truest Self in the
midst of all that is swirling around him,
conspiring to make him forget,
to show others the way.
I think we saw an example of that this past week as well.
We should listen,
because the world needs more people showing the glory of God like Jesus did,
people who are human beings most fully alive.
And so, I invite you into a meditation to connect,
even if for only a few moments,
to seei yourself, in the words of poet John O'Donohue,
"with the same delight, pride, and expectation with which God sees you in every
moment."
This meditation is an adaptation of one by Dr. Frank Rogers and will take several
minutes.
Find a comfortable position sitting or lying down.
You may wish to close your eyes, if that feels right to you.
Ground yourself by taking several deep breaths and easing into an inner quiet or

silence.

If it is helpful to you,
continue to ground yourself by settling into an internal space of peace, safety, and
gracious receptivity.

Now allow into your awareness a moment or moments in your life when you were fully
alive—

when you were engaged in meaningful work that was intrinsically satisfying,
or doing an activity that gives you joy and delight,
or embodying some quality particularly dear and important to you.

If several such moments come to you, allow one to emerge as the focus for this
meditation—

the one you feel most drawn to right now.

For a couple of minutes, imagine yourself engaged in this activity.

Simply observe yourself as if watching yourself in a movie.

If you notice judgment, criticism, or hesitation of some form,
ask those interior movements to relax so you can simply witness yourself engaged in
this life-giving activity.

[Quiet meditation]

Pay Attention to yourself in this activity and notice what you are wearing;
what you are doing; the gestures and posture of your body as you do it;
what you are feeling; the expression on your face.

[Quiet meditation continues]

While you continue to gaze upon yourself,
cultivate a deeper understanding of what this moment means for you.

Are their chronic fears you have that seem relaxed or that linger?

Are there longings that are being satisfied or that remain? A

re there any aching wounds that feel eased or that are still tender?

Are there gifts or capacities that are emboldened in you
and yearn to flourish more fully.

If you notice any of these,
extend toward yourself any loving connection or warm regard you might feel.

[quiet meditation continues]

Now invite the Sacred reality you know—

imagined as a healing light, a soothing breeze, a divine figure like Jesus, a felt
sense of peace—

to be with you in whatever way feels healing and life-giving. N

Notice how the sacred feels toward you while you are engaged in this activity—

the pride, the compassion, the delight, the sense of God saying,
“here’s my beloved child.”

[quiet meditation continues]

As you dwell in this compassionate connection,
notice any grace or new life you are experiencing in this practice
and embody that grace by breathing it into every cell of who you are.

[quiet meditation continues]

Before surfacing from this meditation, discern any invitation
of one simple and concrete way you might embody
the grace you are receiving from this practice in the hours and days ahead.

[quiet meditation continues]

Then gently allow yourself to reenter this space and open your eyes.

Notice how you are feeling.

Pay attention. Listen. Remember.
This is what it feels like to be in your true self.
Amen.

“Spirit of the Living God” – Sounds Like Reign
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En44FTqOifs>

SHARING GOD’S TABLE

One of the ways we remember who we are in our compassionate truest selves,
and who we are in God,
is through participation in Holy Communion.
Through this holy meal, we reconnect to the story of Jesus, the one who remembers.
As we eat and drink together,
we listen to Jesus with our whole bodies, not just our ears.
The Lord’s Table is a place
Where we remember what Jesus gave
His whole self,
and what God gave in return,
resurrection, new life.
We are called to be part of that same cycle
Of giving and receiving,
Offering our whole selves,
And this whole meal is nourishment,
what we need,
for that journey Jesus took before us.
This is a meal of love,
Love given, love received.
But it is your choice.
Come to this sacred table not because you must,
But because you may.
Come with an empty place,
Let it be filled with bread.
Come with an empty cup,
Let it be filled with good drink.
Come with an open heart,
And feel God’s love fill it.
Come just as you are
This is the Lord’s table
And it is spread for you and for me.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:
Lord,
Wherever we are,
in the valley, on the mountain,
no matter how deserted it seems,
we are not truly alone,
because you are with us..
Bless this bread and this cup
May they be vibrant with your grace

Nourishing what is deepest in us.
And through this holy meal
May we come to know
that wherever we are
In Real Life, in Second Life,
We are connected to each other
Through our faith in you,
And that in and through this community,
we may find that your love
Is as real and tangible
As this bread and drink
We share.
Amen.

Now take the bread.
Feel it in your hand.
And let us remember another time, and another table,
when Jesus gathered in a upper room with his disciples,
his closest friends.
When he took the bread on the table for the evening meal, blessed it, broke it, and
shared it saying "This is my body, given for you. Take. Eat. And remember me."

Let us eat this bread of life together.
(pause to eat)

Now pick up your cup of drink,
Because at the end of the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine, the juice of the vine,
And said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, a new relationship in my blood.
Drink, and as often as you drink, remember me."

Let us drink this cup of blessing together.
(pause to drink)

Let us pray.
Lord of all our life,
We give thanks that you have welcomed us
To your table.
As we have been given healing and hope and nourishment
At this table,
May we share it with others,
Each of our offerings coming together
Until all are fed.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

And now,
Our worship is over,
but our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting.

Go in peace, come again in hope.

And now, may we all dance before God in our truest, most authentic selves.
That is the glory of God in us.

Amen.

“This is Me” – The Greatest Showman

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

GO IN PEACE