

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 Second Life is  
a church with full real life standing in the  
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](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 March we enter the season of Lent.  
Today is the Second Sunday of Lent.  
And the United Church of Christ has made available a resource for us in a Lent  
resource filled with spiritual substance to meet us where we are.

Amid a news cycle filled with stories that can cause overwhelm and disorientation,  
this season of lent we are invited to download this free 40 day lent Journey guide.

Link: <https://jointhemovementucc.org/jtm-resources/lent-2025/>

I will also share this link and information in our social media circles.

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.

Thank you for inviting us this lent season to reflect and discern what gives us light and hope. Amen.

Invitation to reflect:

As we move into our gathering music I invite you to reflect on the following questions:

What kind of justice work have you been committed to in the past?

What drew you to it?

What might that teach you about what struggles are calling you in this moment?

#### GATHERING MUSIC

Micah Tyler - God Did It (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG6HTCYTpU>

#### SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the Gospel of Luke 13:31-35 (The Message)

Just then some Pharisees came up and said, "Run for your life! Herod's on the hunt. He's out to kill you!

Jesus said, "Tell that fox that I've no time for him right now. Today and tomorrow I'm busy clearing out the demons and healing the sick; the third day I'm wrapping things up.

Besides, it's not proper for a prophet to come to a bad end outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killer of prophets, abuser of the messengers of God!

How often I've longed to gather your children, gather your children like a hen, Her brood sea under her wings- but you refused and turned away!

And now it's too late: You won't see me again until the day you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of God.'"

The Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks be to God

Not afraid -

The phrase that stood out right off the bat from the scriptures we just heard was “Tell that fox!”

It caught my attention.

I am an artist by trade and I love to do illustrations and draw characters. Today’s text sparked my imagination.

The first question I had was why did he call him a fox?  
And who is his Herod guy who the Pharisees are talking about?

Allow me to present some important information: Herod Antipas, the king of Judea, is a significant historical figure who governed Galilee during the era of Jesus. He succeeded his father, Herod the Great, and is infamously remembered for ordering the beheading of John the Baptist.

Herod's reign was marked by his tyrannical nature; he was often characterized by a self-righteous demeanor and a propensity for swift, violent reactions to any perceived threats to his authority.

Which then led me to question what insights can we gather regarding the essence of the fox?

For starters they belong to the canidae family, foxes exhibit a diverse diet that includes both animal and plant matter.

This adaptability makes them highly versatile creatures and effective scavengers in various environments.

Often overlooked, foxes skillfully leverage their unique strengths, showcasing a remarkable ability to hunt.

At the core of their identity lies a combination of cunning, resourcefulness, and intelligence, traits that define their behavior and survival strategies in the wild. So perhaps Jesus was saying, “Tell that clever, resourceful, tyrant, who is self-righteous, that I’m not afraid of him! I still have much to do.”

What do you think?

And here is another question, why did the Pharisees who did not like Jesus warn him about Herod?

What motivated the Pharisees, who were clearly opposed to Jesus, to inform him that Herod was seeking to take his life?

It’s worth noting that Herod had previously executed his cousin, a man who had challenged him and made him uneasy with his fervent messages about repentance and embracing a transformative lifestyle.

It’s likely that Jesus understood the implications of this warning; he was probably seen as a figure similar to John the Baptist, someone who was unwelcome and viewed with disdain, a true ‘persona non grata’ (Latin for an unwelcome person), in the eyes of those in power.

In these scriptures we see Jesus detailing his tour of Galilee.

He was like, I got a couple of healing appointments scheduled for tomorrow with a

couple of demons here and there I have to go see and send on their way. The next day following that is a pretty full schedule as well so not till the third day will I probably be on my way.

Jesus finds himself inundated with commitments, his schedule overflowing with appointments, while those around him urge him to flee for his safety, warning that his life is in jeopardy. However, he remains resolute, understanding that his mission is far from complete.

By suggesting that the fox can wait, he subtly acknowledges the ongoing conversations among his adversaries, signaling that he is not oblivious to their schemes.

Moreover, he boldly asserts his stance on civil disobedience, unafraid to confront the authority of the king.

He articulates his awareness of the hostile environment surrounding him, recognizing the nation as one that is not only unwelcoming but also marked by a history of violence and oppression.

He remarks that it is inappropriate for a prophet to meet a tragic fate away from Jerusalem, lamenting, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, slayer of prophets, tormentor of God's messengers!" Throughout history, numerous individuals, including John the Baptist, have met their demise in Jerusalem while delivering God's message, with many more to follow after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of those who construct elaborate tombs for the very prophets they have slain. It is believed that six prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and Amos—fell victim to their violence.

In Luke 11:47-51, Jesus says, "Woe to you! For you built the tombs of the prophets and your fathers killed them. Truly you bear witness that you approve of your fathers, for they killed them, and you built their tombs."

And now here they are telling Jesus, run because you are next!

Now Jesus does take the advice of the Pharisees and leaves.

And he does not return again until his re-entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. (Luke 19:28-40)

I would like to emphasize the importance of discerning when to take action and when to hold firm in our beliefs and seek safety.

In today's rapidly changing landscape, it is crucial for my younger friends and our community to engage in thoughtful reflection, prayer, and contemplation to navigate the complexities of this new world.

The perspective shifts dramatically when we consume media, witness news reports, or hear political candidates on social media or witness in legislative discussions speaking disparagingly about transgender individuals.

This shift in viewpoint becomes even more pronounced when we consider the implications of mass deportations, where a family member could be forcibly returned to their country of origin due to a lack of proper documentation or even by mere chance.

Such events are not just hypothetical; they have occurred. The discussions we hold in private reveal a stark reality: there remains a significant amount of work to be done, yet we find ourselves overshadowed by fear and the looming specter of despair. And yet, one can not regardless of challenges in our lives let despair win. Despair is not an option.

A significant realization that has emerged among my friends is the reality of what we have lived and survived. Many of us know what it means to live in secrecy, to navigate life in the shadows, and to express our true selves only in the company of a select few we trusted.

This has led us to ponder along with our young friends a crucial question: what should we do now? Should we retreat back into the closet, a phrase that encapsulates the act of concealing our genuine identities?

The answer is complex and layered. On one hand, there is a temptation to say yes, to seek safety in silence; yet, on the other hand, the call to resist, to persist, and to forge ahead is equally compelling.

Ultimately, the decision rests with each individual, as the truth is personal and multifaceted. What remains clear is that we must continue to live, to exist, and to progress. The challenge lies in how we choose to navigate this journey, a consideration that demands our full attention and commitment.

I find solace in knowing that the United Church of Christ community of members, and pastors remain a force powerful enough to stand with those in the margins. Including and not limited to suing and joining lawsuits.

In October 2024, Oklahoma families, teachers, and faith leaders, including the United Church of Christ, filed a lawsuit against Superintendent Ryan Walters to block his Bible-education mandate, arguing it violates the separation of church and state.

Why will we not want that as Christians?

As Christians, we should recognize the importance of inclusivity in education. Our neighbors—Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and those who choose not to follow any faith—deserve the opportunity to learn in an environment free from concepts like sin, hell, and exclusive paths to God. Embracing this perspective fosters understanding and respect among diverse beliefs.

Most recently the United Church of Christ joined 27 church religious groups that filed a lawsuit challenging the government's actions. The lawsuit, Mennonite Church USA et al. v. United States Department of Homeland Security et al., was Filed on February 11 in the federal district court in

Washington, D.C., the lawsuit brings together a diverse coalition of Christian and Jewish denominations, along with various regional organizations.

Kelsi Corkran, the lead attorney representing the plaintiffs from the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection, emphasized that these groups are united by their religious teachings and traditions, which compel them to welcome and support refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, regardless of their legal status.

The fear of arrest has led individuals to avoid medical appointments and places of worship, resulting in a profound violation of sacred spaces and community bonds.

You can read more about this following this link:

<https://www.ucc.org/27-religious-groups-including-ucc-conference-file-lawsuit-challenging-ice-action-in-churches/>

The gospels urge us, my friends, to take action, to engage, and to make a difference.

Martin Luther King Jr. encountered a similar challenge during the civil rights movement, fully aware that many spaces were unwelcoming to him and Black people in general.

Yet, they chose to confront this adversity head-on, employing their physical presence as a form of civil disobedience to demand change.

However, not everyone took to the streets.

Some individuals opted for a more behind-the-scenes approach, making strategic calls, drafting letters, and meticulously planning the movements that would drive their cause forward.

In the insightful book “Where Do We Go from Here? Chaos or Community,” co-authored by Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, the importance of both organizing and taking decisive action is thoroughly examined, highlighting the various ways individuals can contribute to a larger movement.

For example, it says, “When a people are mired in oppression, they realize deliverance when they have accumulated the power to enforce change.”

It continues, “People struggling from the depths of society have not been equipped with the knowledge of the science of social change. Only when they break out of the fog of self denigration can they discover the forms of action that influence events.”

One must be willing to stand from whatever it is friends that hold us down.

Jesus could have run and then hide knowing his life was in danger.

Martin Luther King Jr, could have taken a step back knowing his life was in danger and taken a more behind the scene approach.

Every person bears their own struggles and feelings, frequently concealed from others.

Is the fear of tomorrow taking its toll?

Will I have a job?

Will I have food?

Will I have my medicines?  
Will I be safe?

During times of distress, finding a spark of hope can seem nearly impossible, underscoring the importance of building community.

By connecting with others and sharing our experiences, we can gain new insights and creative solutions and it can lead to fresh perspectives and innovative solutions, helping us tackle our challenges with renewed optimism.

Friends, the gospels gives us sense of hope, recounting the narratives of Jesus' life and ministry.

They inspire transformation, encourage our prayers, and prompt us to consider acts of kindness.

Ultimately, these texts resonate deeply when we uncover a kernel of truth, faith, or belief within them.

While empires may rise and fall, the unwavering love of God and the assurance that we are not alone in our struggles provide us with strength.

We may falter and traverse our own wilderness, especially during Lent, a time that brings the shadows of mortality into focus.

Yet, we must hold onto the promise that on the third day, Jesus will rise.

Life is inherently challenging, and attending church or reading scripture does not exempt us from difficulties.

This notion is misleading, as life is a continuous journey of change and circumstance.

What truly matters is that, no matter how unpredictable life becomes, we cling to the undeniable truth that sustains us.

Jesus could have likened himself to a more cunning creature than the fox, yet he chose to identify with the hen, emphasizing his role in nurturing and uniting the vulnerable.

In a society fixated on dominance, he aimed to convey a message of warmth, compassion, and protection.

Fully aware of the impending challenges from the empire, Jesus remained focused on fulfilling his mission before his time came to an end.

When faced with violence from Jerusalem, which silenced those wishing to share God's kingdom, he responded with love, healing, and a call for liberation, all while mourning the past.

It's important to recognize that foxes, often seen as clever and in control, are constantly on the hunt or being hunted.

In contrast, the hen embodies protection, gathering her chicks and ensuring their safety for another day.

We can't change the circumstances around them but we can choose how we respond and in what way we act.

May it be in the background with caution and yet with unwavering commitment to the cause of liberation for all.

May it be in the foreground marching, calling things out publicly or a combination of both while saying, "Tell that fox, I have much to do and I'm not afraid."

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.

RHETT WALKER - Goodness of God: Official Lyric Video  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHG6Ak5Jqkc&t=2s>

#### 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 -

And let joy ring out from us.  
In memory of all we and our ancestors have endured—even still, we remain.  
We're still here, breathing freely.  
Remaining not despite our story but because of it.  
And for this we celebrate.  
We exhale.  
This is sacred air.  
This is holy ground.  
Amen.

Black Liturgies - 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.

Now lets dance!

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Alicia Keys - Love Looks Better (Official Video)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4jeFyo\\_NG8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4jeFyo_NG8)