

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.

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.

Today is May the 4th!
For those who don't know I am a major Star Wars geek so I feel like today is my day!

So May the 4th be with you!
May the Force be with you!

Today is also the first of the month so we will be sharing in Holy Communion.
I invite you to gather the elements for after the Message of Hope to share together
in our sacred time of remembering Christ in the breaking of bread.

I invite you to gather something to eat, such as bread, a cracker, or a cookie.

As well as a cup of grape juice or wine to drink after we pray over the elements remembering our savior Jesus Christ with the ritual of Holy Communion. You do not have to be a member of this church or any church to join us in this sacred moment.

This May is also known as the spring month where in the northern hemisphere there are blooming flowers and the beginning of summer!

I love the Summer not only because that is when my non-profit Color Splash Out goes full bloom connecting with young people out of school creating safe and brave spaces but because things are coming up alive again after a winter.

May is also known for observing Memorial day, and Mothers day.

This May, I have an exciting idea for our church community: let's take a trip to the movies!

I want to invite you to join me in a special series that explores the intersection of cinema and our faith.

Together, we'll delve into select movies that resonate with our sacred texts, theologians (people who write about God) and illustrate the concept of the Holy Trinity, sparking meaningful conversations and reflections on how these themes manifest on the big screen.

While we may not be able to watch every film together or attend full screenings, you can definitely take the opportunity to prepare at home by re-watching or discovering a movie that we will be discussing.

I will announce the selected film a week in advance or share it on social media, so you can think about it, maybe even formulate a question, theme or idea you want me to explore in my sermon.

We will continue with our service, incorporating some clips during the sermon, and I warmly invite you to join in.

As we listen to the next song, I encourage you to share your favorite movies with me.

You can send me a private message or think it over and let me know later.

Perhaps titles like Casablanca, To Kill a Mockingbird, Dead Poets Society, or Mrs. Doubtfire comes to mind.

While I may not have seen them all yet, I plan to!

I'll pray for your suggestions and allow the spirit to guide my reflections, as we connect through media, each other, and our faith in the context of film.

Let the fun begin!

GATHERING SONG

Urban Rescue - Kaleidoscope (Official Lyric Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReOkNQHodKk>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the gospel book of Matthew 22:34-40 NRSV

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert in law, asked him a question to test him.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You should love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

This is the greatest and 1st commandment.
And the 2nd one is like it: 'You should love your neighbor as yourself' on these two commandments hang all the law of the prophets.

The Word of God for the people of God,
Thanks be to God

PRAYER -

Would you pray with me?

Holy-One-of-those-in-the-margins, be with us today as we explore your scriptures together. Nudge at our minds.

May we find a connection as you lead us to think, dig, and feel a bit deeper.

And may my words be beneficial to someone today.

May they be molded like clay in your hands.

May all glory and honor be yours today and always.

Amen

SERMON - Love really?

Today's lesson is rather simple, love deep.

If you think about it, there are tons of movies on the subject of love.

Let me read to you the gospel again the Yadi translation of my understanding.

"When the Pharisees who are the experts in the law heard the chisme' the arrogant carpenter's son had once again been rude and made the sadducees who are also experts in the law (but probably not as much as they are) be silenced by him...

They were upset.

So they plotted and one of them, the brave legal mind said, "I got this.." and went to question Jesus to test him.

He said, teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?

(The law people all around said, good one!)

Let's see how good he knows the law of Moses!

Jesus (probably cleared his throat to make sure they heard him)

L O V E.

Love God with everything you got.

Everything.

Your HEART and everything your heart desires.

Your MIND.

Ask questions, test it see how real it is we are not offended.

Love your God with all your SOUL.

All of your being, your molecules, dna, all of who you are.

And the second command is just about the same.

L O V E

Love your neighbor, your compadre, your hommie, your hermano (brother), hermana (sister), hermane (nonbinary siblings), as yourself.

Your neighbor is also the annoying person you can't stand, your boss, or the enemy you just absolutely dislike...that one too."

Jesus finished with "the Law, the prophets, are all standing on these."

Love is complex.

Love is complicated, confusing, empowering, demanding, absolutely nuts, unexplainable at times.

Love is beautiful.

It is magical.

It is a kaleidoscope of feelings just as complex and amazing as the colors the light shines through.

Love can move you to act.

Love can have you down one minute and up feeling alive and full of energy the next.

Complex, love is.

Love is a mix of unexplainable human emotions.

So it is a great theme with lots of genres not only relatable but also commercially viable.

In the United States, the abundance of television channels offers viewers a wide array of choices.

So if you want to feel all lovey, good and emotional in a good way turn to the Hallmark channel.

But if you want to get complex, and deep into the challenges of love, turn to the lifetime channel.

Love is as beautiful as some Disney movies. Some.

And as controlling and unhealthy as the love story of Harlem Quin and the Joker.

And as complex with a trajectory of beauty to evil as the love story of Anakin and Padme in Star Wars.

We could build an entire series exploring these characters.
Every story and character brings with them a set of beliefs, actions and reactions.

I believe that is the case with the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
Because I do believe that they love God.
Perhaps their love started as innocent as a Disney cartoon "some cartoons".
It became controlling and fear based with some unhealthy characteristics like Harlem Quinn and the Joker.

Love for some might push them into the shadows like Anakin Skywalker willing to do everything in his power to keep it from evolving beyond what he could control.

Think of Nicodemus as a character who realized they were not traveling on the right path and pivoted to seek Jesus' counsel at night time.
What if he was wrong about this guy being someone greater than a prophet?

Perhaps to experts of the law, the Sadducees and the Pharisees who control the Jewish community and had an "understanding" with the Romans could not possibly have people going rouge for fear of death or imprisonment.

Perhaps it was too good of a power to let it be a tool that can be wielded around beyond the elite and their understanding of accessing favor.

After all, think about what it took for them to be called experts of the law.
It took a lifetime of dedication.
It was like seminary but unlike me that started on a Masters or graduate level they were studying this all of their lives.

They started learning the Torah when they were very young and then kept going into adulthood making it their life's work.

I asked a group of teens during a Sunday class, who they believe these experts of the law, the Torah, back then would represent in today's society.

One of them said they were as powerful as the supreme court justice.
In the United States we have a supreme court that is the ultimate place of legal decisions.
That is how this one teen saw the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

I had to think about that.

Who would YOU church say in today's world the Pharisees and the Sadducees might represent?

So let's break it down to who they were.

The Pharisees taught in the synagogue, and were revered by the Jewish people who would come to listen and learn from them. They were believed to be upper middle class.

The Sadducees were the upper class, wealthy men who worked in the temple. Like the priesthood.

It left me pondering, were they as big as what we consider the Supreme Justice in the United States?

I mean when you think of the Supreme Court justice you're thinking of the law of the nation and in those days that was the Romans. So maybe not.

The Romans allowed the Jewish people to "THINK" they were in charge but in reality they could crush them and swap them out.

Perhaps that was the whole point of the Pharisees and Sadducees when they would see or hear about Jesus' ministry.

Jesus kept creating so many problems for them. Jesus challenged the people to think by asking them questions and talking in parables. His entire ministry was shaking people out of their slumber.

See, people wanted to believe that Jesus was rising in power like some revolutionary. A savior for the little people, the underdog that would stand against the Roman empire.

Those in power that wanted to remain in power could not have Jesus calling unwanted attention to them. So, it was time to silence him and discredit him. By asking Jesus this question about the law they were hoping he would stumble and look like a fool.

Silly rabbits!
Had they not learned by now that he keeps outsmarting them?

Oh but they were the experts of the law!
They knew the 10 commandments, the law of Moses, the way things were done.

In the scriptures in this particular chapter 22 of Matthew there are different ways that Jesus talks about the kingdom of God.

Matthew Chapter 22: 1- 11 is the Parable of the wedding banquet. Then from the 15-22, it is about paying taxes.

Moving on from verses 23-33, it is about the resurrection and whose wife belongs to who in heaven.

I mentioned these verses because in each of these, Jesus is being questioned, and tested.

But perhaps these questions can also be seen as someone who wanted some type of parameters, some clarity.

People on the spectrum which is a term we used to describe someone who has a wide range of diverse array of characteristics, needs, and abilities, often referred to as neurodiverse needs and abilities such as people with Autism to name a few.

People on the spectrum think differently sometimes to deep, complex, and expansive for mere mortals.

Some of our teens that I walk alongside calls it “nero-sypicy”.

I have a youngling who is on the spectrum who often struggles with authority. He sometimes appears to challenge instructions, shows reluctance to complete tasks, expresses frustration when given assignments, responds back to his teachers, and finds it difficult to remain still and attentive.

As a Mexican parent being raised by the way of the “chancla” and other ways of “respect your elders type of thing”, I had to learn new ways to engage my youngling.

When he was tested and I realized what was going on I had to change my way of thinking, pray for understanding, read, research and find ways to engage him.

After receiving a note from his teacher that he had argued with her in front of the class causing chaos I was ready to ground him till next year.

But I remember the notices, the things I had been reading and after many breathing exercises I asked him what happened?

He said, “Well, the teacher lied. She said we were not having homework and then she gave us homework.”

I explained to him that teachers are allowed to change their minds and he should have addressed this in private not in front of the class.

His respond was, “Well, she lied to the whole class so I had to address it with the whole class she did not lie to me in private.”

I did not let him known but I felt like he had just won this round.

Although, I did not ground him till the following year I did have to address disrespect.

And so I could not help to think is this what happen with the law people?

I mean who knew back then if people were on the spectrum?

What if they were really trying to get some guidelines?

I need to know where the line is so I don't cross it.
Or in this case, they wanted JESUS to know where the line was that he kept blurring.

Seeing Jesus inviting them and inviting us to look beyond the rules, guidelines and parameters was not how things were or are done.

I believe that Jesus did not do this to muddy the waters and create chaos but to challenge the way these laws were being used or put in place.

What are the rules for?
Are these in place to protect the people?

Why is there a Human Resources department at jobs?
Why do we have a committee on ministry overseeing clergy appointments and ordination?

Why do we have to take boundary classes as clergy?
Guidelines and laws are not a problem if they are applied across the board to all.

The way the law was being used and has been used to benefit the wealthy and hurt the one with no resources to stand on, is the problem.

See Jesus was asking them and us to look beyond into the base of all things, the heart.

If one loves God with all their heart, then all the matters of the heart go through God.

Let me break it down.

Is what I am about to do okay with my Holy-Father-Mother-Spirit-Parent-One?
Where does the need to do this come from?
Does it measure up in fairness?
Am I using certain rules or guidelines for my benefit and to crush someone?

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the experts.
They were the law.
Perhaps they were what we know on our side of the world as the "good ol' boys club."
Perhaps, not all of them.

Perhaps, they did aspire to be good followers of God.
Perhaps, not all of them were on a power trip.
But here we are seeing one using knowledge and power to try to embarrass someone he considers less.

I once read on social media a post that said, "it doesn't matter how many academic degrees you have, but how you treat others."

Have you ever experienced someone trying to show off their knowledge?

I'm more educated than you so I know best.
Have you ever seen how people can talk down to others?

In particular the way our neurodiverse siblings are often treated.
I know some who are brilliant, with a beautiful mind who are often disregarded.
Introverts who are often passed for leadership roles.

The way of Jesus was to bring attention to all these things that make no sense when you see them through the lens of the Holy-One.

Jesus levels the field and says all should be treated with respect, dignity, and equity. All.

Jesus gets this law of Moses, and infuses it with love.

To love your God with all your soul means that all you do is measured upon the one you love.
To love your God with all your mind does not mean you put it away when you get to church and follow someone blindly.
Cults, false prophets, and those wolves dressed in sheep clothing thrive in leaving your mind at the door.

To love your God with all your mind means you're always measuring what is said and done with God's love for humanity, BUT also for you.

And then there is the complex part of loving yourself.
We don't always love one-self.
But Jesus is inviting you to look at yourself through his eyes and invite the Holy-Spirit to touch you and move you to love yourself deeply as THEY love you.

The greatest commandment invites us to see beyond laws and dogmas and to see love unfiltered.
It seems simple when you read it at first glance.
Love God. Love yourself and love your neighbor.
Simple.

Beloved, God's love for you demands that YOU are treated with respect, dignity, and equity.
God demands it of the world around you.
You're that important and that amazing to God.

And when you believe that.
And when the world around us believes that, only then can we all make sense of this.
Only then can we honor and treat each other with the same devotion and love we give to the one who loved us first.

So beloved may you trust that love is yours unconditionally and it can not be measured, categorized, or boxed but it can be shared.

The greatest commandment is love, really?

Really.

Peace be with you. Amen

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

We have now come to the time to share in Holy Communion together and I invite you gather your elements.
Place them before you and let us take a moment to take a deep breath as we remember.

On the night Jesus was betrayed he shared a meal with his friends, his followers the people he called family.

At a simple table Jesus gathered with friends, he remembered the liberating story of the Passover,
shared the bread, passed the cup, and asked us to do the same, and remember -
remember God's liberating work in the world - work embodied in Jesus.
We remember how the greatest gift he gave to us was very life.

This table is open to all who seek nourishment for the soul.
Join together in this holy communion
not because you must, but because you may
not because you are full
but because in your emptiness you are in need of God's mercy and assurance
come just as you are
It is the Lord's table
And it is spread for you.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:
God of liberation, with this bread we remember.

Let us pray
Come Holy Spirit upon these gifts of grape and grain.
Make them before us the life and love of Jesus, that we may
become the life and love of Jesus, for the world.

In Real Life, in Second Life,
We are connected to each other
Through our faith in you,
In and through this community,
we may find that your love
Is as real and tangible
As this bread and cup
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.

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.

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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGYDcwoog1k>

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 -

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Before we go if you think of a movie you want to explore send me a message.

Let's have some fun exploring movies, culture, and the beauty that can be found withing our faith.

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

Let's dance!

And remember you can always call on me or message me.

Starley - Call On Me (Ryan Riback Remix)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-VsisgVkJw>