

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).

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.

Our service will be in voice and text.  
A copy of our services today, our bulletin or worship guide can be found inside that  
red book located in the back.  
The 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.

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 donation bowl located in the back next  
to the red book or 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.

Today is the Seventh Sunday after Easter and it is also the first of the month so we  
will be partaking 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.

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.

Today is also the start of Pride Month.

I will like to share a message by our United Church of Christ President, Rev. Dr.

Karen Georgia Thompson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ8Lio1izwQ>

Amen

#### GATHERING MUSIC

TobyMac - Feelin' So Fly

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjI4Xh6m-cI&list=RDjjI4Xh6m-cI&start\\_radio=1&rv=jjI4Xh6m-cI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjI4Xh6m-cI&list=RDjjI4Xh6m-cI&start_radio=1&rv=jjI4Xh6m-cI)

#### SERMON AND SCRIPTURE

Gospel

Luke 24

Then Jesus completely opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "This is what is written - the one who was anointed by God as the Christ suffered and then rose from death on the third day, and repentance for the liberation from sin was proclaimed in his name into all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You all are Witnesses for this Christ.

And behold, I send the promise of my Father to you; but, sit here in the city until you may be clothed with power from on high."

Then Jesus led the disciples out as far as the town of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.

While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them.

And they, worshipping him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

P: The Gospel of the Lord!

C: Praise to you, O Christ

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Blessed Ascension Day!

I am happy to be here with you today as we come to the end of the season of Easter. When my rl Pastor asked if I interested in preaching today, I said yes right away.

THEN I asked what the scripture was...

I checked the liturgical calendar and saw it was Ascension Day, and said, oops! Pastor said, yes, Ascension Day, and he said I could use some of my flying experience, up, up, and away!

And that song by the Fifth Dimension has been playing over and over in my head. (I know I am dating myself...)

What is Ascension Day?

Ascension Day falls on the 40th day of Easter, which was last Thursday, but we, like many churches, celebrate it on the Seventh Sunday of Easter.

Google tells us that this Christian holiday marks the end of Jesus' earthly life among us and his temporary ascension into heaven, where he is given power at the right hand of God.

It highlights Jesus' ongoing presence with believers through the Holy Spirit and through word and sacrament and gathering together as his church.

Ok, that's all well and good, but what does it mean?

I found a lot of articles that focused on the question of where is Jesus, and what is he doing?

That is a theological question that doesn't do much for my understanding.

The Ascension of Jesus is also the subject of a lot of art showing Jesus in the sky and moving away from those around him.

If you look up this reading in Luke, you will see:

While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

The part of Jesus being carried into heaven is not in some ancient manuscripts, and it was not in today's reading either.

I like it better that way.

I don't want a Jesus who is far away, detached, done with us.

My faith says Jesus is always with us.

It doesn't bother me if I cannot see him.

So now, what can we learn from this lesson?

I mentioned flying earlier.

You may or may not know that I am a pilot.

When flying, yes, you are ascending or climbing into the sky, but in today's context I want to look at it in a different way.

Let's look at flying not as ascending, but as learning.

You start flying with an instructor.

You learn the basics, how to climb, how to descend, how to turn.

You learn how to takeoff and land.

You learn how to keep an eye out for traffic, other aircraft around you.

One of the steppingstones to getting your license is your first solo.

This is the first time you take the airplane up all by yourself.

For me, the flight began like many others.

When was this?

My instructor and I took off from Westchester Airport, about an hour north of New York City and headed to Stewart Airport, about 30 minutes away.

I would need to check my logbook but I assume we did a few takeoffs and landings, also known as touch-and-goes, after we got there. Touch-and-goes combine many elements of flying in a short period of time so they are an essential part of training.

After that we landed and taxied to a parking area.

My instructor, who also happened to be my father, got out and told me to go do three takeoffs and landings, and then come back and pick him up.

And suddenly it was just me and the airplane.

Ok, here we go.  
Start the engine, call the tower, taxi to the runway.

Take off, the plane climbs so much better without the instructor's weight!  
Climb to pattern altitude, turn left 90 degrees for the crosswind leg, then left again to downwind, paralleling the runway.

Maintain speed and altitude.  
Call the tower, continue downwind. Abeam the end of the runway, turn base, start descending and slowing down.

Turn left again to final, lining up with the runway.  
Cleared to land.  
Here we go. Land on the runway, try to make it look graceful, then after a few seconds apply power and take off.

Back around like before but this time the tower asked me to do a 360 degree turn to provide spacing between me and a corporate jet that was also training.

My father told me later he was trying to remember if he taught me how to do that! (He did.)  
Land again. Take off again. Back around the pattern and land one more time.  
Taxi over to pick up my father and head back to Westchester Airport.

My first solo, all by myself!

There was no one else physically there.  
But many a pilot has said they can still hear their instructor even years later.  
Too fast, too slow, watch your altitude, drifting left, come right, good job.

Back to Ascension Day

The day of Jesus' ascension was a pivotal time for the disciples.

They had spent three years with Jesus, listening to him, arguing with him, learning from him.  
Here are a few events I remember off the top of my head.

The Wedding at Cana, Jesus' first miracle  
Feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and some fish  
Scolding the Jewish leaders when they tried to trick him  
Healing the lepers, the blind man, the man lowered through the roof by his friends  
Raising Lazarus from the dead  
Healing Simon's mother-in-law  
Teaching, teaching, teaching

And then,  
The triumphant entry into Jerusalem  
Then the Trial, Crucifixion, Burial

The disciples had had a wonderful time traveling with Jesus, learning from him,  
enjoying being with him.  
And then he was gone.  
Jesus' death took them by surprise.

They were disappointed, sad, discouraged, fearful  
They couldn't imagine a time when Jesus wouldn't be there with them.

How could this happen?  
Was he just a man after all?  
Could they be next?

And then Resurrection  
Jesus was back, just as he said he would be.  
It shouldn't have been a surprise, after all Jesus told them several times what  
would happen.  
Pastor Pam, the first seminary intern at my rl church, referred to them as the  
DUHciples.  
Personally, I can relate.

Jesus started appearing to them  
Mary at the tomb, Jesus met her, called her by name  
On the road to Emmaus, Jesus met the two travelers, taught them, sat down to eat  
with them  
Peter and several other disciples went fishing. Jesus met them and told them where  
to fish  
The disciples hiding in the upper room, afraid, Jesus met them there  
Jesus met them there a week later and showed Thomas his scars

These are some of the events in the first days after the Resurrection.

Beforehand they had seen miracles and healing but now, they had seen something  
bigger. Jesus rising from the dead.  
This was BIG!

Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures and continued teaching them.  
Beforehand they often just didn't get it. Now they did.  
Jesus was with them again.

After my first solo, training continued of course.  
I flew solo to practice what I learned  
I flew with an instructor to refine what I learned and learn more.

I also flew farther, dual and solo, going to different airports,  
I learned and practiced different maneuvers, different types of takeoffs and landings.

My longest flight was solo from Westchester to Albany NY to Binghamton NY, then back to Westchester.  
Several hours of flying.

I originally planned to go from Westchester to Bridgeport CT on the Long Island Sound to Albany and back,  
however when reviewing the weather forecast the night before it looked like there would be fog along the route with low visibilities,  
so I replanned the flight and went over the new plan with my instructor.

Learning to adapt, learning decision-making

On that flight I had also planned to fly at 7500 feet to get experience flying higher than I had before, but as my flight progressed, the scattered clouds below me started becoming more numerous, making the ground hard to see.  
I had read stories of non-instrument-rated pilots getting trapped above the clouds. Some managed to get back down safely  
Some, however, did not.  
I didn't want to be that guy.  
So I picked a hole and descended under the clouds and flew the rest of the flight at 3500 feet.

More learning and adapting. And fun as well!

Not much later I took my flight test with an examiner.  
This is like the road test you took for your driver's license.

I passed my flight test and was no longer a student pilot, I had earned my private pilot certificate.

It was a license to fly, but it was also a license to learn.  
A good pilot never stops learning.  
We never stop being students, right?

As an aside, I remember my driving teacher telling me I needed to get my license and then learn to drive.  
In other words, learn by doing, get experience.

That is the thing, instructors can only do so much.  
Eventually you are on your own  
Butt you are always learning.

Jesus was with the disciples for 40 more days.  
I always wonder what those days were like?  
Oh to be a fly on the wall!

But eventually it was time for Jesus to go.  
It was time for the disciples to fly on their own, to continue Jesus' ministry without him.  
In the words of Pastor Owen, my rl church's second seminary intern,  
it was time for the disciples to put on their big-boy pants and get to work!

Was it easy?  
Probably not.  
Could they deal with anything that came their way?  
Definitely not.  
Were they ready? Yes.  
And I am sure they often heard Jesus whispering in their ear.

The disciples had three years with Jesus.  
Then they had another 40 days with eyes and minds opened.  
Jesus took a bunch of ordinary folks and equipped them to spread his message and continue his ministry.

Ordinary folks, just like you and me.

How about you and your ministry?  
Are you discouraged by setbacks? Learn from them.  
Are you joyful at your successes? Be encouraged by them, learn from them also.  
Each lesson gives you something more for your ministry toolbox.  
Jesus equips us as he equipped the disciples.

Don't think you have a ministry? Think again, you might be surprised.

#### 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.

Colton Dixon - Made To Fly [Official Lyric Video]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCHQOMrZzMo>

#### COMMUNITY PRAYER

God only knows what you've been through and what you are going through.  
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 heart

#### 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

Let's dance!  
Lenny Kravitz - Fly Away (Official Music Video)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvuL5jyCH0w>

Go in Peace,

Amen.