

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.

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.

I am so glad to be back among you my siblings.
Thankful for the prayers.
I returned from my Kansas trip doing a workshop for the Open and Affirming Coalition
of the United Church of Christ not feeling so well.

I am grateful for Doug and Pastor Jamie covering as well as Pastor Chris for their
prayers, and support during this busy season.
Will you join me in prayer?

INVOCATION -

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill this space and our community with your divine presence.

Touch our hearts, minds, and souls so that we may experience your love and light in our darkest moments.

May your comfort be with those afflicted by health, financial, mental, stress, or other challenges that you are fully aware of.

May we find a wind of hope, and joy as we gather today.

Thank you for bringing us together and for this space touching, changing, and connecting others through the waves and miracle of technology.

I pray in the name of the one who calls us, children of the most high.

Amen

GATHERING MUSIC

Kendrick Lamar & Kirk Franklin - God Still Loves You

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly-Dihi_v24

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the Gospel of Luke 10:1-12 NRSV

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves.

Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'

And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you.

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid.

Do not move about from house to house.

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'

I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

The Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks be to God

Sermon - Shake it off -

We begin today's reading with the phrase, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others." This prompts an intriguing question: after what exactly?

The answer lies in the prior appointment of the twelve disciples. Following this significant moment, Jesus broadens his ministry by sending out seventy-two followers to prepare the way for him.

This chapter unfolds way before his crucifixion, highlighting a pivotal time in his ministry.

This is important because we know he appointed twelve people right?

The twelve disciples who were with him at all times (or for the most part) during his ministry, his teaching, and connecting with people.

The gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus sent out seventy-two others ahead of him in pairs with some instructions.

Oh I have so many questions about the seventy-two!

There is so much in this reading that I can go into a rabbit hole, a maze, geek out, and find strings of concepts and themes.

There is so much in this particular text to explore!

For the sake of time, I will concentrate on three key aspects.

First, I will discuss the send off, setting the tone for what lies ahead.

Next, I will explore the guidelines of what Jesus advises to carry on the journey.

Finally, we will look at Jesus' advice for coping with rejection, a common hurdle that can be navigated with resilience and perspective.

What is the "send off"?

It is the "go..."

Go onto the world and spread the good news.

The good news is what?

The good news that all can be forgiven, love, etc.

The whole revolutionary Jesus message.

The send off highlights a crucial message from scripture: the harvest is abundant, yet there are not enough hands to tend to it.

I often reflect on whether the harvest reflects life as a day laborer, you know farming, collecting vegetables and fruits.

A work that is vital but it is difficult and often not someone's idea of a career path.

In our scriptures the harvest and the fields reflect the Kind-om of God.

Let's think about the work we do volunteering at a church in RL or SL, or at a non-profit of some kind.

Without the proper help the harvest is too much for one person,

Much of the work that needs to be done in these organizations is not always glamorous or easy but it is vital.

The same thing with the church.

Here in SL we are always open for volunteers to read the scriptures, participate in leading Psalter in the afternoons or meditation in the mornings.

Doug is always saying "We will train you!"

Seriously, we will train you if you have time to join our team of volunteers.

This is an opportunity for both introverts, who may prefer to operate in the background, and extroverts, who thrive in social settings.

The behind-the-scenes efforts involve logistics, organization, and problem-solving, while the front stage features those who greet newcomers, serve as deacons, read scripture, and lead music.

Both are vital to the harvest, to the need to share good news, to create safe and brave spaces that are welcoming to all.

The call to action is clear: we are sent to share the good news.

There are countless ways to fulfill this mission.

Countless ways to help each other with the harvest.

What do you like to do?

What are you passionate about?

I can assure you the community and the church can benefit from your knowledge, your gifts, your contributions.

Sharing the good news can be done in many different ways.

Such as serving coffee, making sandwiches, smiling and welcoming people.

You might be the only person who has shown kindness to someone dropping by.

Volunteer in something that brings you joy, something that shares your gift to others.

The second part to consider in this text is how Jesus sends people out as pairs. Both in the gospel of Luke and in Mark the instructions were clear, go in two's.

This is also not the first time that the scripture talks about the buddy system. Jesus in the gospel of Mark chapter 6:7 says, "Then he went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits."

At summer camp with younglings running all over the place I emphasize the buddy system.

Who would have thought Jesus invented?

In Ecclesiastes 4:9 wise Salomon says, "two are better than one, because they have

a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.”

This also serves as a safety precaution.

A friend of mine used to venture out alone to feed the homeless, often driving to a deserted lot under a bridge in Dallas.

I frequently voiced my worries, but she would often brush them aside, citing scriptures about divine protection.

I argued that there was no reason to put oneself in harm's way.

Things did not change until she experienced a near-assault.

Church there is NO need to go walk down the valley of the shadow of death when JC is literally telling you to take back up.

Or as my grandmother used to say, “pa que tientas al diablo” (why tempt the devil.)

The sendoff also comes with some guidelines.

If taken literally it will present in my opinion a challenge.

But these were the instructions given.

Carry:

No wallet.

No bag.

No sandals.

Don't even greet anyone along the way?

Stay in the same house, don't move around and eat what they give you.

Say what?

How am I supposed to pay for things with no wallet?

I do not think they had apple pay or a watch back then.

Carry no bag.

Like what about a change of clothes or is this just a local mission?

No Sandals?

Like extra shoes?

I mean I'm sure they had to walk through shrubs.

Don't even greet anyone along the way.

Oh that is easy for introverts who hate small talk.

This is going to be torture for extroverts!

But then I had a question for Jesus because this made no sense.

If one doesn't talk to people along the way how are we spreading the good news?

Then there is the “eat what they give you” command.

But what if you're vegetarian, vegan, or gluten intolerant.

What if you don't like the people you're with?

In today' s world it might be different, definitely more difficult.
Because I was thinking about myself and how much I LOVE technology.

Carry no apple watch, iphone, wallet, or cash. (Who has cash nowadays?)

Carry no backpack?

No extra tennis shoes and socks. I have to have my socks.

And did Jesus invent the concept of AirBNB?

You're literally staying in someone's house with someone in the next room.

Fascinating!

And as I prayed over this passage what came to mind was don't take things that distract you from your mission.

Think about it.

How much of a distraction would these things be if your sole purpose is to get to a place and be present.

In an age overflowing with information, being truly present can be a challenge.
Yet, we are called to share a powerful message.

A message of acceptance and love that can be easily shared with the respect and attention to being present, to truly listening and spending time in someone's home as a guest.

We may not always resonate with those around us, as differing political views and perspectives can create a divide.

The scriptures advise against hastily dismissing others, suggesting that we should not be quick to cut ties or refuse to share a meal with them.

But in today's world, it can be tempting to write off individuals who don't align with our beliefs.

It might be even healthy.

Perhaps, we are being asked to be thankful and respectful when being someone's guests.

But also mindful of that one for the sake of our mental health and safety that might be loving someone from a distance.

The message to love our neighbor did not come with foot notes or suggestions.

But we were asked to love ourselves.

The gospels show us that the good news can be complex but it is clear as day that it is not based on our egos, personal agendas or biases.

By focusing on the simple yet profound truth of God's unwavering love for humanity—despite our flaws—we can truly grasp the meaning of love.

Jesus commissions us to venture into the world and share the good news, acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead. He provided us with the essential guidelines, recognizing the vast amount of work needed across various fields, which fuels our motivation to persevere.

As we embark on this mission, it is crucial to prioritize safety and wisdom, ensuring we look out for one another and support each other.

Jesus understands the pain of rejection and encourages us to remain steadfast in our purpose.

This sendoff serves as both advice and a reminder to navigate the world carefully, always with a companion by our side for mutual support.

Choosing to follow Jesus signifies a commitment to a transformative lifestyle. It involves embracing a mission to spread goodness in a world often filled with negativity.

This choice means rejecting hate and violence, opting instead for peace, even when chaos seems to reign around us.

In the context of Jesus' time, the Greco-Roman Empire exerted oppressive control over its subjects, perpetuating cycles of suffering.

However, Jesus introduced a revolutionary approach that transcended these patterns of pain, offering a path filled with hope and new possibilities.

The Empire, a relentless adversary in our lives, brings chaos and misery that may change its guise but remains the same force dragging you down.

Jesus came to offer you life and the strength to live it fully, but the choice is yours to make.

Ultimately, He advises that when faced with rejection and mistreatment, to step outside and shake the dust from your shoes.

But let's try something new.
Try this with me if you're able.

Look at the palm of your hands.
Rotate them over and look at the top of your hands now.
Do this motion faster now,

Now pretend you have water in your hands.
You just washed them and there are no paper towels.
Shake it off.

So try this now...

If someone is talking about you negatively, shake it off. (Do the motion we just practiced.)

You hear the hate, and see the news, or hear the rejection of those who don't believe in your sacredness and your divinity.

Shake it off.

Someone is trying to clown you or act out on social media, block them.
Shake it off.

Shake it off like the dust in the shoes and choose to live.
No....chose to go beyond that and thrive!

Shaking things off reminds your body to shed the negativity and drama that seeks to anchor you in a cycle of conflict and despair.

So, shake it off.

And work on your buddy system.
Find your buddy, the one who can walk with you on this journey.
The one who you don't have to pretend or hide who you are.

And cary on the good news.
The fundamental truth that grace is grace and we are loved not for what we did, can do or will do.
But because we simply exist in our sacredness.

For we are loved beyond our imagination to infinity and beyond.
That is the message of good news, forgiveness, grace and love.

Everything else, shake it off.

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.

"I Won't Let Go" – Soulful Gospel Testimony for the Tired but Still Trusting |
Melanin Frequencies
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvtpNEdkVfg>

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 -

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.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Let's dance and Shake it off!
Taylor Swift - Shake It Off
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfWlot6h_JM&list=RDnfWlot6h_JM&index=2

Amen.