

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.

Now let us breath in and breath out as we prepare for todays service and welcome the
Holy Spirit to meet us where we are.

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in
Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

GATHERING MUSIC

GAWVI - Fight For Me ft. Lecrae
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYU9RWkvhwo>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the Gospel of Luke 12:49-56 (The Message)

"I've come to start a fire on this earth-how I wish it were blazing right now!

I've come to change everything right side up-how I long for it to be finished!

Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice?

Not so. I've come to disrupt and confront!

From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be-
Three against two, and two against three;

Father against son, and son against father;
Mother against daughter, and daughter against mother;
Mother-in law-against bride, and bride against mother-in-law."

Then he turned to the crowd: "When you see clouds coming in from the west, you say, 'Storm's coming'-and you're right. And when the wind come out to the south, you say, 'This'll be a hot one-and you're right.

Frauds! You know not tell a change in the weather, so don't tell me you can't tell a change in the season, the God-season we're in right now."

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

SERMON - UNCOMFORTABLE JESUS

I will be the first to admit I hate confrontations.
I don't know if it was I was raised in the church to serve, honor, help and obey that made me this way.

Or if it's genetics cause my dad would often tell me to take the hide road and I am more like him.

Perhaps this is why I was really good at my job running a security department for seven years at a mall.

I always tried to figure out a way to resolve disputes, aiming to stop the escalating tensions before they turned into shouting matches or physical altercations.

While it can be said that this experience has contributed positively to my career, it hasn't always been beneficial.
I tend to quickly distance myself from negativity, whether it's ignoring disrespect or holding others accountable when it comes to me.

So to say how uncomfortable I feel with this version of Jesus is truly an understatement.

Can you imagine what this day might have looked like?
Imagine you and me next to Jesus and his disciples as he starts
Preaching and saying these words we just read. .
I would have been like "JC, this ain't going to help with your following!

Or I would be like "yo, its all negative stuff, lets line up those in
need and cut it out, you want the Romans to come after you?"

What are your thoughts on this version of Jesus?
"I've come to start a fire!"
It almost sounds like he wanted to burn everything down.
Was he feeling frustrated?

Did the Pharisees and Sadducee's finally push him over the edge?
Or perhaps he just skipped breakfast?
I know I can sound this way when I don't have my coffee.

Jesus goes one "Do you think I came to smooth things over and
make everything nice?"
AH? Yeah, your Jesus.

Have you ever experienced those fiery sermons that seem to shake the very
foundations of the church?
I have many times growing up.

I always felt a sense of impending doom when our lead pastor began by quoting a
Hebrew prophet.
The moment I heard him read from Isaiah, I knew we were in for a serious message.
And when Elijah's name came up, it was clear that things were about to get intense.

As church kids, we quickly learned to read the atmosphere and realized that arguing
was not a good idea.

In these passages, I also think of Jesus resonating with the figures from the Hebrew
Bible displaying a fiery passion like that of Elijah.

It's remarkable to consider that these words, written many decades or even centuries
ago, still hold relevance today.

At times, we seek the gentle presence of Jesus, but there are moments when we crave
the assertive Jesus who declares, "Enough!"

Because I don't know about you, but at this point in our lives, I myself ask for
this assertive, Jesus to challenge our government, our Clergy on the front lines,
and our legislators for action!
I find myself asking for no more Mr. Nice Jesus.

Enough of the chaos, the deception, the exploitation, the abandonment, the
starvation of people and disappearance of others.

We need Jesus who confronts the injustices of the world, who challenges those who can discern the weather yet fail to recognize the shifting seasons of life.

Our world is evolving, friends, and this transformation transcends political affiliations; it is rooted in our shared humanity and the fundamental principle of treating others as we wish to be treated.

Laura Esquivel, (on the UCC Sermon seeds website) said, "Each of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them all by ourselves."

I often find myself unresponsive when things are directed at me.
As I've mentioned before, my instinct is to remain calm and walk away from conflict.

However, if I see someone in the margins, or a young person being targeted, I leap into action like a fierce lion ready to defend.

What about you?

Where do you draw the line, what triggers you, and what are your vulnerabilities?

My dad, despite my upbringing, was not a religious man.

Dad was more of a Greek Mythology kinda guy and he always had a story to tell me to teach me about being kind, or being careful.

One of those stories was about a hero in Homer's epic poem on the story of Achilles during the Trojan war.

Achilles was an invincible Greek hero made vulnerable when his mother Thetis deep him into River Styx to make him invulnerable but held him by the heel leaving one area exposed.

Despite his near invincibility in battle, he ultimately met his demise when an arrow struck that very heel.

This raises a thought-provoking question: what is your own Achilles' heel?
What is your kryptonite, your weakness that could lead to your downfall?

What might provoke Jesus to leap forward and question your actions?

What might compel you to take a stand and voice your thoughts and speak for those with no voice?

Was there a moment that ignited Jesus' passion, prompting him to declare, "This must change!"?

Is there a moment or a time you can recall you were moved to act?

Perhaps Jesus felt a frustration that many were drawn to him for healing yet failed to grasp the deeper mission of embodying love, kindness, and a heightened awareness of those in need.

Or was Jesus frustrated by the rampant hypocrisy surrounding the Sabbath, where rules and regulations took precedence over the needs of the people?

Did he find it troubling that adherence to social norms often overshadowed the call to address injustice?

It seems likely that Jesus was indeed disturbed by the misuse of wealth and resources during his time, as it reflected a deeper moral failing in society.

And wow frequently church, has society been sidetracked by moral issues, as evidenced in past eras?

Consider the temperance movement of the 1920s and early 1930s, which sought to tackle the social challenges posed by alcohol consumption.

However, did it truly confront the underlying economic struggles and food shortages of the time?

Reflect on movements you have witnessed that seemed to address superficial concerns rather than the root causes of problems.

In the readings from Luke, it appears that Jesus critiques the hypocrisy of religious leaders, the divisions among people, and the absence of accountability.

Could you and I draw parallels to our world and times today?
Does Jesus' message resonate?

Rev. Cheryl, A. Lindsay says, "Jesus did not come for peace. Real peace requires confrontation, resolution, and restoration. Division must be brought into the open; sides must be declared, stances must be taken."

I can't stand back and say I don't have an opinion when people of Palestine are not being fed.

I can't stand back and say I don't have an opinion when the federal government in Washington.D.C. is placing homeless people in buses and shipping them somewhere.

I can't stand back and say I don't have an opinion when (fill in the blanks, there is so much going on right now.)

Church there is so much we can't stand back and say, it does not affect me, I don't have an opinion.

R.F. Kuang said, "Fire and water looked so lovely together. It was a pity they destroyed each other by nature."

I don't think Jesus advocated for mindless violence or for shouting matches that prevent understanding.

The idea that strength determines the outcome is flawed, as the marginalized will always suffer in such a scenario.

In nature, water and fire oppose each other, yet both possess immense power when

alone. Water can extinguish fire, just as a wet log resists ignition. Each of these elements can also ignite life and transform barren land.

This duality may reflect the essence of being a Christ's disciple; we must discern when to embody each quality. Our presence, voice, and prayers should be rooted in love, compassion, and mercy. The fire within us reveals truth and it has the potential to heal a fractured world and dismantle oppressive systems.

So invite you to reflect, examine your beliefs and test them to see if they align with the teachings of Jesus. Not everyone will agree with you and that is the division that Jesus talks about.

I invite you to church to confront the injustices you encounter. To engage in community initiatives that uplift the marginalized, including the poor and those unable to speak for themselves.

Embrace generosity by sharing your resources, talents, and support whenever possible. Cultivate a sense of community and open conversations, and be ready to embrace change while seeking to understand and educate yourself on issues that may be unfamiliar.

Church, it's important to recognize that you don't have to tackle everything; focus on what brings you joy and ignites your passion.

Above all, seek guidance through prayer. If you find confrontations challenging, consider partnering with someone who is passionate and assertive. I often share my research and viewpoints with my partner, allowing her to take the lead in discussions.

While I may appear confident during my speaking engagements, it's my passion for the topics that empowers me to step forward, even when I feel nervous.

Remember, you are never alone in this journey. Jesus came to offer us abundant life, and even when we encounter moments of doubt, we can always seek the right path forward.

Sometimes we want to pause like Jesus and say, this ain't right, where is my match? Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will nudge you and make you uncomfortable, pay attention.

Today, I hope you are empowered with a prophetic voice that inspires you to advocate for others and champion justice when the moment calls for it. Today i hope you hold on to joy and with it light the shadows around.

And may you find the courage to speak out and stand firm in your beliefs, while also discovering joy in the everyday moments that bring life to you and a smile to your face.

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.

Trip Lee - Mercy (Official Music Video) ft. Kirk Franklin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jr-5Oq1r6M>

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 -

God of the shadows, We long to be seen, and we're terrified to be seen.
We find ourselves in rooms where, to belong, we must disguise and diminish ourselves, our bodies, and our thoughts.
Help us to reclaim the sound of our truest voice,
learning to name our desires, our loves, our doubts without apology.
We can only pretend for so long.
May we prioritize our own protection
in relationships that demand a particular way of being or thinking or believing.
Grant us communities who honor our thoughts, needs, and emotions, and liberate others to do likewise.

Amen

(Black Liturgy, Cole 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.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Pharrell Williams - Happy (Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbZSe6N_BXs

Amen.