

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 with you, my dear siblings,
during this month of Hispanic Heritage celebration.

Today marks the start of a series that I will explore in greater detail during our
sermon time.

For now I want to invite you to join me in prayer as we open our time together.

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.

God of Rainbow, of Diversity,
of Different shade and colors of the spectrum we thank you for your divine love and for calling us yours.

May you Holy One continue to bridge the gaps, and your comfort and love be with us today and always.

I pray in the name of the one who calls us family, in Jesus name.

Amen

GATHERING MUSIC

Iniko - Jericho (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8BP8K-ZuL0&list=PLGPw66brtuzEdYycOsESEo4lFLCj8TZtu&index=3>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the wise book of Proverbs 31:10-18

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from far away.

She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her female servants.

She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

Her lamp does not go out at night.

The Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks be to God

Woman!

The Book of Proverbs is traditionally attributed to King Solomon,

renowned for his wisdom.

However, scholars suggest that other authors contributed to this collection during Solomon's reign.

This compilation is often referred to as the book of wisdom, reflecting its rich insights and teachings.

This Bible book was also my mother's favorite.

As a child,
I admired her wisdom as she often quoted passages,
incorporating them into birthday cards and gifts.

I read today's passage in Spanish,
not only to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month but
also because I have heard it so many times that I can recite it from memory.

This book was frequently shared with girls,
particularly during their teenage years as they transitioned into womanhood.

The lesson emphasized that women were expected to be quiet,
submissive, diligent, and that they had both strength and tenderness.

A virtuous woman was deemed far more precious than rubies or even cryptocurrency.

Today, as I reflected on a passage from the Bible,
I couldn't help but envision a modern-day superwoman,
like Elastic Girl from the cartoon The Incredible.

I mean think about this passage for a minute,
a woman goes out to provide for her family while ensuring she is present at home.

She wakes up before dawn,
she feeds her loved ones and manages her household,
even overseeing her servants.

Her dedication knows no bounds,
as she works late into the night,
it says her light is always on.

She also goes and purchases land and attends to her husband's affairs.

She did what?

This portrayal challenges the traditional notion of women being confined to silence!

Someone forgot to edit this part!

But see even here there is a revealing a powerful narrative that celebrates their

multifaceted roles that a woman can hold.

When we talk about women, women rights, mothers or feminism people cringe.

Oh no another liberal redirect!

The term "liberal" often leads us down a spiral path, stirring up strong reactions regarding women's rights—whether they are advancing or regressing.

This type of talk can create a chaotic environment where opinions swing wildly from one extreme to another, leaving little room for exploring and really understanding each other.

It can seem as though everyone is fighting for their beliefs as if it were a life-or-death struggle.

However, I want to assure you that this is not what we are going to do here.

This upcoming series aims to invite everyone—not just women—to explore the narratives of those who have frequently been overlooked or silenced.

The exploration of women's stories is vast, sharing rich experiences that range from uplifting to heartbreaking, and often intertwine inspiration with sorrow.

This complexity is perhaps what fuels the power of movements and explains why there are channels dedicated to women stories like lifetime and the Hallmark channel!

Then there is the dystopian world or the Handmaid tale by Margaret Atwood which is set in a totalitarian society called Gilead, which has replaced the United States.

The story follows Offred, a woman forced into the role of a Handmaid, whose sole purpose is to bear children for the ruling class.

In Gilead, women are stripped of their rights and categorized based on their functions: Wives, Handmaids, Marthas (household servants), and Aunts (who train and control the Handmaids).

This show is very compelling, demanding a strong stomach to watch.

Its power lies in its frequent references to scripture, which provide a rationale for its themes and governmental choices.

It's important to recognize that many concepts can be anchored in Biblical principles and moral standards, provided one knows where to find the relevant texts,

how to interpret them, and how to market them effectively.

Women's narratives are often celebrated when they convey positive moral lessons, such as raising exemplary children, being cherished by their husbands, or performing acts of heroism for their families and communities.

These stories highlight the traditional virtues associated with womanhood, emphasizing their nurturing roles and contributions to society.

Companies like Dove are reclaiming what it means to be a woman in a positive way.

Dove came up with a campaign that encourages good self esteem and empowerment of women, girls and our society.

Let's watch: <https://youtu.be/c96SNJihPjQ?si=TLf5udmVFUB0qN5r>

If we were to do a campaign about being a virtuous women what would it look like?

How would we re-define this term?

For those of us striving to be good Christians, understanding Biblical characters who resonate with our lives is essential, rather than relying solely on proverbs that may set the bar too high.

Church, I have a quick question for you: please share your thoughts in the chat box.

No need to search online or provide random names; instead, think of a woman from the Bible that you remember from church, Sunday school, or a book you've read.

Are you ready?

Go ahead and list a woman of the Bible that stands out to you.

Have you ever come across names like Judith, Dilah, Jezebel, or Herodias?

These figures are quite notable, each with their own intriguing stories and historical significance.

When discussing the women of the Bible, we often find ourselves diving into the binaries of good or bad labels.

This binary view overlooks the complexity of their roles, as many women support the dominant male narratives, often remaining in the background while contributing significantly to the story.

While we may hope for change, traditional introductions still persist, with women often being defined by their relationships—such as being introduced as

someone's wife, daughter, or mother.

Growing up, I was known primarily as Tomas's daughter or Tommy's sister, and later, as a pastor's trainee.

As women, minorities,
or individuals labeled in various ways,
we often find it easier to conform to these expectations,
learning to navigate life by going along with the flow.

Divorced, you become the divorcee so and so.
OR The widow of so and so.

Today, as a non-binary individual,
I embrace my name, my identity, and my place as a beloved child of God.

What has been your experience?

As our brothers, what have you witnessed?

These are questions to ponder as we are in need of our allies of those present in the room where we are not to stand for us and amplify the voices often silence.

Church, friends, I invite you to join me on a journey to explore the stories of women in the Bible often labeled as "bad girls."

This exploration is not limited to a book study or sermon;
it welcomes everyone, including those who identify as non-binary or male.

Together, we will dive into narratives that bring these women's lives to light—stories that are frequently overlooked because they challenge the virtuous ideals presented in Proverbs.

In these challenging times,
the importance of community and support cannot be overstated;
we need allies and safe spaces where we can be courageous.

Together, we will create an environment that fosters growth,
exploration, and a deep connection to God's love and protection.

On Sundays, I will introduce the intriguing topic of "Bad Girls of the Bible,"
focusing on women whose virtues may be questioned,
while Thursdays will provide an opportunity for deeper discussion using a study guide by Essex.

I encourage you to bring your questions,
your favorite meal or drink,
and any creative materials you wish to share as we engage in meaningful conversations in the upper room.

On Thursdays teleport to: First United Church of Christ MAIN BLDG Christian Community (or the Gathering)

Here is the link as well if you want to bookmark it:
<http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/First%20UCC%20Island/77/184/36>

Our time together on Thursday will give you some time to reflect on the sermon, pray, and consider what aspects may have challenged or intrigued you.

I look forward to our exploration together,
and I invite you to have a notebook handy to ponder questions such as:

Who are these women?

What do their actions signify?

Are they sinners or saints?

What relevance do their stories hold for us today?

Friends, the Bible is a very complex book that as we grow it changes, evolves and challenges us.

We are currently reading a book by Rachel Evans (May she rest in peace) on Monday and Friday mornings title: Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water and Loving the Bible Again.

Transport to the 1st UCC SL Peace Grove to join us on Monday at 8 a.m. SL and on Fridays.

Here is the link friends for you to bookmark:
<http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/First%20UCC%20Island/189/99/26>

The Bible friends is not a history book but more like a divine "novela" (drama), with lives, stories, death and life.

Essex says, "The Bible reflects God's action in creation.
God is the creator, the author,
and finisher of this story and our faith.

This story of God's dealings with humankind is the beautiful creation of diversity in his creation.

It is my hope, dear friends,
that we enter this season with the Book of Judith.
Although this text is not part of the biblical canon,
it resides within the Apocrypha.

Judith is a fascinating character—a widow who transforms into a fierce warrior.

I invite you to join us as we celebrate the stories of women,
delve into the life of this intriguing figure,
and engage in meaningful discussions during our Sunday worship and Thursday
gatherings.

If you can't attend,
feel free to stop by the upper room to grab a copy of our Bible study or the
bulletin.

Our first meeting will actually take place next Thursday,
not this week.

Author Essex reminds us of the importance of amplifying the voices of women,
revealing their stories, and highlighting Jesus' affirmation of them.

In a time when many voices are silenced,
shows are being canceled,
pressure from the government is rising to silence those that oppose this regime, we
must continue to ground ourselves in hope, and hold space for each other and those
who have yet to find us.

So, what is your story?

How do you feel affirmed by the Creator?

Let me share with you a poem by Maya Angelou

Phenomenal Woman by Maya Angelou

“Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model size.

But when I start to tell them,
They think I’m telling lies.

I say.
It’s in the reach of my arms.

The span of my hips.

The Stride of my Step.

The curl of my lips.

I’m a woman.

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman.

That's me. "

Maya Angelou

As the world evolves, let us remain innocent as doves yet wise as serpents.

I leave you with next week's Bible reading: "The Lord will deliver Israel by my hand." Judith 8:33.

Remember, as we conclude this introduction, you are surrounded by a supportive cloud of witnesses.

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.

A Little More - Jennifer Knapp (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEJeu50I3X8>

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

And now to you all superwomen lets waltz with some Alicia Keys and Queen Latifah

Alicia Keys, Queen Latifah & Kathleen Battle - Superwoman (Live 2008)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwI1WK0gdnc>

Amen.