

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.

Tonight I bring you greetings from Rio Grande Valley which is the very tip of Texas  
literally on the border of Matamoros Mexico, my home area.

This month has been a month of reflection and celebration of the Hispanic Heritage  
Month which runs from September 15 to October 15th.

This month is an opportunity to learn, celebrate and hear unique voices that foster  
community, pride, a sense of understanding from a community that is a vital part of  
the U.S population.

Last Sunday we kicked off a series that is aimed 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.

As part of our series and our Hispanic Heritage Month I will diligently invite other voices from around the country to join us.

One of our guest preachers during this season is going to be The Rev. Rhina Ramos. We are finalizing the details of when that will be.

But if you're like me and want to look ahead of who will be visiting us via video and hopefully if we can launch by then or Discord Or Twitch channel later on for a Q&A visit.

Here is a link to her congregation in <https://www.ministeriolatino.net/>

Next Sunday, our very own Minister Christine Ng will be leading our service.

Great things head my dear friends and I invite you to pray with me as we continue to expand, explore, and create spaces where all are welcome!

Will you pray with me?

INVOCATION -

Come, Holy Spirit, and fill this space and our community with your divine presence. Touch our hearts, minds, and souls wherever in this vast planet we are found.

Thanking you of Holy on what wherever we are found you not only know, but see us and hear us.

May this service today be an inspiration, a creative wonder and invitation to grow closer to you and in community to each other.

May you create a holy bubble of protection from anything that might distract, or glitch our very own connection to you through these digital waves and in our minds.

May all honor and glory be yours now and forever.

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

Amen

GATHERING MUSIC

Tenth Avenue North - You Are More

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwtcwQwgdsA&list=PLNqSoogFr9\\_hLw1crd60MRl3-sKB6PTCF&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwtcwQwgdsA&list=PLNqSoogFr9_hLw1crd60MRl3-sKB6PTCF&index=4)

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the wise book of Judith 12:1-10 NRSV

Warning - We will be touching on some sensitive items

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew.

Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence.

They went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted so long.

But Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was dead drunk.

Now Judith had told her maid to stand outside the bedchamber and to wait for her to come out,  
as she did on the other days,  
for she said she would be going out for her prayers.

She had said the same thing to Bagoas.  
So everyone went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber.

Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart,  
"O Lord God of all might, look in this hour on the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem.  
Now indeed is the time to help your heritage and to carry out my design to destroy the enemies who have risen up against us."

She went up to the bedpost near Holofernes's head and took down his sword that hung there.

She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, "Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!"

Then she struck his neck twice with all her might and cut off his head.

Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts.

Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes's head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.

The Word of God for the people of God,

Thanks be to God

Sermon: Judith, La Mujer Que Decapitó al Patriarcado

Beloved church, today we dive into the book of Judith—  
a text not in everyone's Bible, because it lives in the Apocrypha  
and can not be found within the 66 books of the Bible.

In the Christian tradition the book of Judith was received only into the Orthodox, and 'deuterocanonical' by the Roman Catholic Church.

However, it was never received as part of the Jewish or Protestant biblical canons.

Despite this fact, there are both Jewish and Protestant scholars who have increasingly begun to explore extra-canonical literature such as that of Judith.

Perhaps after this sermon or if you have read the book of Judith you might think there is a reason this book did not make it into the canon.

Perhaps, it might be because it gave too much power too someone who wasn't supposed to have it.

Judith's story unfolds like a telenovela meets superhero comic.

She's a widow, wealthy, independent, no man telling her what to do—scandalous!

Her people are under threat from Holofernes, the drunken tyrant general of Nebuchadnezzar's army.  
He destroys shrines, kills innocents, and flexes his power through violence.

And here comes Judith—pious, smart, strategic—rolling up with her maid, no sword, no army, just faith and a plan.

Now, let's pause here.

Power, as defined by Linda Day, is to have the ability to affect and influence others to do what they want.

Holofernes has the sword, the army, the empire. Judith has her wealth, her prayers, and her wits.

Mira (see), power is not just who swings the sword.  
It is who dares to act when everyone else freezes.

So Judith plays her role.

She acts the part of the beautiful widow, planning to keep true to her diet so her maid cooks for her and they walk often on their set prayer walk.  
While Holofernes thinks he's seducing her.

But Judith's not there for romance—she's there for liberation.

And in that drunken moment, she seizes the chance. She grabs his hair, clenches the sword, and cuts off his head.

Twice.

With her maid at her side, she stuffs the evidence in a bag and walks right out

like, “don’t mind me, just carrying my leftovers.”

¡Santo Dios!

Now, some scholars call her deceitful, even murderous.  
But let’s be real: Judith didn’t kill for greed or revenge.  
She killed to free her people.

Liberation is rarely neat, never easy, and often risky.  
Judith risked it all.

And here’s where I want us to sit, church: in that tension between power and liberation.

Judith and her maid—one rich widow, one unnamed servant—together became unlikely heroes.  
One had resources, the other had none, but side by side they pulled off the impossible.

The maid’s name is never given, but she’s essential.  
She carries the bag.  
She walks the road.  
She is the ride-or-die in this story.  
Without her, liberation doesn’t happen.

Let me ask you, church:  
Who here has ever been overlooked?  
(Wait for hands, nods.)

Who here has ever carried the weight while someone else got the credit?  
 (“Mhm,” “Amen.”)

Some women live with high rates of poverty, school dropout, limited English proficiency.  
And while some may see Judith as the model, I confess—when I read this story, I often see myself in the maid.

The one behind the scenes.  
How know that feeling?  
(Invite: “Say amen if you do.”)

During seminary I was out there cleaning houses, following the wealthy, hoping liberation would trickle down.  
Hoping for more than a Christmas bonus.

So the unnamed maid in this story was also the hero in this story, just as Judith was.

Such is the world of Latina women—often the unlikely heroes,  
committed to the liberation of their families and communities,

even when empire looms large.

Now, the climax of the story: the general is drunk, his sword nearby, while Judith prays.

She grabs his hair—an image of warrior victory. She strikes him twice.

The Kohlenberger/Mounce Hebrew word for struck, “פָּגַע” means, “the hand clenched to strike.”

With that blow, Judith flips the violence he had planned for her back onto him. She tosses the body, covers it with a canopy, and with her maid, places the head in the bag.

Together, they commit an act of liberation.

Together these mujeres take liberation into their own hands.

And here’s the beauty: Judith’s love for her people,  
and her unwavering trust in God, gave her the strength to follow through.

Church, that’s the kind of commitment we need to keep seeking our liberation.

Ada María Isasi-Díaz says women must work together to create “self-defining and self-determining societies.”

Judith and her maid embody that truth.

Neither had the full picture alone.

Together, they changed history.

So let me ask you:

Who are the Judiths among us today?

And who are the unnamed maids—overlooked, underestimated, yet still carrying the bag of liberation?

Judith didn’t topple the patriarchy forever.

She didn’t become queen.

She went back to her garden.

But in that moment, she reminded her people: we are not powerless.

Say it with me:

We are not powerless.

Judith reminds us:

You don’t need empire’s sword.

You don’t need permission.

Trust God. Act bold.

Move together.

Now let me ask again:  
Where do you feel underestimated?

(Pause and meditate for a moment)  
Where do you feel dismissed, discounted, or ignored?

(Pause and meditate for a moment)

God says: that place... is where your courage can rise.

Yes, her methods raise hard questions.

Was it moral?  
Was it ethical?  
Can violence ever be justified for liberation?  
These are tensions worth wrestling.  
But what I know is this: Judith refused to let empire write the last word.

And church, neither should we.

Because these risks—Judith's risk, the maid's risk—still inspire.

They inspire women.  
They inspire queer folks.  
They inspire all who are discounted for gender, or status, or identity. Judith reminds us: even when we could walk away, we have a responsibility to justice.

And when empire says, "you are powerless"—Judith whispers back: "¡Sí se puede!"

Activist and writer Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote:  
"We cannot wait for the future to arrive—we must build it.  
With our hands.  
Our hopes.  
Our stubbornness.  
And our faith."

So let's be builders, church.

Let's be risk takers.

Let's dare to enter those risky spaces in the name of liberation—  
for ourselves, and for those who otherwise might not be free.

Judith's story still calls us:  
Keep resisting.  
Keep building.  
Keep raising swords against oppression.

¡Sí se puede!

And the church says—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.

Francesca Battistelli - Write Your Story (Live)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBmDCDbmtpc&list=RDFBmDCDbmtpc&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBmDCDbmtpc&list=RDFBmDCDbmtpc&start_radio=1)

#### 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 -

Powerful God,  
We confess that we have wielded power against one another,  
as opposed to using our power in protection of others.

In a world of so much chaos and unpredictability,  
we have become feverish for any semblance of control,  
even if that control is used to neglect, exclude, and oppress others.

We have pulled triggers, we have sent drones,  
we have sat by while powerful men wreak havoc on the world's most vulnerable.

And our own daily power, we have used to maintain the status quo.

We have stolen the bodily agency of others.  
We have dismissed the voices of our children and the elderly.  
For all that we've done or witnessed done, we are truly sorry.  
Forgive us and have mercy on us that we might know an empowered life, grounded in



our own voices without suffocating those of others.

#### FORGIVENESS:

Let your soul receive this rest:  
The God who wove order and direction into the very earth around us so too reveals  
all that they have relinquished control over.

Allow the divine to restore your humanity to you,  
that you would turn from evil deeds and give that power which you have used so  
terribly to those who can be trusted to wield it well.

Amen

Black Liturgies - Cole Arthur Riley

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

May you wake and rest with humility in your hearts.

May you be protected from the greed and fear that tempt us to dominate others.

Possess such moral clarity that you would be able to be both leader and follower  
without threat to your sense of self.

May you live responsibly and tenderly, that your power would never come at the  
expense of someone else's.

Black Liturgies - Cole Arthur Riley

#### GO IN PEACE, AMEN

#### MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Myammee - This What it Look Like ( Official Music Video ) | Gospel Rap & Christian  
Hip-Hop |

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz\\_08dkNfDg&list=RDhz\\_08dkNfDg&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz_08dkNfDg&list=RDhz_08dkNfDg&start_radio=1)

Amen.