

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.,

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,
wherever you are

As our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,
to remind us of God's presence with us,
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

Now let us all take a deep breath,
breathing in the peace of God
breathing out the stresses of the day
we may have carried here with us.

Let God hold them for you, at least for a while,
as we gather on this holy ground to worship God.

.I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

GATHERING MUSIC:

One Voice – The Waillin' Jennys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc6HloRYZGc>

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 anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.
As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a 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."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be
included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in
life.

If you would like a bulletin for today's service you can find it in the red binder
in the back.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry
there is a donation bowl in the back,
or you can go to our website
firstuccsl.org

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

We will also celebrate Holy Communion together today and all are welcome at the
Lord's Table.

So you may wish to gather the elements: some bread, a cracker or cookie, even some
cake or pie,

and something to drink such as wine, juice, or water.
Whatever makes you feel closer to each other and to God.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,
as a community,
join our hearts together,
to connect to God and to each other.
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.
If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at
this time.
As people share their prayers in text
please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.
Those voiced here today.
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.
Those for which we have no words.
We lift them all to you, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.
We pray all this in the name of the one who taught us to eat and to pray together,
saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kin-dom, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kind-dom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE

"Baba Yetu (The Lord's Prayer in Swahilli) – Stellenbosch University Choir
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8>

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Today we continue with our series on women in the Bible started by Pastor Yadi,
so I'm not strictly following the lectionary.
However, the scripture reading I have chosen was part of the gospel lectionary
reading from this past June.
The reading comes from the Gospel According to Luke,
and right before it is the story of a woman who "was a sinner."

She washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair when he was visiting the home of Simon the Pharisee. Often when this lectionary passage is preached, we focus on this woman. Instead we're going to look at the brief passage after that story. We're going to hear this short scripture three times- from three different scholarly translations.

The first reading will be from the New International Version (NIV), originally released in 1978 and updated in 2011.

The vision of this translation was to find the best balance between good biblical scholarship

and a readable and accessible text in contemporary language.

The scholarship and language interpretation leans on the more traditional side, but it is very readable.

The second is from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Originally published in 2001, the ESV strives for "word-for-word" literal accuracy, relying on the work of exclusively evangelical Christian scholars.

The third reading will be from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVUE).

This version is published by the National Council of Churches in the USA.

It seeks to be an up-to-date, accurate, and inclusive version of the bible.

The original edition was published in 1989 and the Updated Edition,

which contains edits based on the last 30 years of scholarship by a diverse body of scholars,

was published in 2021.

Because this version seeks to use the most up-to-date scholarship, the editors of the NRSVUE will often include footnotes describing discrepancies between various ancient manuscripts.

This short text from Luke describes some of the women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve from town to town.

Pay attention to how these women, and what they were doing, is described in these three versions.

What do you notice?

Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Luke, chapter 8 verses 1 through 3.

LUKE 8:1-3 (NIV)

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

The Twelve were with him,

and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases:

Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;

Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household;

Susanna; and many others.

These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

LUKE 8:1-3 (ESV)

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

And the twelve were with him,
and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities:
Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,
and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager,
and Susanna,
and many others, who provided for them[a] out of their means.

LUKE 8:1-3 (NRSVUE)

Soon afterward he went on through one town and village after another,
proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.
The twelve were with him,
as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities:
Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,
and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza,
and Susanna,
and many others,
who ministered to them out of their own resources.

The words of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

"Hidden Figures" (Luke 8:1-3) SL

Let us pray ...
I remember watching the moon landing on TV as a kid,
And learning about the Mercury and Apollo space programs.
And as I look back of the story of that amazing human achievement,
It's a sea of white male faces.
There were the astronauts, of course.
Like John Glenn, and Neil Armstrong, and Buzz Aldrin.
And the black and white photographs of the NASA Mission Control in Houston during
that era,
A sea of white men in white shirts and dark ties.
And then there were the ones telling us the story as it was happening,
White male TV announcers like Walter Cronkite.
Fast forward about 20 years
And the story is told again in the really wonderful movie,
"The Right Stuff."
There they are again, those same white male faces.
It's a story of courage, and power, and perseverance
By the white men who had the "right" stuff
To make this miracle happen,
Landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth.
There were some women in the cast,
Playing the roles of the wives of the astronauts,
Women like Betty Grisson, Annie Glenn, and Louise Shepard.
They supported their husbands,
But otherwise didn't have much to do with the story,
So you didn't see them much,

Not enough to remember their names.
Those of you who saw the movie,
Do you remember their names?
I'm sorry to say I didn't either.
I had to look them up.
At the time I never questioned this.
This was the story.
Women didn't play a significant part in the story.
That's just the way it was.
Looking back, I would think it unfair,
But it was the 1950s and 60s.
Women were just beginning to make significant strides in these professions.
I never questioned the story itself.
Then in 2016 there was another movie that looked at the Mercury space program from a different perspective,
That of three African-American women who worked at NASA,
And not just making coffee.
It was a biopic, but the core of the story is historical.
These were real women, who did real work that made the moon landing possible.
Mathematician Katherine Goble Johnson, Mathematician and computer programmer, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who was an aerospace engineer.
The film played with Mary's timeline for dramatic effect.
She was already an engineer at NASA before the Mercury program began in 1958.
There were women in this story of human beings going into space,
I just never heard about them.
They were hidden figures – pun intended – their names and contributions hidden by those telling the story.
They are hidden no longer, and not just because of the movie and the book on which it was based.
Katherine Johnson now has two NASA facilities named after her.
Many girls and young women, particularly those of color, were inspired by Uhura on Star Trek,
How many more can now be inspired by the story of these real-life women?
Women played key roles in one of the greatest achievements of human history.
For women, the story of human beings travelling out into space is our story too.
We can be part of reaching for the stars.
And now knowing that there were hidden figures like this in the story,
one wonders how many other women and people of color were there too,
the stories of their contributions still unknown.
Which brings me to our gospel text for today.
With only a few notable exceptions,
such as Jesus' mother, Mary,
you have to really look deep into the text to find women in the gospel narrative,
Especially as people doing more than needing to be healed by Jesus.
Often they are unnamed, and even when they are their stories are still largely hidden.
This may be the "greatest story ever told," but it's a largely male story.
Jesus and the Twelve.
A story about men, told by men, as the gospel writers were almost certainly male.
But the text we heard today tells us of "some women" who traveled with Jesus,

And names three.

"Mary, called Magdalene" – a familiar figure I'll come back to in a minute,

"Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward," a man named Chuza.

Joanna is only mentioned twice in the New Testament,

here and later in Luke where she is named as one of the women at the empty tomb, one of the witnesses to the resurrection.

And Susanna, who is never mentioned anywhere again.

We don't know anything about her, even what male she was associated with.

And then, we are told, there were many, unnamed, others.

These are hidden figures in the story of Jesus.

And what were these women doing, according to the text, as they traveled with Jesus?

Did you notice the difference in that between the different translations?

The NIV said the women were "supporting them out of their own means."

Then the ESV says these three named women, and many others, "provided for them" or "him," both are found in ancient manuscripts, "out of their means."

Both of these translations are based on the more conservative scholarly theory that these were financially independent women who provided money for Jesus' ministry.

This is not very persuasive to me.

Ok, maybe some did, but

There were "many" of these women accompanying Jesus, according to the text.

In First Century Palestine, how many independently wealthy single women could there have been?

Most women in ancient times didn't inherit money of their own.

But then there is the NRSVUE, which says these women "ministered to them" or him, "out of their own resources."

They "ministered" – they were "ministers."

These three versions are all translating the same Greek word, "diakonoun,"

The word from which we get "deacon" in the church.

Every time that word is used for men, it is translated as "ministering"

But when it's women, it becomes "supporting" or "providing."

But if they were ministering, they were doing the same things the disciples were doing.

Even the discrepancy between whether the women were ministering to "them" or "him" can make a difference.

"Him" could suggest they were only taking care of Jesus himself, "them"

suggests they were ministering to the world at large, like the men.

Women were not just coming to Jesus to be healed,

After they were healed, they stayed and made major contributions to the ministry of Jesus themselves,

just like the men around him.

But their contributions were buried, dismissed, hidden.

Most of their names forgotten.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna were too well known in the early church to have been left out entirely,

So they got a mention,

But not much else.

The rest – just come under the heading of "many others," not even worth mentioning.

What reason might the church have to downplay the contributions of women in the

Jesus movement? Hmmm

And what incentive might a more conservative or evangelical Christian perspective have to see the contributions of these women as only financial, not hands on?

To suggest it was somehow different from that of the men in that circle?

To dismiss the idea that these women weren't ministers. Hmmm...

It's interesting because, while we didn't read it, the King James Version,

The oldest English translation,

Also translates "diakonoun" as "ministering," the most common understanding of that word.

So the modern NIV and ESV had to intentionally change that to give the women a lesser role.

Which brings us back to Mary, called Magdalene.

Some of you may remember me talking about some of the most current scholarly research on her.

To add insult to injury, one of the major women in the gospel we do know about, Mary Magdalene,

has been slandered by tradition as a whore,

When the gospel record doesn't say that at all.

The text we read for today says what little we know about Mary Magdalene herself:

She was in the circle surrounding Jesus during his public ministry and she had been cured of seven demons.

Something else you might think you know about Mary is that she is from Magdala.

She's often referred to as Mary of Magdala.

If you have visited the Holy Land,

you may even have been to a place called Magdala

and taken a tour where the guide will tell you that you are in Mary Magdalene's home town.

But according to Diana Butler Bass, there is currently a serious scholarly debate about this,

because in the First Century that place was not called Magdala.

There was no known village called Magdala in the First Century.

So when the text says "Mary, called Magdalene" then "Magdalene" was not a place but a title.

"Magdala" in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, means "Tower."

Mary is the Tower, as in a Tower of faith.

Like Peter is the Rock.

Historians now think that these two people, two leaders, represented two key strands of early Christianity:

Those who affiliated with Peter and those who affiliated with Mary.

One male and the other female.

They could have worked together - been the two, balanced pillars of the church.

Male and female perspectives, lived experience, guiding the way forward.

Guess which one won?

Peter became the rock on which the church would be built.

Mary became a whore.

But then, it was men who later wrote down the gospels

and who chose the material to include in the official Christian canon,

The sacred documents of our faith,

That we call the Bible.

Mary Magdalene was apparently powerful enough that she had to be discredited, turned

into a whore,
and hidden in plain sight.
The other women who ministered with her to the early church just had to be ignored
and forgotten,
Even their names.
The patriarchy had to burn down Mary's tower so the patriarchal church could be
built on Peter's Rock.
Why does any of this matter?
I've spent a lot of time today essentially doing Bible Study, but what's the point?
Is it just a curiosity? An intellectual debate?
Obviously, I think the answer is no.
Okay, yes, I do think it's a cool intellectual debate, no lie, but it also matters.
It matters because women have been told for hundreds, indeed thousands of years that
they couldn't be ministers.
They couldn't be ordained religious leaders in the church.
In some cases, that they couldn't even speak in church, let alone preach the gospel.
Their spiritual gifts dismissed, downplayed, suppressed by the patriarchal church
that coalesced after the death of Jesus.
The United Church of Christ was the first denomination to ordain women,
But I've been told that to my face
That it was not "right" to ordain women.
That Jesus was a man, the Twelve were men, Paul was a man,
Only men could be ordained ministers, religious leaders.
Only men could preach.
But if women were true disciples of Jesus, ministering to others,
then the story of Jesus is not just the story of a man, surrounded by men.
It's the story of women too, women whose gifts were as valued by Jesus as their male
compatriots.
And if women were treated equally with men by Jesus, then that is the example we
should be following more broadly,
Because the same patriarchal voices that want to silence women in church
also want to silence women in the broader society.
Keep them from voting, holding office, owning property, etc.
Please remember that it is only in 1974 that women in the US got the right to apply
for a credit card in their own name.
Often the institutional church was at least silent, if not complicit in this
injustice.
But this text shows us that is not the example set by Jesus.
That's good news, and not just for women.
It's not only the history of these women that has been suppressed or rewritten.
Don't get me started on the myth, perpetuated by the European church, that Jesus was
white,
Or on the downplaying of his Jewish identity,
Which enables the oppression of people of color and the attacking of Jewish houses
of worship
on their holiest of days, Yom Kippur.
It's important to see how the patriarchy, and the forces of domination, work.
Changing history to suit those in power.
And it's happening again today, right before our eyes, here in the U.S.
Diminishing or suppressing the contributions of those the dominant cultures pushes

to the margins,
Deleting information from websites, changing informational displays in museums and national parks,
Suggesting that women should not have the right to vote or serve in the military,
Gaslighting us about our own history and lived experience.
There are forces in power in this country, including those who identify as
"Christian,"
Who are trying to rewrite history and erase the gains women,
people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ people, children, the poor,
To consolidate wealth and power in a small segment of wealthy white men.
But that's not the model Jesus gave us.
That's not the kin-dom of God.
The good news is that once the hidden figures in our history and sacred literature
are allowed to step out into the light,
Like the women in the movie and in this text from Luke,
Once they have been seen, they cannot be unseen.
And we can use their example to inspire us to create a better world,
And to reach for the stars.
Amen.

"We Shall Be Known" – MaMuse and Thrive Choir
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4xhQcgyoLk>

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

The Lord's Table is a place
where we keep company with each other and with the Divine.
Where the connections between us are made tangible and visible.
The Lord's Table is a place
Where we remember what Jesus gave
His whole self,
and what God gave in return,
resurrection, new life.
We are called to be part of that same cycle
This is a meal of love,
Love given, love received.
But it is your choice.
Come to this sacred table not because you must,
But because you may.
Come with an empty place,
Let it be filled with bread.
Come with an empty cup,
Let it be filled with good drink.
Come with an open heart,
And feel God's love fill it.
Come just as you are
This is the Lord's table
And it is spread for you and for me.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:

Lord,
Wherever we are,
in the valley, on the mountain,
no matter how deserted it seems,
we are not truly alone,
because you are with us..
Bless this bread and this cup
May they be vibrant with your grace
Nourishing what is deepest in us.
And through this holy meal
May we come to know
that wherever we are
In Real Life, in Second Life,
We are connected to each other
Through our faith in you,
And that in and through this community,
we may find that your love
Is as real and tangible
As this bread and drink
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.
(pause to eat)

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.
(pause to drink)

Let us pray.
Lord of all our life,
We give thanks that you have welcomed us
To your table.
As we have been given healing and hope and nourishment
At this table,
May we share it with others,
Each of our offerings coming together
Until all are fed.

Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

And now,
Our worship is over,
but our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting.
Go in peace, come again in hope.
Amen.

"A Million Dreams" – Pink (cover of The Greatest Showman)
<https://youtu.be/xSBzMU1Qy08?si=Td21WsmWgUn-klun>

GO IN PEACE