

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.

This past month we started with a series that is aimed to invite everyone—not just
women—to explore the narratives of those who have frequently been overlooked or
silenced.

Last Sunday, Rev. Rhina Ramos preached to us via our media viewer.
This past Thursday we met in the upper room to talk about Jezebel and explore her
life and history.

Next week I invite you to join me Thursday as we continue to explore "Bad Girls of
the Bible: Exploring Women of Questionable Virtue" by Barbara J. Essex.

This next one is a bit more spicy so bring plenty of soft drinks, and have some
earphones that will not be for the faint of heart, it is about a scandalous woman,

Tamar!

We meet friends in the upper room called "the gathering" on the teleport there. We meet at 4 SL time which is 6 Texas time (central).

This Sunday friends as part of our series and after our Thursday conversation we enter the world of Jezebel.

So let us prepare our hearts, our minds, and set aside a moment to pray, meditate, and let questions arise as you center your hearts and connect with the Holy-One.

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 we find ourselves at this time. 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

For our gathering music if you have any announcements of the life of our church please share during this time.

GATHERING MUSIC

TAYA - Worship! (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQnP4pTgmAs&list=PLGPw66brtuzEdYycOsESEo41FLCj8TZtu&index=10>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the book of 1 Kings 21:1-21 NRSV

Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria.

And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; 'I will give you a better vineyard for it, or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.'"

But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should

give you my ancestral inheritance.”’

Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said,
“I will not give you my ancestral inheritance.”

He lay down on his bed, turned away his face,
and would not eat.

His wife Jezebel came to him and said,
“Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?”

He said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him,
‘Give me your vineyard for money, or if you prefer,
I will give you another vineyard for it,’ but he answered,
‘I will not give you my vineyard.’ ”

His wife Jezebel said to him,
“Do you now govern Israel?
Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful;
I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and
sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to
the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city.

She wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and seat
Naboth at the head of the assembly;
seat two scoundrels opposite him,
and have them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘

You have cursed God and the king.’
Then take him out and stone him to death.”

The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived
in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them.
Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them,
they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly.
The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him,
and the scoundrels brought a charge against
Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “
Naboth cursed God and the king.”

So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.

When they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”
As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead,

Jezebel said to Ahab,
“Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite,

which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead.”

As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead,
Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth
the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

The Word of God for the People of God,
Thanks be to God.

Jezebel - Don't hate the game...hate the system

The story of Jezebel is one that has been associated
with that of a woman who is a harlot.
Growing up, I often heard girls who were "Losely" as "Jezebel!"

In a chilling example from 2018,
a man who murdered his two young daughters and pregnant wife blamed his heinous
actions on his mistress, whom he said was a "Jezebel."

Similarly, a serial killer from the 1950's told his girlfriend
that his mother disapproved of women like Jezebel,
insisting she toned down her appearance.

He also blamed his actions on his "Jezebel" girlfriend.

In conservative circles,
Jezebel is remembered as a defiant figure who opposed God,
clashed with the prophet Elijah and ultimately met a tragic end.

How do you remember or recall the story or the use of Jezebel in your life?
(with respect you can enter text below.)

Jezebel's story in 1 & 2 Kings serves as a stark warning
about how defying God and committing idolatry equals tragic death and destruction.

Jezebel was, in reality,
a bold and unapologetic character.

Interestingly, she hailed from a royal lineage,
being the daughter of King Ethabaal of Sidon,
a prominent Phoenician city in what today is Lebanon.

The Phoenicians, renowned for their trading prowess and maritime skills,
worshiped Baal, a god, a deity associated with the weather and fertility.

Baal was believed to govern the rain and agricultural
abundance along with having healthy babies.

When Jezebel moved to Israel,
she brought with her the beliefs of her upbringing along with her priests, and

rituals.

Which means temples were built and the Israelites came face to face with a religion they only can see as idolatry.

However, for Jezebel, this was an expression of her faith, a continuation of her ancestral religion in a new land.

Jezebel the princess who comes into a political motivated marriage with King Ahab ruler of Judah, is a deeply devoted worshiper of Baal.

And while she was deeply devoted to Baal and Asherah rather than Yahweh, it is important to note that her father was a high priest of Baal.

Jezebel did not arrive at Israel as a seductress but as a queen wielding significant political power and religious authority.

Since her arrival church can you see the political tension building rather than an overtly sexual theme?

Yet I ask you, could she have been pretty?

Could she have been even, dare I say sexy? (Scandalous!)

Could she have batted her eyes and play lady in distress to get her way like Judith?

Maybe...

Or could she have been like Mary Magdalen and the story of the Hidden Figures Pastor Chris preached on and be smart and witty?

This past Thursday in the upper room
(labeled the gathering on the teleport)
we talked about women being often demonized
for exercising some serious feminine power.

We shared examples of modern women in today's world that reflected Jezebel's bad girl behavior.

Women like Cleopatra a foreign queen vilified by male historians for her sexuality and political power.

Modern day people such as Hillary Clinton, where in some conservative circles she was called a Jezebel for defying traditional roles.

We also talked about pop culture icon Madonna who because of her confidence, sensuality and outspoken demeanor got her the Jezebel title.

And so I wonder what happens when women in power
defy patriarchal systems, ancient or modern?

In 2013, there was this show on Netflix called House of Cards,
inspired by a 1989 British Novel and adapted to the U.S political climate.

In this show, Kevin Spacey plays Frank Underwood,
a congressman and his wife Claire played by Robin Wright,
who are politically inclined to get to the White House at all cost.

These power couples use all means necessary from manipulation,
betrayal, power, sex, corruption, even murder.

Claire's character is that of a woman who stands at nothing
to get what she wants, often standing poise reminding her
husband to stop being a whinny baby and be a man.

I could not help but think of them when I was thinking
of this couple in our scriptures today.
See this was a power couple, King Ahab and Jezebel.

Jezebel was so confident and shrewd that not even the
Prophet of God Elijah would scare her.

In 1 Kings chapter 18, Elijah goes before Ahab and
they have a not so friendly barbecue challenge that ends
in Elijah killing Jezebel prophets.

And rather than intimidating Jezebel after God had shown their power,
she doubles down against Elijah and
in 1 Kings 19:2 she says, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely,
for by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah became so fearful of Jezebel that he fell into
a deep depression and went into hiding for forty days
and nights in the mountains of Horeb.

Church, it is clear to me that Jezebel and her husband,
the king, were regarded as wicked both in the eyes
of the Lord and in our own judgment.

Take a moment to reflect on their track record;
it speaks volumes about their moral standing.

1 Kings 18:4 - Jezebel kills the prophets of Yahweh.
1 Kings 18:19-40 - Elijah kills her prophets and she puts a bounty on his head.

And finally the scriptures we read today about Naboth's
vineyard tells us how she will stop any nothing to get what she wants.

I do not stand here today excusing any of Jezebel's behavior but rather point out that we must look at her again not from a "harlot," "seductress," "temptress," and every other negative word that comes to mind but rather with a new lens.

Barbara Essex in her book "Bad girls of the Bible" says about Jezebel, "She was not a villain to be eternally despised-she was religiously committed, politically savvy, determined, self-assured, bodacious, and clever. She was dedicated to her family and a zealous missionary for Baal. She died as she lived-royally."

In today's scriptures we read how her husband threw a tantrum because he could not get the vineyard he wanted.

Jezebel plays the system, a system that is poised to help those in power, much like today's framework that is set to help those in power.

The system that is gaining more wealth, control, and dominance across various sectors, including finance, education, religion and government at all levels.

This growing influence reflects a persistent desire for authority and resources accumulation, echoing the patterns of exploitation seen throughout history. Don't hate the game, hate the player.

Or in this case don't hate the player whose characters actions we may not like or can not even see sacredness or a loving God actually expecting us to do the same.

See Jezbel with sacredness, really?

It is like she mocked Elijah and his God.

She probably told her husband, there I took care of it, go enjoy your new playground with no regard to taking from a family their land, their history, their loved one?

That is who we are supposed to see as sacred or with loving eyes?

Really?

Church Jesus came during a political landscape in a system where the Romans just like today were getting richer and stronger.

They were disappearing and killing people.

Jesus disrupted the system not by fighting them with their own game or weapons.

But rather by inspiring a community to rise in another way.

Often we hear that people will say about those
in the margins that they should "pull themselves up by their bootstraps"
when in fact they don't have any boots!

When I think about Jezebel I could not help to think
of women who right now are in power and I can't stand them.

I am upset at the way the system is being used,
dismantled, rewritten, and rewired to do what it has always
done except now it does it in the open without shame
or regard for those in the margins.

A system that is taking away human dignity,
and causing so much chaos that like Jezebel's time our prophets,
our community or people are hiding, running, depressed,
hurt, and wondering when this will end.

I think of Jezbel as one of these women in power in the
U.S. like the House representative from South Carolina
making Transgender issues her crusade as
she calls our siblings out as evil, who should be eradicated.

She is one of many women who are savvy,
clever, smart, strong, and whose history as such
is overshadowed by their actions to wield such gifts
and power to destroy and hurt others.

And is God asking me to acknowledge their sacredness too?

Brian McClare in his book, Holy Disruption: A Manifesto for the Future
of Faith Communities, said, "Jesus' message was unsettling,
unpopular, and much more counterintuitive. Give what you have away.

Share with your neighbor. Stop along the side of the road to help
someone who is vulnerable. Live your life with hands and
heart open, believing and living as if you know there is
more than enough to thrive, if only we would turn our
focus from ourselves to the good of the whole community around us."

We might not like how Jezebel and these women in power
play the system but we must admit they had the poise,
charisma, and cajones (explicit slang) to do what they think and believe is right.

What are you and I called to do?

We are not called to spew names, hate, and anger
towards how they behave, act and do.

Like Elijah we might have had to run and hide for 40 days
and 40 nights, we might even need more time there and it is okay.

But when you're ready, come out of the cave,
call things out and don't be afraid to use your voice
to point out injustice and then join a community to do something about it.

Yesterday, over 7 million people participated nationwide in the
"no Kings" protest against the current administration policy and rule of laws.

Peacefully they danced, they chanted, they created signs, created family-friendly
atmospheres, wore costumes, played music and said,
"We will not bow.
We will not stand for this authoritative behavior."

Jezebel was a woman of great passions and gifts,
not one that was intimidated by men or anything.

She was savvy, politically and devoted.
but she acted wrong and used her power and all her gifts to hurt, kill and destroy.

Accountability,
karma or bringing balance to the force might come in time for us to see or not.

Perhaps it happens in the background and we wonder
if mean people in power get away with things.

But what if church we spend our energy
and time not chasing punishment for our satisfaction but rather true Justice.

Justice that comes when you and I become a force
as a community for not only helping people but as Brian McLaren says,
"A force that changes unjust systems that cause people to need help in the first
place."

I see you.

Your a bad - a

What will you do with your gifts, your anger, your passion, your life?

What's your story?

May the holy one inspire you to act upon your response one step at a time.

Hate the game, disrupt it, change it,
and dance with joy and unconditional love from above.

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.

Franchesca - Inner Me (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2QPIovffQo>

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 -

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

I pray that in your time of rest and need to be in the shadows that you have someone like the ravens who fed Elijah while he rested in the cave.
And when you're ready may the Holy-One give you the energy, the strength and the courage to speak for Justice unapologetically and boldly in your own way.

GO IN PEACE, AMEN

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Santana - Smooth (Official Video) ft. Rob Thomas
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Whgn_iE5uc