

## 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 service can be found in the red book located in the back by the  
entrance.

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 wider church not only  
with prayer but financially.  
So we greatly appreciate any offering you can make to support this ministry.  
Donations can be made on our donation bowl located in the back near the entrance or  
on our website, [firstuccsl.org](http://firstuccsl.org).

My name is Tritonia and I am a Member in Discernment in the UCC, on the path to  
ordination.  
Anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

Call to Worship (please respond to yourself, wherever you are)

One: God brings us together in the word.

All: We are grateful to be part of God's story.

One: God brings us together in stewardship.

All: We are grateful to be part of God's community.

One: God brings us together in a vision for the future.

All: We are grateful to be part of God's dream. Amen.

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

## GATHERING MUSIC

Dream God's Dream

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBP0QLGLGTE>

## SCRIPTURE

Today's reading comes from the book of Isaiah, chapter 12:

A Hymn of Praise

1 And in that day you will say:

"O Lord, I will praise You;  
Though You were angry with me,  
Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.

2 Behold, God is my salvation,  
I will trust and not be afraid;  
'For Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song;  
He also has become my salvation.' "

3 Therefore with joy you will draw water  
From the wells of salvation.

4 And in that day you will say:  
"Praise the Lord, call upon His name;  
Declare His deeds among the peoples,  
Make mention that His name is exalted.

5 Sing to the Lord,  
For He has done excellent things;  
This is known in all the earth.

6 Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion,  
For great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

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

Sermon - Be Grateful for Generosity

In my Real Life church, this is our Stewardship time,  
and today was the day we made our pledges of support for the church for next year.

It reminded me that I also need to do more here in SL, to assure the continuance of  
this ministry that means a lot to me.  
Because, although you don't often see me here for the Sunday service,  
I'm a regular at Morning Meditation with Pastor Yadi at 8am on Mondays and Fridays.

In my RL church, we've been using the UCC Stewardship material for this year,  
entitled "Dreaming God's Dream.

"No gift is too small, No dream too big".

It says that God's dream for the world is that there would be no one living in poverty and no one being killed in conflicts.

That enemies might be reconciled and that together we would be building the kingdom of God here on earth.

That's a big dream.

And in the resources we could use for sermons I found a section on using the book of Ruth.

Now I told my rl congregation that for obvious reasons, Ruth is one of my favorite books in the Bible.

(Perhaps not so obvious here, but, so you know, Tritonia's rl name is Ruth.)

I wrote my first big paper in seminary on the book of Ruth.

It's short, only 4 chapters.

It's often dismissed as a cute folk tale or a sweet love story.

Usually the only verses preached about are when Ruth says she will return to the land of Judah with her mother-in-law Naomi, and her loyalty is held up as an example.

But the material pointed out all the types of generosity that we can see in the book of Ruth.

When Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, with their two sons, left Bethlehem and went to Moab

it was because of a famine in their homeland.

They went to try to find a better life.

But what a decision!!

They had to travel across a very inhospitable wilderness,

and they were going to the land of a people who were sworn enemies of Israel.

The Moabites hadn't let Moses and his people cross their land, and attacked them instead.

And there were several wars with Moab noted in the Old Testament.

Yet this is where the family went.

And what happened?

Well, we can assume that they were actually welcomed generously in that land, as the sons were both allowed to marry Moabite women, usually considered an act of acceptance by the people of a land.

They lived there for 10 years.

But, then Naomi's husband and both her sons died, and she decided to return home to the land of Judah.

Again across that wilderness.

At first both daughters-in-law wanted to go with her,

but Naomi, generously, tries to send them back so they can have a life of their own in the land of their people.

One daughter-in-law agrees, and goes back, but this is when Ruth stays and makes her

famous declaration to Naomi.

“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.

Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Naomi must have been a really nice mother-in-law don't you think, to earn that type of loyalty.

So Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, the village where Naomi's husband was from, and there we learn about the practice of the farmers, as they or their workers harvested a field,

that some grain would fall to the ground behind them.

This was a practice followed to allow the poor to gather, or glean, some grain to eat,

and it is what Ruth was doing in the fields to have food for Naomi and herself.

It was a type of generosity offered by the people of Israel to care for the less fortunate of their people.

Then we meet Boaz, an apparently older and well-to-do kinsman of Naomi's husband. When he sees Ruth in the field, he learns from his foreman that she is the Moabite woman who returned with Naomi.

Boaz tells her specifically to remain only in his fields, to stay near the other women,

and to drink of the drawn water when she needs it.

He tells the young men not to bother her.

At meal time, he sees that she is well fed.

When Ruth asks why he is being so kind to her,

he says he has heard all about her returning with Naomi and working in the fields so they might eat.

Her loyalty to Naomi is rewarded by the generosity of Boaz,

and this in spite of the fact that she is a foreigner,

a woman from a people who were their enemies.

When Naomi hears of Boaz's kindness, she devises a scheme to ensure the security of her daughter-in-law.

A generous act of course, but this leads to the section that might seem a little risqué for church.

Naomi tells Ruth to anoint herself and put on her best clothes,

and go and lay at the feet of Boaz on the threshing room floor.

I won't go into more details, but when Boaz wakes up and realizes Ruth is there, he promises to look out for her.

Because, in part, that is what is required of a kinsman to do for the widows of the family.

But, there is another closer kinsman than he, who might want to redeem the land that belonged to Elimelech, Naomi's husband.

So then there is a meeting at the gate of the town,

the common way that the men gathered to settle disputes and govern the small villages.

Boaz announces to the kinsman that he is the one that should redeem the land, but if

he does, he also has to marry Ruth.

And, as it was the custom to keep a man's name alive, the children would be considered children of Elimelech's house.

The kinsman realizes he might have to divide his estate with his other children to do this, so he says he is not interested.

This leaves Boaz the opportunity to redeem the land, and take Ruth as his wife.

So, as an honorable and very generous man, he also assumed responsibility for the care of Naomi.

When Boaz and Ruth have a child, Naomi becomes like a godmother and nurse for the baby,

thus restoring the family that Naomi had lost.

And that child is the grandfather of David, and hence an ancestor of Jesus as well.

A point that is made is that they had an ancestor who was not of one of the tribes of Israel,

but who had been accepted into the faith.

And they all live happily ever after.

Although Naomi and Ruth came from just an ordinary family, that suffered great hardship, and the loss of their husbands, God provided for them.

God used Boaz to practice the generosity of the Israel society toward the widows and the poor, through the practice of gleaning, and also through the responsibility of a kinsman to be a redeemer of lost property and care for the widows.

The three main characters exhibit the love that is known as hesed.

Love that is generous and kind and loyal.

And accepting of the generosity, all are rewarded in the end.

What parallels might we see in this story to conditions in the world today?

Do we know of any people that travel to a foreign country to obtain a better life?

Do we know of people that are struggling to have enough food to eat and a place to live?

We know that none of us can solve these immense problems alone.

But as part of our society, do we each do our part in showing that care and generosity that was part of the ancient Israel community.

Can we each do our small part in helping God's dream for a world of love for all our neighbors be a reality?

Amen

PRAYER PREPARATION:

And now let us 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, I invite you to share it now.

COMMUNITY PRAYER

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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 -

O God, please hear our prayers for those named here, and only in our hearts. Offer them your presence and your comfort, perhaps you healing, in this time of need.

There is so much going on in the world, and so many of us need your comfort, but also to help us do better at living into God's Dream for the world.

Please help us to love our neighbor as we also love God.

And now we pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father  
who art in heaven  
hallowed be thy name  
thy kin-dom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our debts  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil  
for Thine is the kin-dom  
and the power  
and the glory, forever.  
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

God created us with gifts.  
Christ gave us grace for healing.  
The Spirit inspires us to dream.  
May the peace and blessings of our triune God go with you.  
Amen.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Lord I Want To Be A Christian

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZUq1Ruj9dE&list=RDMZUq1Ruj9dE&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZUq1Ruj9dE&list=RDMZUq1Ruj9dE&start_radio=1)

GO IN PEACE, AMEN