

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.

I'm thrilled to be back after a month filled with transformation and healing.

My heartfelt thanks go to Doug, Ruth, and everyone who contributes to creating this  
sacred space.

Change is the only constant in our lives, and when our bodies signal the need for  
rest and recovery, even the most stubborn among us must pause.

Now, as we embark on a new season leading up to Advent, or what many consider the  
holiday season, we enter this space with our hearts filled with – cansancio, (we  
might be exhausted) hope (esperanza), and many questions – and God welcomes all of

it.

As we enter into this sacred space today, I invite you to think:  
What is the price I pay for the life I live and what am I investing my time and energy in?

Take a moment to breathe (Respiren profundo)... and remember: God is here, Dios está aquí, in this very moment, in this very body, in this very community.

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

Benjah "Every Mountain" [ official music video ]  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TARuSXZkIgw&list=RDTARuSXZkIgw&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TARuSXZkIgw&list=RDTARuSXZkIgw&start_radio=1)

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading come from the book of Luke 12:54-13:9 NRSV

He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does.

And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is.

Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky.

How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?

“Why don’t you judge for yourselves what is right?”

As you are going with your adversary to the magistrate,  
try hard to be reconciled on the way,  
or your adversary may drag you off to the judge,  
and the judge turn you over to the officer,  
and the officer throw you into prison.

I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Luke 13:6-9

Then he told this parable:

“A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard,  
and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any.

So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard,  
‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t  
found any.

Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year,  
and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it.

If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

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

The Price We Pay

The Scriptures in Luke tell us of the way we as humans look up to the sky and  
predict the weather.

Luke would be blown away to know we can just look at our phones and figure out what  
the next five days might look like.

I say might because here in North Texas that changes by the hour.

I can be wearing shorts today and fully covered,  
freezing, the next.

My abuelita would say, “Así es la vida, m’ija, siempre cambiando.”

And we cannot overlook the things going on around us.

This past week was Transgender Day of Remembrance.  
Every year it is heavy to acknowledge worldwide that transgender  
and gender non-conforming individuals are targeted and killed with violent acts.

This year 281 murders were reported globally between October 2024 - September 30th.  
In the United States, the number was 27 violent deaths,

in addition to 21 suicides.

This year the war in Ukraine has been going on for three years, eight months, and four weeks.

For forty-three days the U.S. Government was shut down, and after that it still took 24 hours and three days for people to start seeing their SNAP benefits (a card for people who have qualified for assistance to receive money to buy food).

For many of our gente, that's the difference between frijoles on the stove or an empty table.

On and on we can list the times, days, and hours of misery – and misery loves company.

Gloomy, almost difficult to see anything to be thankful for when you're in the middle of all these things I mentioned.

And yet, every day people rise to the challenges in the margins and continue finding ways to exist, and many even thrive.

Our barrios, our neighborhoods, are full of gente que lucha – people who keep going.

But how?

The parable we read in Luke about the fig tree tells us the story of a man who sees that his investment has not yielded any results.

The fig tree is always just there, not producing, not working, not doing anything – and so it is taking space.

But the other guy who is going to do the deed and take it out says, "Let me work with this fig tree and I can help it give fruit."

This person is going to invest time, energy, prayers, and sweat to help this fig tree not be cut down.

But why?

Take that tree out and plant another one, end of story.

And with people trying to upscale each other this is the way of life for many. As a follower of Christ what is our way of life?

We live in a society and in a world where things are changing at a fast pace and at the tip of our hands we hold the power to buy, sell, trade, and change things.

We are connected globally, worldwide, and locally if we wish.

Artificial intelligence is here to stay and many of us try to keep up with technology and how to use it to help our daily lives.

But at what price?

Do we use the power, the privilege, the resources we hold to simply benefit us and those we love or can we share with others?

And if we share with others does that make us vulnerable?

When you and I look at our source of income, whatever that might be, we try to budget, and try to see what bills must be paid, and what can wait.

Have you heard the phrase "Pay Paul, borrow from Peter."

I have gone down to all the apostles and started again each month to stretch what I can.

Some of us grew up watching our parents and abuelos doing milagros with the money – stretching one check to cover rent, light bill, tortillas, and maybe a little pan dulce for the kids.

Absolute scarcity is often seen in areas where the demand for resources exceeds what is available.

Relative scarcity refers to the total amount of resources and how they are distributed.

The problem with relative scarcity is that resources are often distributed to those that can pay.

In the border towns of the United States exists this places of land that are unincorporated.

Meaning they have no power, water, streets, sewer, etc.

But families buy land there and make it their homes.

They create a system that works for them.

They bring water out there, create outside sheds, bathrooms, they capture water, grow crops and do everything they can to survive as a family.

These unincorporated land is often hidden but I assure they are in every border town from El Paso, Arizona to South Texas.

The price they pay for their entire family to feel safe, have peace and land is often scarcity.

The price they pay for water is often higher if they wait for someone to go out there and filled their tanks.

Or the same thing with their propane tanks out there in their land.

The price one pays varies as you and I know depending at times on who you know.

The challenges we face are undeniably significant.

While some may be fortunate enough to remain unaware of such difficulties, I am thankful for their circumstances.

My perspective is shaped by personal experiences,

particularly during my time in seminary when I visited the border as part of my studies.

Hardship manifests differently for each of us, whether it's the struggle to find employment or advance in our careers.

Ultimately, we all bear a cost in various facets of our lives, not solely in financial terms.

I was heartened to witness how communities rallied together—from congregations to businesses—to support food pantries across the nation, aiding those without access to food assistance programs.

Reflecting on my childhood,  
I remember waiting in line with my mother from early morning,  
only to be told there was no food left when we finally reached the front. I

t's a haunting thought. In our own ways, we can see the biblical imagery of changing weather in our lives, preparing for storms while cherishing the sunny days.

Today, we confront the unsettling reality of our neighbors being taken and our beliefs challenged,  
especially when scripture is misused to justify injustice in God's name.

Reconciling these contradictions is a profound struggle.

But this is where friends we have to ask ourselves what does it mean to be a disciple of the one who calls us family?

We pray, we listen, we provide support when we can but it does not change the things still happening around us.

Houses are foreclosed.  
People are homeless, couch surfing, etc.

And we wonder how do protect ourselves from all the things around us that could hurt us or our families?

How do we plan for a healthy lifestyle with no insurance?

Or how do you invest in your health when we have insurance  
but we are too busy to keep up with doctors' appointments or self-care?

The price we pay for our sanity, and our health, and our spiritual life is like our economic planning.

That is the question to sit and ponder.

To be grateful each day for what we have even if its small.

To be grateful for the changes that still allows us to lay our head in a place that is safe.

To be grateful especially if someone you know or is near you builds community with you.

Because that is the secret, who is willing to help you and who are you willing to help?

See, I was a fig tree once.

I was broken, not giving fruit, taking space, and in my mind just useless.

My faith was gone, my mental state was a mess, and I just focused on the negative.

I could not see past my misery.

I had a scarcity mentality, not because I wanted to always be down, but I just could not see up.

Then someone said, "Let me water it, and give it nutrients and see it grow."

The price was paid to connect with me weekly and hear me whine, cry, and complain, and cry some more, and be angry, and pray, and not pray 'cause I was mad at God, and complain some more.

My spiritual Director,

or what we call now companion,

let me just take space on her couch in her office and just blah all the way for what seemed like forever.

Then one day, I realized the price I was paying for my depression, sadness, loss of identity was very heavy, and I needed to find a new way out.

With her help I started small, to think about what brought me joy and peace. The price we pay for our choices in life comes back with investments or with consequences.

The price I pay for eating Takis (like really awesome chips) and Pepsi is that my sugars skyrocket and I feel really sick after a while, if not right away.

As a diabetic I hate that! I love Takis and Pepsi!

What is your investment on?

What price do you pay for your habits?

Oh and I'm good at making excuses and making it work.

It's not like I'm smoking, or doing drugs, it's just a Pepsi!

We do that, right? "Nomás esto... just this one thing..."

The price for our peace, our salvation, was paid.

Many romanticize the suffering of Christ or minimize it.

Jesus walked around during his time challenging the oppressive systems in a way that threw everything off balance.

He came to set the captive free, to heal, to restore and demonstrate solidarity with those in the margins.

But he also came to give people a choice: do you want to be healed?

Rev. Cheryl A. Lindsay says to:

"Hold on when wickedness seems stronger, deeper, and more enduring.

Hold on when the costs seem too high—turning family and friends into foes.

Hold on when the costs keep mounting and joy seems illusive.

Hold on and stay on when others abandon the effort, look for shortcuts, or substitute an easier path.

Because on the other side of the dangerous seesaw of discipleship  
is victory—justice, righteousness, and the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven.

Nothing is more valuable than that. Estimate the cost.”  
In other words, church, what is the price you pay for peace, for joy, for hope?

You might be all good, economically stable, mentally chill, and ready for the  
holidays.  
You might be one who already has the darn tree up!

Blessings if you are.  
If you are, this is a great time to budget and store for a rainy day.  
Or you might be in the shadows trying to find the light, to find hope, to find help.  
St. Ignatius of Loyola focused on finding God in all living things.

A key practice that I would like to share with you, my friends,  
as we enter this season is called the Daily Examen.

Imagine it like this: at the end of the day, you sit at the kitchen table,  
maybe with a cafecito, maybe a little pan dulce, maybe a vela lit – and you look  
back over your day with God.

Meaning a daily reflection that could be journaling,  
drawing, or even taking notes on your phone if you can open an app for that.

Start small: What am I thankful for today?

¿Por qué le doy gracias a Dios hoy?

The key practices that Ignatian spirituality mentions are rooted in meditation and  
discernment –  
a life of service, love and commitment to God and others, using your talents and  
gifts to collaborate in the work of the Holy-One.

So when the bad times come you have paid the price to upgrade your life.  
You have taken notes of what brings you joy.

We might see when the weather will change by looking up or at our digital devices.  
Look at your pictures.

You might know when you are starting to feel sad, or off,  
and you might need to get a spiritual tune-up, a therapist visit, a time to really  
share with the Holy-One how you feel.

The price we pay for ignoring our bodies and our spiritual life will raise havoc on  
us.

So today I want to invite you to invest in you – your mental health,  
your friendships that fill you with joy, your life of dancing, arts, books, música  
that lifts your spirit.

The price was paid, and the price we now pay is the liberty to seek peace, for it is ours.

The freedom to find a way to connect, to become, to be more than living each day with no purpose.

¿En qué vas a invertir tu corazón, tu mente, tu tiempo?

Church, what will you invest in this week?

It is my hope and my prayer that know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Holy-One is with you in your journey.

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.

Alicia Keys, Queen Latifah & Kathleen Battle - Superwoman (Live 2008)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwI1WKOgdnc&list=RDDwI1WKOgdnc&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwI1WKOgdnc&list=RDDwI1WKOgdnc&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.  
In this moment, mi gente, I want to invite you into prayer.

Maybe you feel like that fig tree – stuck, sin fruto, barely hanging on.  
Maybe you're carrying the price of old decisions, of worry, of fear.

Wherever you are, tal como estás, I invite you to bring your corazón before God.

If you'd like, you can close your eyes, poner la mano en tu corazón,  
or simply take a deep breath and say in your spirit:

"Dios, aquí estoy. (God, here I am.)

Show me where I am spending my time and energy (Muéstrame dónde estoy invirtiendo mi vida),

Teach me how to seek peace and be at peace.

Let us pray...

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Mi gente, as we go back to our homes, nuestros barrios, nuestras familias:  
remember that the price we pay can be an investment in healing, in justicia, in  
comunidad.

May the strength of the Holy-One go with you.

May you have the peace of the one who calls you family.

Vayan en paz, y échale ganas. (Go in peace and keep on keeping on)

Amén.

Music for the Journey

Gloria Estefan - Get On Your Feet

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