

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 share that First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is a real UCC church with full standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

And as a real UCC church, we want you to know:

No matter who you are,
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here.

Our service will be in both voice and text.

You can find today's bulletin or worship guide in the red book at the back.

The music will be on the media viewer,
so please be sure your voice and media are turned on.
If you're not sure how to do that, just let someone know and we'll gladly help.
There will also be a link in Nearby Chat so you can
watch in your browser if the viewer isn't working for you.

As a real UCC congregation,
we help support the wider church in prayer and in finances.
We're deeply grateful for any offering you feel led to share.
You can use the donation bowl next to the red book in the back or visit our website,
firstuccsl.org.

My name is Rev. Yadi Martínez-Reyna,
and I am one of the pastors in this community.
Anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

This Wednesday marks the start of Lent my favorite season.
Starting Monday at or Peace Grove Circle we will begin a new Meditation based on Kat Armas book "Sacred Belonging" a 40 day devotional on the liberating heart of scriptures.
Monday and Friday we will be going through the writings.

On Sunday's I will touch upon these books as well our scriptures in conversation with this same book and "Liturgies for resisting Empire" also by Kat Arma
I invite you to start a 40 day Journal to bring it with you on Sundays.

And now let us take a deep breath and begin our worship service.

"We come to worship God as the Lenten season begins, aware of our frailty and our failings.

We come seeking God's mercy, acknowledging our mortality.

Having received the waters of baptism, we prepare our hearts to be marked with ashes.

May we humble ourselves before God not with a yoke of burden but a mantle of freedom in Jesus' name.

(Bartlett, David L.; Taylor, Barbara Brown; Long, Kimberly Bracken. Feasting on the

Word Lenten Companion: A Thematic Resource for Preaching and Worship”

INVOCATION -

Will you pray with me,
Come Holy Spirit..

Meeting us as we come some of us might feel—tired, hopeful, distracted, longing to belong.

Gather us in your mercy. Quiet what is noisy in us, and awaken in us a desire to know you deeper.

Meet us here, with our open hearts and minds.

Holy One - Blessed those who are here and those who could not make it today.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

Gathering Song -

Erica Mason - Better (Official Music Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdUKvL8xC2g&list=RDvdUKvL8xC2g&start_radio=1

Our reading today comes from the Hebrew Bible, book of the Prophet Isaiah 58:1-12
NRSV

Shout out; do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet day after day they seek me

and delight to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness

and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;

they ask of me righteous judgments;

they want God on their side.

“Why do we fast, but you do not see?

Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day
and oppress all your workers.

You fast only to quarrel and to fight

and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today

will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose,

a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush

and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator[b] shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am."
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,

if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your needs in parched places
and make your bones strong,
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON

Holy Repair - From Dust to Dwelling

Today's scripture comes from the Hebrew Bible, from the prophet Isaiah.
But what was the context for this reading?

It sounds like it could have been written for today, but it was written long, long ago—often dated around 520–539 BCE, during or immediately following the Babylonian exile, about 70 years after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Some modern scholars attribute this section to a later prophet addressing a post-exilic community.

The earliest surviving physical evidence we have comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date to around the 2nd–1st century BCE.

Some scholars interpret these writings as a call to rebuild the walls and restore the city.

When I read it, it feels like Isaiah—or someone writing through his name—is urging the community to restore themselves. Restoration is tied closely to walls, stability, and a place to dwell.

Before I arrived here—this border town that is now home—I was so excited to restore my dad’s house.

The place had been abandoned, and for lack of better words, it was worn down. But I was excited.

I even made a Pinterest board for the project.

Do you know what Pinterest is?

I’m not making an advertisement for them—although they should throw us some lindens since I’m about to tell you all about it. Pinterest lets you create boards, and when you’re scrolling and find something you want to try, you “pin” it to your board.

So let’s say I type into the search bar: “Cool office DIY” (do it yourself). It brings up all these cool ideas people are doing, and you can save them for later.

So before I arrived, I had a Pinterest board called “Proyecto Casa Linda”(Project Beautiful Home), with pins about decorations, wall restoration projects, and gardening ideas.

And even though I still return to that board from time to time, the reality is: I did not expect it would be almost two months before any of that would be possible.

I have sat in the dirt digging for weeks to put a concrete beam under the house—scooting from section to section as the contractor directed—dig, place, set, reestablish support so the floors wouldn’t collapse.

My arms ached so badly that I bought heating pads I would hug at night, propping myself up with the hope that the next day would be better.

I have carried beams, planks, wood, 2x4s, concrete bags (that I nearly threw my back out on), dirt, water, and so much more.

I have fallen off the ladder, landed on the ER.

If anything could go wrong, it has gone wrong.

One day I was sitting outside my house, looking at the cracked wall, thinking, "All shall be well, and in all manner of things all shall be well."

I texted Doug and Pastor Chris and said, there's a sermon here—good news—I just can't see it yet.

Maybe it's my Western Christology.

Maybe it's my conservative evangelical upbringing that associates suffering with being a good servant of God.

Maybe it's that growing up, as a Latin person, I have only seen myself connect with being a servant

—a cleaner, a gardener—the one "in the background," the one who "doesn't make too much noise,"

the one who isn't supposed to think of themselves as anything else.

So: suffering = good Christian.

Good Christians = carry the cross (Luke 9:23, 14:27, and Matthew 16:24)

Good Christians = turn the other cheek and do nothing (Matthew 5:39)

Good Christians = be last (Mark 9:35, Matthew 20:16)

And the list can go on and on—reaffirming from my upbringing to take less space, speak less, not be greedy, selfish, rude, combative... and to be quiet.

Perhaps that's why I LOVE LENT!

I'm so emo... (slang for "emotional," rooted in 1980s introspective culture: black hair, dark clothing, moody, sad).

Ash Wednesday kicks off Lent—this 40-day season when we are called to pause and re-examine our lives, our actions, and our behaviors.

Today, I have a steady floor—one I'm proud to have helped rebuild.

I've become good at sheetrocking (still a bit off), and taping, and spreading joint compound, a

nd then watching it become a solid wall after paint goes on.

I've learned what drill bits to buy.

I can't endorse anyone here—I already did Pinterest for free! (Semi-kidding.)

Ash Wednesday invites us to look at our mortality—the body that will return to ashes.

Or as Kat says in her book: "God recycles. He made you from dust."

Our lives, like my house, probably have areas that need to be restored—

or you will fall through the floor.

There's the floor of temptation: when you know you should not do whatever it is the Spirit of God is telling you to walk away from. You need to reinforce those joints, those 2x4s—or tear the whole floor out and replace the beams that have been rotting away.

And maybe you need help, like I did with a contractor. Maybe you need a therapist, a spiritual companion (not the same, by the way), someone to walk with you as you work on that part of your house—one step at a time.

Today's scripture reminds a community returning to rebuild that God does not want all this flare and pretentious behavior.

Don't fast and then turn around and turn in your neighbor because they "look illegal."

Yup—that is happening.

Do not fast and serve your own interests while you oppress your workers, co-workers, family members, or people you don't like—maybe because you don't understand them.

God calls us to practice righteousness: to loose the bonds of injustice; to undo oppression—yours and others'. Feed the homeless. Share your bread with the hungry.

Make your bones strong.

Water the garden.

Satisfy needs in parched places. Drink from the living water.

All this to say: take care of you.

You can't help, or give, or be, if you don't take care of you.

It's not selfish. It's not putting yourself in front of others.

It is doing exactly what Jesus commanded.

Jesus said, "I tell you to love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

This is a fundamental commandment rooted in Leviticus 19:18.

You will be a safer person to be around when there's no floorboard to fall through, no live wires hidden in the walls, no dark corners filled with the parasites of greed and hate.

This Lent, it is time to rebuild—to recycle—to re-imagine joy beyond Hallmark happiness or an emo-Lent mood.

Lent is coming.

Ash Wednesday is coming.

"All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return."
(Ecclesiastes 3:20)

It is sacred belonging when you and I come together in community to worship our God who meets us where we are—no questions asked.

Only you can know what it is in your own home—your own life—
that needs to be rebuilt, reconsidered, reevaluated, readjusted, or reorganized.

And now is the time.

The scriptures reaffirm that we are in a mutual relationship between dirt and our bodies.

Kay says, “Our world is both stable and chaotic, balanced and dynamic.

Both states exist together yet still affirm the truth that we are part of a web of diversity that needs every creature—from beetle to elephant to deciduous leaf—to function in its fullness.”

Only you know when your life feels chaotic—
when anxiety overtakes you, and when everything feels gloomed over.
But let me remind you: we belong to this earth,
and from the start of Genesis we were invited to co-create—to be in concert together.

So friends—church—find your journal and ask yourself:
When was the last time you felt like you belonged to a web of life larger than yourself?
What can you nurture in your own hands that connects you to our ecosystem?
What cultivates belonging in your life?
Find what is yours to do—what to meditate on, what to hold, what to let go.

We are children of God, heirs to the throne, belonging to each other.
And it is the sacred belonging of our togetherness that makes us stronger.

So this Lent, I’m going to invite you to “de-colonize the Bible” as Kat invites us through her book Sacred Belonging.

She says, “To decolonize the Bible and the ways it has shaped us,
we must be able to imagine alternative perspectives that make possible a change in these power dynamics.”

She goes on to say, “This process emphasizes interpretations that are found on the periphery rather than center stage—leading us beyond the familiar to in-between places, places where new ways of thinking and seeing color our reality.”

Church, I invite you to journal—to draw—to write—
to enter this space with open hearts and minds.
Because to decolonize we must engage:

Kat goes on to say, “In every aspect of life, queering boundaries,
and allowing new possibilities to emerge.
We must decolonize—where we find ourselves hungry for new, liberating insights into our faith tradition.”

So church—before we leave today—don’t just hear Isaiah 58.

Practice it.
Start small.
Start honest.
Start where the floor creaks.

This week let your faith take up space.
Let your love get political—
in the Jesus way that reflects the living gospels of our still speaking God.

And when the empire tells you, “Be quiet, stay small, don’t make trouble,”
may the Spirit give you holy courage to say, “No.”

This week, ask God to show you one place in your life that needs repair—
not to shame you, but to restore you.

One beam to reinforce.

One habit to release.

One boundary to set.

One apology to offer.

One neighbor to feed.

One worker to honor.

One person to defend.

And this Wednesday when you feel the dust on your forehead,
when you remember you are made of earth and headed back to earth,
don’t hear it as doom.

Because we are dust—yes—
but we are dust that God breathes on.

We are dust that belongs.

So may we be a people who don’t perform holiness, but live it—
loosening the bonds, sharing the bread, welcoming the vulnerable,
repairing what’s been broken.

So go—rebuild what’s been broken.
Start with your own house.
And then help rebuild this world.

In Jesus’ name.
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.

Selah Soul - "Love Your Self (Official Music Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=javhF3S1LJk&list=RDvdUKvL8xC2g&index=13>

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

God of dust and breath,
you meet us exactly where we are—tired, hopeful, carrying more than we show.
In this season, rebuild what's cracked in us.

Strengthen what sags.
Heal what's tender.

Give us courage to let go of what harms, and grace to receive the help we need.

Make our worship honest and our repentance concrete:
teach us to loose the bonds of injustice,
to share our bread,
to welcome the vulnerable,
to repair what has been broken in our homes and in our world.

And when we feel dry, water us again—
until we become a watered garden,
repairers of the breach,
a safe place for others to stand.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

May the God who made you from dust and calls you beloved strengthen your bones and steady your steps.

And when the world feels dry,
may you be like a watered garden—
a safe place for others to stand.

En el nombre del Creator, Jesu Cristo y Espiritu Santo

Go in Peace,

Amen.

Music for the Journey

Imagine Dragons - On Top Of The World (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5tWYmIOWGk>