

## 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](http://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.

We are in the season of Lent.  
And as a reminder we are gathering on Mondays and Friday mornings  
at the Peace Grove Circle where we are reading and reflecting on the book based on  
Kat Armas book "Sacred Belonging" a 40 day devotional on the liberating heart of  
scriptures.

Today we're stepping into a familiar story: Jesus in the wilderness.  
But we're going to listen for something you might've missed—  
the quiet bargain underneath the temptation...the "if...then" deals that still show up  
in our lives.

So take a breath.  
Pay attention to what stirs in you.  
Because before we're done,  
we're going to name what we're hungry for  
—and talk about how to walk in freedom  
without selling our souls to anything that can't satisfy.

INVOCATION -

Will you pray with me,  
Come, Holy Spirit.  
Come and settle our hearts,  
quiet our minds, and gather us into Your presence.

Come, Breath of God, and meet us exactly as we are  
—tired or hopeful, distracted or hungry, carrying joy or carrying weight.

Open our ears to hear what is true.  
Open our eyes to see where You are moving.  
Open our hands to receive Your grace,  
and our lives to respond with love.

Form us in the way of Jesus—steadfast in the wilderness,  
faithful in the world.

And let this worship be more than words;  
let it shape us for freedom, compassion, and courage.  
We pray in the name of Christ.  
Amen.

Gathering Song -

Jon Batiste - BIG MONEY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkS2xydpLIg&list=RD3YHVC1DcHmo&index=4>

## SCRIPTURES

Our reading today comes from the Gospel of Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil.

He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished.  
The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones  
to become loaves of bread.”

But he answered, “It is written,  
‘One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the  
temple, saying to him,  
“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,  
‘He will command his angels concerning you,’  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written,  
‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory,  
and he said to him,  
“All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.’ ”

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The Word of God for the people of God  
Thanks be to God

When the Enemy Quotes Scripture, Remember: The Gospel Isn't for Sale

These are scriptures we've read many times.  
We've seen movies and plays, heard sermons, read books—and still they carry power.  
They show us a man at his weakest moment: tempted, and yet victorious.

But the words that kept coming up for me this week felt like an equation:  
If... then...  
If... then...

Let's see:

“If you are the Son of God, then... command these stones to become loaves of bread.”  
If you're hungry, then do this and be fed.

Simple.

If you are the powerful Son of God, then... take a dive...  
and prove it—because nothing is going to happen.

Makes sense.

One more:

If you bow the knee, then... I will give you all your eyes can see.

That one always makes me laugh.

Like... you are going to give me—the Creator—my own creation?

But friends, isn't this what life has been about from the start?

Before money, before systems, there was bartering.  
You got water, I got flour—let's trade a bit.  
Or combine what we have and make some tortillas.

And if you look at these three temptations, you can see some human needs underneath:

- Hunger for food
- The desire to prove yourself

• Power

You want food?

Then become the man—show your power—own everything.

Isn't that capitalism?

In the United States—and I'm speaking from my lens, so I can't claim this for every country, though I'm guessing it's similar—so much of life gets framed as wealth, power, and success... or poverty.

Capitalism gets sold as prosperity, efficiency, and innovation. You get, you buy, you sell, you invest, you get more money, and repeat.

But that story tends to work best for people who are already positioned to win: those with access, education, stability, and a little luck—hopefully not getting wrecked when a company can't pay wages because it goes bankrupt.

So capitalism can create wealth inequality, market instability, and environmental exploitation.

And whether we like it or not, that's the world we're living in.

So what does that have to do with us as Christ followers?

Because... we need things.

We need food.

We need shelter.

We need security.

Rev. Timothy A Beach-Verhey says,

“The temptation of Israel was to love the gifts of God more than the giver. Similarly, in the church today, we are tempted to measure God's value by the realization of our own desires, rather than to conform ourselves, our desires, and our values to God's will.” (Feasting on the Gospels Mathew)

If you noticed, in the scriptures Jesus was basically like, “Nope. Get back, fool,” and he quoted scripture.

As a young evangelical, this was the model for sustaining my spiritual life: resist the devil so he would flee. But that meant I had to know the Word.

Because if you don't know the Word, how can you defend yourself against temptation?

Today, it is true for me to know the scriptures so I can tell when they are being misused.

And I also know now that if I focus on the actions of Christ,

and I orient my life toward God—not toward the things God provides,  
and not toward whatever is happening in this thing called life—then I’m less likely  
to get tripped up.  
Let me take it a bit further.

They say, “Don’t go shopping when you’re hungry.”  
Have you heard that?

Because I want to buy everything.  
I imagine all the plates I can make, all the wonderful food I can cook.  
I am a chef!

Then my stomach grumbles and I realize:  
I ain’t got time for that. So I start buying things for later,  
and then I buy things for now. What can I pop in the microwave?

Life without my spouse means I’m buying all kinds of things—  
and probably not the best choices as a diabetic.

The cart has chips,  
Pepsi, and all kinds of stuff that,  
if she was shopping with me—or better yet,  
if she handed me a list—I would do a whole lot better.

But that’s human nature: when you’re hungry,  
you will do what you can not to be hungry.

You’ll pull into a fast-food place because you didn’t pack lunch to heat up.  
When I started working as a youth pastor in a church in Dallas,  
I began volunteering at a youth center.

I remember they had rules when I first started—  
solid boundaries to protect the young people and protect you as a volunteer.

They made perfect sense:  
Don’t take young people in your car.  
Don’t give rides.  
Don’t be alone with young people without another adult,  
no matter their age.

Don’t give young people money—no matter what.  
When in doubt, ask.  
And the list went on and on.  
At first, some of it felt extreme.

But later I learned these young people,  
in particular, were in the streets.

They were hungry.  
They were in survival mode.

And they would do anything, say anything, take anything from you—and it wasn't personal.

When we have a need, we will find a way to fulfill that need.  
Maybe that's why credit checks and deep background checks exist for bankers—  
or why, until this new season, those checks were expected for government jobs.

And that's part of what makes things feel so unbalanced right now—  
because the checks and balances aren't there like they should be.

In the same way, quoting scripture to resist temptation—like Christ did—became,  
for me, “using your sword” (the Bible). But too often,  
people used that sword to quote away the liberals, the unsaved,  
the unholy, and other religious people who weren't “really christians.”

Christ was tempted. He resisted.  
And after 40 days—when he truly needed food—he said, in effect:  
I won't trade who I am for your promises.

And honestly... could the enemy of our lives even give him what he needed?  
Food?  
Could Jesus not get food?  
Fame?  
Ah—Jesus could've gotten down from the cross. Instead of the whole place going dark  
for a while,  
bring lightning and walk right out—BAM.

Power?  
Everything being offered was created by him!  
But isn't that what people crave—fame, fortune, and power?

Social media tests that hunger every day:  
how many likes, how many followers?  
And Christian Nationalism has found a home in people who are hungry—  
hungry to be right, hungry for power, hungry for control.

It offers a way to “make sense” of scripture that fits an agenda.  
What is Christian Nationalism?

The Disciples of Christ had a great explanation,  
“Christian nationalism is not simply loving your country or praying for its leaders.

It is an ideology, a racialized, political theology, that fuses allegiance to Jesus  
with allegiance to the nation.  
It mythologizes America's founding as a divine act, portrays its history through a  
whitewashed lens of moral exceptionalism, and declares the United States to be God's  
chosen nation.”

When Jesus resisted the devil—the enemy of our lives—  
in that desert, it was about more than hunger and bread.

He said,  
'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

But that does not mean: go quote scripture out of context, or find a verse that fits your agenda.

It means: look at the nature of who Jesus is.

Jesus tells us he did not come to abolish the law—  
meaning he did not come to do away with what the prophets had written or deny the way things were—  
but rather to infuse it with love and give us a different perspective. (Matthew 5:17)

To complete it with the reminder:  
love your God with all your heart and all your soul,  
and love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew, Mark, Leviticus)

It came to tell us to do what we do for the least of these as if we do it to him.  
(Matthew 25:40)

So when you hear scripture quoted at you—  
when things are being said that sound God-like—measure it against these things.

Because the devil—the evil one—was quoting scripture too. He was saying,  
"But it is written..." and then, "If you do this... then..."

And Jesus came back with, "It is also written."  
So it is imperative, church, that we name what we're hungry  
for before we go into the supermarket.

Find what your temptation is.  
Find what the lies are—before they come your way and you fall into something that  
brings you down physically, emotionally, financially, or spiritually.

Jesus was the Christ.  
And when people would tell me, "  
Be more like Christ," I couldn't help but think of Superman.  
Superman

Superman has superpowers he has to tone down to be more human.  
I can't compare to that.

But I can learn this: even with power,  
Jesus chose not to use it for the sake of my salvation, for my reality, and as a way  
to say,  
"si se puede." Yes you can. You can survive too.

Find your community.

Find those resources.  
Find your sobriety.

Find your people—to hold you and help you.  
Find what you need.  
Because it's not if trouble comes that we must prepare for—  
it's when it comes.

And when it comes, you're going to be prayed up and okay.  
Do not be deceived by beautiful quotes or scriptures that lead  
you to deny someone else's humanity and sacredness.

Do not be deceived.  
This week, don't just admire Jesus in the desert—practice Jesus in your life.

Before you step into the supermarket of your routines,  
your newsfeed, your spending, your relationships,  
your politics—name what you're hungry for.

Because whatever you refuse to name will end up naming you.  
So do three things—real, concrete, not theoretical:

First: Identify your “if...then.”  
What's the deal the world keeps offering you?  
If you prove yourself, then you'll be worthy.  
If you get more, then you'll be safe.

If you control them, then you'll have peace.  
Write it down.  
Say it out loud.

Bring it into the light—  
because temptation thrives in secrecy.

Second: Choose your “it is written.”  
Not a verse you can weaponize—but a truth that forms you.  
Measure every voice, every post, every preacher, every policy, every

“God told me...” against Jesus:  
Does it lead to love of God and love of neighbor?  
Does it protect the least of these?  
Does it honor human dignity?

If it doesn't—no matter how “biblical” it sounds—  
it is not the voice you follow.

Third: Fast from the lie and feed somebody.  
Fast from the lie that your life is about bread alone  
—likes alone—power alone—being right alone.  
And then take what you would've spent, posted,

argued, or hoarded—and turn it into mercy.

Make a call to the lonely.  
Apologize where you've been harsh.  
Donate to the pantry.

Stand up for the person being scapegoated.  
Show up at the meeting.

Protect the vulnerable.  
Tell the truth when it costs you something.  
Because Lent is not a season for spiritual performance—it's training for freedom.

And when the world comes at you with, "If you are... then prove it,"  
you don't have to take the deal.

You can say, with Jesus and with your whole chest:  
I will not trade my soul for bread.  
I will not trade my neighbor for power.

I will not trade the gospel for a flag.  
And then—don't just say it.

Live it.  
Let 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.

GloRilla - RAIN DOWN ON ME (feat. Kirk Franklin & Maverick City Music)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBtYIaIgu6U&list=RDFBtYIaIgu6U&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBtYIaIgu6U&list=RDFBtYIaIgu6U&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.

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and loving God,  
we come to You honest about our hunger—hunger for bread, for approval, for control.  
Jesus,  
in the wilderness You faced the same bargains we face:  
If...then...

Forgive us for believing the lie that we must prove ourselves,  
gain more, or overpower others to be okay.

Give us discernment, Lord,  
because we know even the devil can quote scripture.

Teach us to measure every message against Your heart:  
love You, love our neighbor, and care for the least of these.

Deliver us from any gospel that becomes a weapon, and from any faith that costs  
someone else their humanity.  
Make us a people who will not sell the gospel for comfort, influence, or power.

Strengthen those in the desert today—the sick, the grieving,  
the anxious, the addicted, the exhausted. Be their bread and their shelter.

And when temptation comes, give us courage to say, “It is also written,” and to live  
it with love.

In Jesus’ name,  
Amen.

#### BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now with courage and clarity.  
You are God’s beloved—grounded, held, and never for sale.

When you feel pressured to prove yourself, to grasp for more, or to choose control  
over compassion, remember: the gospel isn’t for sale.

So walk in the way of Jesus—love God with your whole life, love your neighbor as  
yourself, and  
care for the least of these.

May the grace of Christ lead you,  
may the love of God sustain you,  
and may the Holy Spirit strengthen you

to live free, live faithful, and live brave.  
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Jon Batiste - I NEED YOU

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXT00sWwuTQ&list=RD3YHVC1DcHmo&index=3>