

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.

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 also gather in gratitude for the gift of community,
for the presence of the Holy One among us,
and during this month of March we also pause to recognize Women's History Month—a time to remember and celebrate the courage, leadership, creativity,
and faith of women who have helped shape our communities and our world.

Today, as we worship together,
may we also listen for the voices, stories,
and wisdom that continue to shape the church and the world today.
Will you pray with me?

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place and wherever the digital connections share this

good news.

Holy One, We gather in your presence with grateful hearts.

Thank you for the generations of women whose courage, faith, and vision have helped shape our lives and our communities.

Open our hearts today to your Spirit.

Guide our worship, inspire our thoughts, and help us become people who bring dignity, justice, and compassion into the world.

Amen.

Gathering Song -

Crowder, Zach Williams - STILL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3rcQA8mLj0>

SCRIPTURES

Our reading today comes from the Gospel of John 4:13-30 (The Message)

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!"

He said, "Go call your husband and then come back." "I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough."

"Oh, so you're a prophet!

Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

"Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem.

You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day.

God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God.

Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth.

That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship.

God is sheer being itself—Spirit.

Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

The woman said, “I don't know about that.

I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story.”

“I am he,” said Jesus. “You don't have to wait any longer or look any further.” Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked.

They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left.

In her confusion she left her water pot.

Back in the village she told the people, “Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?”

And they went out to see for themselves.

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

Sermon - The Woman at the Well... and the Ones We Avoid”

Today's scripture begins at verse 5, but the chapter actually opens with Jesus traveling through Samaria and arriving at a place called Sychar.

The setting is simple: Jesus is sitting by Jacob's well while his disciples go into the village to buy food—lunch.

That is the background when this Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well, and Jesus asks her for a drink.

This is certainly a gospel reading we have heard before.

Jesus asks for water.

She responds, “Where is your bucket?”

He tells her that he has water she will never thirst from again.

Then Jesus, as the young people might say today, “opens the library.”

Meaning he reads her completely.

“You have had five husbands, and the one you are with now is not your husband.”

She replies, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”

There is so much we could talk about in this chapter of John.
But the words that caught my attention—especially because we are in the month of March,
when we celebrate Women’s History Month—are the words addressed to her:
“Woman.”

Jesus says, “Believe me, woman...”

And later, in verse 27, we see the disciples’ reaction.
They were surprised that he was speaking with her.

Some translations capture the feeling this way: they could not believe he was talking with that kind of woman.
That woman.

Women’s History Month is a time when we celebrate the achievements, contributions, and leadership of women throughout history who have helped shape our world.

And in many ways,
this unnamed Samaritan woman helped shape the world of those in Sychar when she ran back to the village and said:
“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?”

That is the lens through which I want to look at this story today.
But those words still echo:
That woman.

I often share that I was raised in a conservative evangelical church.
Church life filled almost every day of the week.

On Tuesdays we had women’s worship services, where the women led everything.

On Thursdays we had children’s services—again, the entire service led by children.

On Saturdays we had youth services led by the youth.

Then on Sundays the men led the service.

We had Sunday school in the morning, lunch together,
a four-hour break, and then returned for the evening service.

Between all of these services, people met constantly—planning, practicing, cleaning the church, preparing music, rehearsing skits.

Church life was my life.
There was school, and then there was church.

I remember my mother helping lead the children's service.
That meant puppets, skits, and all kinds of creative things for Thursdays.

The year before she died,
a young woman started coming to help us plan the service and work with the puppets.

She was cool. I didn't think much of it—people came and went helping out all the time.

After my mother passed away, I did not see her again—except occasionally when we would drive into the church neighborhood and I would see her standing at the corner store with a man.

One day I recognized her, and the person driving me said:
“That is such a shame. Such a waste of youth.
Give her nine months and she'll be barefoot with a child, and the cycle continues.
That's what happens to women like that.”

At the time, I did not fully understand what was being said.
But when I read this text, that memory came back.

One day, after hearing comments like that and seeing her occasionally at the corner store,
I asked if I could run to the store for something.

I was told no—if I was thirsty, there was water from the faucet outside.
But somehow I ended up going to the store anyway.

I pretended to be looking for something even though I had no money.
I don't even remember why I risked the punishment.

I just wanted to see her.
She approached me and said,
“I'm sad your mom is gone.

You know, when these people threw me out of the church for being a 'loose woman,' your mom invited me to help with the puppets and create things. I like art, and I had fun.”

I invited her to come back and help us again.
She said, “No. Not without your mom.
I saw how she fought those old mean ladies to leave me alone.”

And I wonder...
Did Jesus do something like that for the Samaritan woman?

Because if you read the text,
Jewish people would not normally be caught speaking to Samaritans.

And certainly not a man speaking alone with a woman.

And yet Jesus does more than speak to her.

He begins with a simple act of humility:
“Will you give me a drink?”

In other words:
“I have nothing against you.
Would you share your water with me?”

And then he offers something deeper:
living water.

Water that satisfies beyond physical thirst.
Meanwhile, the disciples return and stare at her.

Their reaction reminds me of what that young woman once said:
“Your mom didn’t let those old mean ladies bother me.”

Were the disciples thinking something similar?
Jesus... you’re talking to her?

We just arrived in town, but her reputation is known.
She is not someone you want to be associated with.

But isn’t that exactly what the Gospel invites us to do?

To associate with those pushed to the margins.

To offer living water to those who thirst.

To share.

To give.

To ask something of people the world assumes have nothing to offer.

When Jesus tells her that the time is coming when people
will worship not only on this mountain or in Jerusalem, he is pointing toward
something bigger—the resurrection,
the tearing of the temple veil, the opening of God’s family beyond boundaries.

Worship, he says, must be in spirit and in truth.
That means looking honestly at the people around us and refusing to pretend.

Worship in spirit and truth is authentic.
It is alive. It connects us to the Holy One in a way that recognizes the dignity and
humanity of others.

And notice something important.
When Jesus tells her about her life—about the husbands and the man she is with now—

he does not shame her.

He does not insult her.
He does not condemn her.

He simply says:
“Go call your husband.”
Go call someone.

And she does.
She goes and calls the whole town.

“Come see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”
I can almost imagine the townspeople saying,
“Girl, everyone knows who you are. What are you talking about?”

And her saying, “No, really—this man might be the Messiah!

He knew things about me you don’t even know!”
Her response to encountering Jesus was not to hide.

It was to testify.
The woman who had come to the well alone—
perhaps because people avoided her—became the one who brought the entire village to
Jesus.

The one people whispered about became the one who shared the good news.
And that brings us to the question for us today.

How many people are still standing at wells in our communities,
carrying the weight of labels placed on them?

That woman.
That person.
People like that.

And how often does the church become the crowd whispering instead of the voice
offering living water?

My mother chose differently.
She saw someone the church had pushed away and said,
“You can come create with us.”

Jesus did the same thing.
He saw a woman the world had defined by her past and said,
“You have something to offer.”

So here is the invitation for us today.

The next time you hear someone described as “that kind of person,” pause.

The next time someone is pushed to the edges of community, remember the well.

Remember the woman.

Remember that the Gospel does not grow through exclusion—it grows through encounter.

Because sometimes the very person we are taught to avoid is the one who will carry the message of hope back to the whole village.

So may we be a people who offer living water.

May we be a people who speak with those others avoid.

And may we be a people who make room at the well.

Because the good news of the Gospel is this:

The story of God is often carried forward by the very people the world tried to silence.

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.

Dolly Parton - Jesus & Gravity (Official Music Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gyqjSn-q34&list=RD_gyqjSn-q34&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

Closing Prayer

Holy and loving God,
You who meet us at the wells of our lives,
we thank you for seeing us fully and loving us still.

Help us to see others the way Jesus did—
not through labels, rumors, or judgments,
but with dignity, curiosity, and grace.

Give us courage to reach out to those who feel alone,
to offer kindness where there has been rejection,
and to share the living water of compassion and hope.

Refresh our spirits, renew our hearts,
and guide us to be a community where all are welcome.

In your holy presence we pray.
AMEN

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

May the Holy One send you into this week with open eyes and open hearts.

May you carry kindness where there is judgment, and compassion where there is distance.
And this week, choose to see someone the way Jesus saw the woman at the well—
with dignity, curiosity, and grace.

Go in peace, and may you be a bearer of living water wherever you go.
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Katrina & The Waves - Walking On Sunshine (Official Music Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPUmE-tne5U&list=RDipUmE-tne5U&start_radio=1