

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.

As we gather during the season of Lent, we're mindful of all that it holds—moments of reflection, stories of resilience, and opportunities to deepen how we show up for one another and for the world.

It's a time to remember who we are and whose we are.

And today, we step into a powerful story from the Gospel of John—one many of us know well.

A story of loss, grief, and a question we've all asked at some point: of the Holy-One:

"Where were you?"

So wherever you are this evening—whether you come with faith, doubt, or somewhere in between—there is space for you here.

Let's lean in together.

Will you pray with me?

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.
Move among us in this digital space through the networks, routers, and wi-fi waves
to

Open our hearts, our minds, and our spirits to hear what you would have us hear
today.

Meet us in our questions, in our doubts, and in our longing.

Speak through the Word, and stir within us new life.
We are here, O Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit—
ready to receive.

Amen.

Gathering Song -

Trip Lee - Lazarus ft. Thi'sl (Lyric Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87nyWNo4kCE&list=RD87nyWNo4kCE&start_radio=1

Pastor Yadi:11:1-7

Our reading today comes from the Gospel of John 11:1-7; 17-20; 28-32; (The Message)

11:1-7

A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.
This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then
wiped them with her hair.

It was her brother Lazarus who was sick.

So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick."
When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal.

It will become an occasion to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son."

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, but oddly,
when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days.

After the two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

(Friend 1- v.17-32)

When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead.
Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away,
and many of the Jews were visiting Martha and Mary,
sympathizing with them over their brother.

Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him.
Mary remained in the house.

Martha said, "Master, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you."

(V. 28-32)

After saying this, she went to her sister Mary and whispered in her ear, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you."

The moment she heard that, she jumped up and ran out to him.

Jesus had not yet entered the town but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

When her sympathizing Jewish friends saw Mary run off, they followed her, thinking she was on her way to the tomb to weep there.

Mary came to where Jesus was waiting and fell at his feet, saying, "Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Friend 2 - (v.37-44)

Others among them said, "Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man."

Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb. It was a simple cave in the hillside with a slab of stone laid against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, "Master, by this time there's a stench.

He's been dead four days!"

Jesus looked her in the eye. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" Then, to the others, "Go ahead, take away the stone."

They removed the stone.

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed,

"Father, I'm grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me."

Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face.

Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him loose."

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON

Title: Where Were You?

Today's gospel is one of the most well-known stories—because a man is raised from the dead.

Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha, dies.

These were close friends of Jesus.

His disciples knew them, and they follow Jesus back, expecting him to go see his sick friend.

But something in this story feels off.

Jesus gets word that his friend is sick... and he stays where he is for two more days.

Does that sound like a good idea?

When someone you love is sick—at death's doorstep—you drop everything.

You go.

You show up.

But Jesus stays.

He takes his time.

And by the time he arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days.

Martha comes out and says,

"If you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died."

Martha then goes and tells Mary the teacher is calling you but we never read that.

I wonder if maybe because Mary was upset.

And you can almost hear it in her voice too:

"If only you had been here..."

Which is another way of saying:

Where were you?

I hear the disappointment in their voices.

And if we're honest, that kind of disappointment is not foreign to us.

It's the kind we sometimes feel toward God.

I know it is for me.

I left the church.

I rebelled against my upbringing.

I even hated God when my mother died.

Because I kept asking:
Where were you?!

For eleven months, my mother was in intensive care.

What was supposed to be a surgery to repair her only lung went wrong.

For eleven months, I sat on the stairs of that hospital.

Waiting. Hoping they'd let me in.

Because we are a very big family –sometimes there wasn't room for me.

And I kept asking:

Where were you?

Pastors came.

Reverends came.

Prophets, anointed folks, powerful women of the desert—laying hands, casting demons, declaring:
“By your wounds we shall be healed!”

Y nada. (Nothing)

The church prayed.
They fasted.
They cried.

They spoke in tongues.

You know it took me a hot minute to return to Pentecost type of worship because of all this.

But I was able to reconcile and I love this worship's style.

But it took a minute because of disappointment, all of the prayers, fasting, and show of spiritual fortitude y nada.

On the other side, my secular side of the family—was doing their thing too.

Wear this.

Touch this.

Say this.

Go see a curandera. (sometimes they are called witch doctors)

Do a limpia. (a cleansing)

And still...

Y nada.

So I asked again:

Jesus... where were you?

Have you ever been there?

Where you pray, pray, and pray...

y nada.

Where you watch someone you love slipping away...
and still... nothing.

That feeling?

That's disappointment.

And let me say this clearly:

It's okay to feel it.

Don't ignore it.

Don't bury it.

When I counsel couples before a wedding I always ask them what their game plan is when they get upset, mad or disappointed in each other.

I often get disbelief.

What? Us? No...we love each other.

It is easier to know how one response and what one needs before something happens.

Emotions can get the better of us and if we don't have a game plan, an idea of how or what we need to do we might hurt someone, or each other.

And if you don't talk about it or address it...well one day it's going to boil over—and like the Hulk, you're going to turn green or it is going to make you feel green.

See, I understand Martha and Mary.
They watched their brother suffer.

They called on Jesus—their friend.

And he still took his time.

I mean, come on—he could've teleported!

Here he is, healing strangers all over Judea...but when his friend needs him, he lets him die?

Are you kidding me?

And then we get the shortest verse in the Bible:

“Jesus wept.”

It's small—but it's heavy.

Jesus wept.

Why?

Was this a show?

I mean seriously Jesus, we all know you can snap your fingers and he wakes up!

You even told the disciples he's just asleep.

You knew what you were going to do.

And you're crying?

I can be very cynical and sometimes it is that edge of come on....Jesus really?

But perhaps friends he wept because his very human side aches to see his friends in pain.

Perhaps, because even with us knowing resurrection is coming...doesn't erase the pain of loss.

Martha and Mary are still grieving.

Still disappointed.

“Yeah, yeah... resurrection someday.”

“Sure, God can do anything.”

But right now?

It feels too late.

And here's the truth:
As humans, we disappoint each other.

We try not to—but we do.

I try not to disappoint my kid—but oh, he remembers everything.
Date. Time. Location. And he has an iPad so he wrote it on his calendar with alarms
and everything!

When I work with teens, I tell them:
“I'm here for you. I'll hold your trust like a vault.”

But...

I can't stay quiet if you're hurting yourself.
I can't stay quiet if you're hurting others.
I can't stay quiet if someone is hurting you.

And one day?
I will disappoint you.

All I ask from you is to talk about it.
To let us respectfully and mindfully walk through it.

Because if you don't deal with things, they fester.
Like a boil—yeah, I said it—gross, but true.

Grief is like that too.
It's a process.

Sometimes a lifelong one.
You can't do it alone.

That's why I tell folks—therapy and spiritual direction go together.
One helps you process your emotions.

The other helps you listen for God in the middle of it.

Back to the story.
Jesus finally says:
“Where is he?”

Then he asks,
“Do you believe?”

And they're probably like,
“Yeah... but it's too late.”

Jesus says:
Open the tomb.
And they're like:
“Jesus... he's been dead four days. He stinks.”

But Jesus calls him out anyway.
And Lazarus walks out.

And then Jesus says something powerful:
“Unbind him. Let him go.”

In The Message:
“Unwrap him and let him loose.”

That right there... that’s the word for us today.
Because some of us are still bound.
Bound by grief.

Bound by anger.

Bound by disappointment.

Still asking:
Where were you?

And God can handle that question.

Scripture says:
“A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

You cannot break God.

You cannot offend God.

You cannot disappoint God.

If that were true—I wouldn’t be here.

I’ve said and done some things...
like, “Where the hell were you?”

I curse like a sailor at times and well...Im sooo very human.

And God still stays.

Lazarus is almost a side character in this story.

But everyone is talking about him.

So let me ask you:

What is your Lazarus?

What is that place in your life where you feel disappointment?

Where something died?

A dream?

A relationship?

Hope?

Even now—

I look at our world, and I feel it.

The disappointment.

How long will injustice run free?

How long will people be dehumanized?

As Paulo Freire in the *Theology of the Oppressed*, said: “Any attempt to treat people as less than human... dehumanizes us all.”

When we stop seeing each other as human—we lose something in ourselves.

But we follow the one who said:

Unbind him.

Let him go.

So here's the call:

This week—bring your full self to God.

Your questions.

Your anger.

Your disappointment.

Don't sanitize it.

Don't clean it up.

Say it:

“Where were you?”

And then...

Let the Creator begin to unwrap you.

Let the Holy Spirit loosen what's been tight in your spirit.

And as you are unbound—

Go and live like someone set free.

In your words—do no harm.

In your actions—do no harm.

In how you treat people—see them.

Because you were once bound too.

And the one who called you out...

is still calling others out.

So today—

Come out of the tomb.

Let yourself be unwrapped.

And walk...free.

And may you also have the courage, the strength to know when you need to ask Jesus
plain and simple where are you?

And through the wind in your face, the laugh of a child, the loving gestures of your
cat, your pup, your fur babies may you hear the Holy One through them say, I am
right here with you.

May 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.

Weep With Me Lyrics _ Rend Collective 2018

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-1CV-QS5Jk&list=RDs-1CV-QS5Jk&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:

Gracious and loving God,
We come to you today carrying questions,
carrying grief,
carrying disappointment.

Some of us are still asking,
"Where were you?"
Meet us in that place, O God—
not with judgment, but with compassion.

Sit with us in our sorrow,
and remind us that you weep with us.

Unbind what holds us—
fear, anger, pain, and doubt.

Breathe new life into the places that feel dead.

Call us out of our tombs, and give us the courage to walk free.

And as you free us, send us to be people who do no harm, who love deeply,
and who see others with your eyes.

We trust that you are with us—
even now.

In your holy name we pray,

Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now into this week unafraid to bring your whole self before God—
your questions, your grief, even your "Where were you?"

And as you go,
let God begin to unbind you—to loosen what has held you back
and call you into new life.

Then live like people set free:
do no harm, love boldly, and see others as fully human.

Go in peace, and walk liberated.
Amen.

MUSIC FOR THE JOURNEY

Kool & The Gang - Celebration

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GwjfUFyY6M&list=RD3GwjfUFyY6M&start_radio=1