

WELCOME

Thank you for coming!

We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.

This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.

I invite you to light a candle,

wherever you are,

as our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,

to remind us of God's presence with us,

and to set aside this as a time of worship for you.

As we begin our worship, this is Palm Sunday

So I invite you to take a palm branch

from the red bulletin holder in the back and wear it.

Of course, while you're there you can also get a bulletin for tonight's service.

Now let us all take a deep breath,

breathing in the peace of God

breathing out the stresses of the day

we may have carried here with us.

Let God hold them for you, at least for a while,

as we gather on this holy ground to worship God.

. 'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

“Hosanna” Jesus Christ Superstar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iE6GhHcfKN0>

Our service will be in voice and text.

Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .

There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.

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 anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.

As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!

And as a 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."

We celebrate God's Love everyday.

and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in life.

If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry

there is a donation bowl in the back,

or you can go to our website

firstuccsl.org

We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Holy Week.

Palm Sunday, of course, is how we enter this holiest of times in the liturgical year.

I have heard it said that this week encapsulates the whole of the Gospel. Celebration and ministry, Teaching and challenging the powers and principalities of the world, Death and resurrection.

We'll hear the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem from the Gospel according to Matthew.

Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Matthew, chapter 21, verses 1 through 11.

MATTHEW 21:1-11 (NRSVUE)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.

If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.'

And he will send them immediately."

This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

"Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

The Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

"Untied"

Let us pray . . .

Yesterday was the No Kings march
Taking place in 3100 places around the globe
Big cities, small towns, and online
With an estimated 8 million participants

Marching, singing, waving signs
With a festive atmosphere, but a serious purpose
And an awareness that they were poking the tiger
That peaceful protest can suddenly turn deadly
Just ask Renee Good or Alex Pretti
But 8 million people refused to be chained by fear
And marched in the name of hope.
And if there were echoes of another march
Millenia ago on the streets of Jersusalem
Well, I wasn't the only one to notice.
UCC pastor Maren Tirabassi posted this poem yesterday
Entitled, "A detail of the story":
First, untie the donkey
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied --
from some sorrow
or some guilt,
from somebody else's judgment --
too young for the ride, or too old,
too much tattoo ink on the skin,
parkinsons in the hands,
pregnant in the belly.
First, untie the donkey,
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied -
from some abusive relationship
or some really intricate
self-made knots,
because what binds
always pretends to be a blessing.
This is just the donkey God wants
for the ride -
this burro with no documents,
or others not-yet-ridden
because they are --
gender-queer, recovery-thin,
on-the-spectrum.
So, first untie the donkey -
this one -
the one who needs a parade,
the one willing to carry both joy
and the premonition of cross,
the one embracing
a day of song and danger,
fetlock deep in palms,
and a life that will echo ... Hosanna.
[pause for silence
I'm going to read this poem again
Because I think we often don't really catch the meaning
Only hearing it once.

This time, listen for a word or phrase that jumps out at you,
That shimmers for you.
and in the silent pause afterwards
consider how that word or phrase
may connect with your life right now.

First, untie the donkey
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied --
from some sorrow
or some guilt,
from somebody else's judgment --
too young for the ride, or too old,
too much tattoo ink on the skin,
parkinsons in the hands,
pregnant in the belly.

First, untie the donkey,
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied -
from some abusive relationship
or some really intricate
self-made knots,
because what binds
always pretends to be a blessing.
This is just the donkey God wants
for the ride -
this burro with no documents,
or others not-yet-ridden
because they are --
gender-queer, recovery-thin,
on-the-spectrum.

So, first untie the donkey -
this one -
the one who needs a parade,
the one willing to carry both joy
and the premonition of cross,
the one embracing
a day of song and danger,
fetlock deep in palms,
and a life that will echo ... Hosanna.

[pause for silence]

I invite you to type the word or phrase that spoke to you
In Nearby Chat.

[pause]

I'm going to read it one more time.

This time, listen for whether there is an invitation for you in this poem.

First, untie the donkey
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied --
from some sorrow

or some guilt,
from somebody else's judgment --
too young for the ride, or too old,
too much tattoo ink on the skin,
parkinsons in the hands,
pregnant in the belly.
First, untie the donkey,
the one that's standing at the gate
waiting to be untied -
from some abusive relationship
or some really intricate
self-made knots,
because what binds
always pretends to be a blessing.
This is just the donkey God wants
for the ride -
this burro with no documents,
or others not-yet-ridden
because they are --
gender-queer, recovery-thin,
on-the-spectrum.
So, first untie the donkey -
this one -
the one who needs a parade,
the one willing to carry both joy
and the premonition of cross,
the one embracing
a day of song and danger,
fetlock deep in palms,
and a life that will echo ... Hosanna.
[pause for silence]
What we did,
Listening several times to a text,
With some silence in between,
And with a different focus each time,
is an ancient spiritual practice
Called "lectio divina" or sacred reading.
It's a way of praying with a text, usually scripture or poetry,
Rather than studying it.
By noticing what stands out for you in the text,
You let the Spirit speak to through it.
Because, as we like to say in the UCC,
"God is still speaking."
Each of you will probably have heard something different in the poem.
It spoke to you in different ways.
I can share with you some of what spoke to me.
For me, it was all about untying,
And spiritual freedom.
Untying those self-made knots that bind me.
Cutting the strings that attach me to beliefs, situations, or actions

That are not life-giving.
What am I tied to that needs to be untied?
What unhealthy attachments may be influencing me?
That keep me from being free to follow my heart and my God.
The God of love.
The phrase of the poem that stood out for me was
“what binds always pretends to be a blessing.”
That one landed, right in the heart.
That was the personal invitation for me in this poem.
But there were other invitations to see what is happening in our world
In the context of the Gospel.
To make connections.
And I don’t believe in coincidences,
Like the “coincidence” that had me reading this poem on the morning
I would preach on this Palm Sunday scripture.
So there is something else working here, I think.
The second phrase that caught my eye was
“This is just the donkey God wants for the ride”
Can I get an “amen”?!
Jesus rides into our well-ordered, ICE-d over systems
Wearing the face of a Somali or Venezuelan immigrant
Or a trans woman,
or an Iranian girl just trying to go to school,
Jesus rides in
Leading a parade of all those our society, our government,
And sadly too often the church, pushes to the side
All those who have been told or felt they were not good “enough”
And others willing to march alongside
Using their presence, their privilege, and their voice
In whatever ways they can
To stand in solidarity with their neighbors.
Lastly, this poem reminds us
That these parades
In the streets of Jerusalem that long ago day
Or in the streets all over the globe yesterday
Were not “happy, happy” celebrations
But they were joyous and hopeful
Singing, dancing, shouting, marching
In the face of real danger
But also In the light of God
Because joy and hope can hold both.
And that the true success of these parades
Cannot be measured in numbers,
As impressive as they are,
Or in short-term outcomes.
The most immediate outcome of the Jerusalem parade
Was crucifixion.
And yet death did not have the last word.
What began as one parade in the streets of one ancient city,
Became a movement that swept the world

And echoes in streets around the globe thousands of years later
God is with us for the long-haul.
Untie the donkey, untie your heart
And come along.
Amen.

“Christ Has Walked” Jeff Johnson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pSaI89weew>

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Worship is a time when we,
as a community,
join our hearts together,
to connect to God and to each other.
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.
If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at
this time.
As people share their prayers in text
please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.
Those voiced here today.
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.
Those for which we have no words.
We lift them all to you, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.
We pray all this in the name of the one who taught us to eat and to pray together,
saying:
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kin-dom, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kind-dom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

And now,
Our worship is over,
but our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting
for all of us to untie whatever knots are holding us back,

stand up, and speak out in love.
Go in peace, come again in hope.
Amen.

“When Love Comes Town” – U2/BB King
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TGU35i8czo

GO IN PEACE!