

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.

Before we start our service I have an announcement and I want to ask you to stay for
a few minutes after church.

I want to share with you something really huge for our church.

Back on December 8, 2025, I was interviewed in a podcast by an organization call
"Soul Force."

Here is that link of the show
(<https://redcircle.com/shows/bb8f7ce2-d8f0-4859-bbac-c33c48e3ccb6>)

Well, they loved everything I shared about our church and we have been in
conversation about a partnership for a church service.

A virtual version of their Culto Cuir, so that more people can participate –
especially folks who are homebound, crowds-averse, have sensory needs, or live far
away.

And if you're wondering what Culto Cuir is, it is Church of the Queerly Beloved – a
collaborative, experimental worship and ritual space focused on spiritual healing

and reclaiming faith for Queer and Trans communities.

It is meant to help heal the harm caused by weaponized religion and to create a sacred space of belonging, hope, and healing.
We're really excited about what this can mean for our community, so I ask you if you have a moment stick around and hear the vision.

And now, let us center ourselves as we enter together our worship service on the second Sunday of Easter.
We are glad you are here.
Whether you came full of faith, carrying questions, or just trying to make it through the door today,
there is room for you here.

So take a breath, settle in, and know this:
the peace of Christ is in this place,
and you do not walk alone.
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

Tyson James - Waymaker ft
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JTXE-oCCIk&list=RD1JTXE-oCCIk&start_radio=1

Scriptures

Today's reading comes from the Gospel of John 20:19-31 (The Message)

Later on that day, the disciples had gathered together, but, fearful of the Jews, had locked all the doors in the house.

Jesus entered, stood among them, and said, "Peace to you."
Then he showed them his hands and side.

The disciples, seeing the Master with their own eyes, were awestruck.
Jesus repeated his greeting: "Peace to you.
Just as the Father sent me, I send you."

Then he took a deep breath and breathed into them.
“Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said.

“If you forgive someone’s sins, they’re gone for good.
If you don’t forgive sins, what are you going to do with them?”

But Thomas, sometimes called the Twin, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
The other disciples told him, “We saw the Master.”

But he said, “Unless I see the nail holes in his hands,
put my finger in the nail holes, and stick my hand in his side,
I won’t believe it.”

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the room.
This time Thomas was with them.
Jesus came through the locked doors, stood among them, and said,
“Peace to you.”

Then he focused his attention on Thomas.
“Take your finger and examine my hands.
Take your hand and stick it in my side.
Don’t be unbelieving. Believe.”

Thomas said, “My Master! My God!”

Jesus said, “So, you believe because you’ve seen with your own eyes.
Even better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing.”
Jesus provided far more God-revealing signs than are written down in this book.
These are written down so you will believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of
God, and in the act of believing, have real and eternal life in the way he
personally revealed it.

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

Sermon Title: Peace in the Panic Room: Con Todo y Miedo (with all the fears)

Today’s gospel drops us right into a room full of fear.
The doors are locked.
The disciples are hiding.
Their teacher has been crucified.
Their world has fallen apart.
And now they are just trying to survive the aftermath.

And honestly... who could blame them?

Jesus had just been executed by the state.
He had been publicly shamed, tortured, and killed.

So of course the disciples were afraid.
Of course they went into hiding.
Of course they were wondering if they were next.

Because that is what fear does.
Fear will make you lock the door.
Fear will make you whisper when you used to sing.
Fear will make you shrink when God made you to take up space.

And let's be real—these disciples probably did not know who to trust anymore.

Can you blame them?

When life breaks your heart,
when grief sits on your chest,
when loss rearranges your whole world,
it becomes hard to know who is safe.

Do you trust the people who minimize your pain and tell you,
“You’ll be fine... just get over it”?

Do you trust the ones who throw Bible verses at you like spiritual band-aids,
thinking one cute little scripture is going to fix what is bleeding in your soul?

Do you trust the people who do not know how to sit with your sorrow,
so instead they try to explain it, solve it, tidy it up, and move on?

Anybody know what I’m talking about?

Sometimes in our deepest grief,
the hardest thing is not only what we lost—
it is realizing we do not know who we can trust with our pain.

And that is exactly where the disciples are.
Locked away.
Afraid.
Grieving.
Confused.
Trying to make sense of a world that no longer makes sense.

And then—Jesus shows up.

Not with judgment.
Not with disappointment.
Not with a lecture about where they should have been or how stronger they should
have acted.

He shows up and says,
“Peace be with you.”

And then he says it again.

Because sometimes peace has to be repeated before it can be received.

Sometimes your spirit is so shaken,
your body so tired,
your heart so cracked open,
that you need to hear peace more than once.

Jesus knows this.

So he comes into that locked room and speaks peace.
Not because everything is fixed.
Not because the danger is gone.
Not because the disciples suddenly understand it all.

But because his presence is peace.

Jesus does not always remove the fear right away,
but he enters the room with us.
And sometimes that is the miracle.

Because hope begins when we realize we are not abandoned.

And let's be honest—sometimes I feel like Thomas.

Sometimes I want to hide, doubt, and run.

In this season of the renovation and rebuilding of my father's house, the stress level at times is huge.
And I do not always want other people to see it or hear it.
I want to hide.

And maybe the equivalent of hiding back then was locking the door.
Maybe the equivalent now is sleep.

Maybe it is binge-watching movies and series.
Maybe it is disappearing into distractions.
Maybe it is staying away from people, from family, from anything that reminds you that your hope feels far away.

Because sometimes it can feel like the one you trusted,
the one you thought would perform a miracle,
the one you thought would fix it, hold it, save it—

That is the heaviness in that room.
And if we are honest, that is a heaviness we can relate to.

The heaviness of disappointment.
The heaviness of unanswered prayers.

The heaviness of carrying too much for too long.
The heaviness of trying to keep it together while your spirit is tired, exhausted!

And into that heaviness, Jesus does not say,
“Get over it.”
Ya paso, superalo

He says,
Peace.

He says,
It is okay to feel what you are feeling.

He says to Thomas,
See.
Touch.
Come near.

In other words:
I am not afraid of your grief.
I am not afraid of your doubt.
I am not afraid of your questions.
Come closer.

And if you hear anything today, hear this:
there is no judgment here for struggling.
There is only the invitation to keep trying to see,
to keep trying to trust,
to keep trying to believe in Jesus again.

That is the good news.

Because poor Thomas gets such a bad rap.
My brother has been catching shay in sermons for centuries.

We call him “Doubting Thomas” like that is his born given name.

But Thomas is not weak.
Thomas is honest.

He says unless I see it for myself—unless I touch the wounds—I cannot believe.

And you know what Jesus DOES NOT DO?
Jesus does not shame him.
Jesus does not scold him.
Jesus does not say, “What is wrong with you? Everybody else believed.”

No.
Jesus meets Thomas where he is.

He invites him closer.
He says, come here. Touch. See.

Because the risen Christ is not afraid of our questions.

And I need somebody to hear that today:
Jesus does not fault you for struggling to believe.

He does not fault you for the nights when faith feels thin.
He does not fault you for asking hard questions.
He does not fault you for saying,
Lord, I want to believe, but life has been life-ing.

He meets you there too.

Yes, Jesus says,
“Blessed be those believing without seeing.”

But let’s tell the truth, church—
in today’s world, we cannot afford
Not with so many voices lying.
Not with so much harm BEING done in the name of religion.
Not with so many people using God-talk to manipulate, exclude, and control.

We do not need blind faith.
We need faithful discernment.

Scripture tells us in 1 Thessalonian 5:19–22,
“DO not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain
from every form of evil.”

Test everything.

That means ask the question.
That means pay attention.
That means discern.

Is it good?
Does it bring life?
Does it hurt or does it heal?
Does it move us toward love, justice, mercy, and wholeness?
Or does it crush, shame, divide, and wound?

Test it.

Because real faith is not fragile.
Real faith can handle the questions.
Real faith does not demand silence.
Real faith invites AND INVESTS IN honesty.

And that is why I appreciate what Billy Porter said at the National Action Network Keepers of the Dream Award Ceremony:

“I no longer subscribe to blind faith
Because faith without works is dead
Hope requires truth
Joy is resistance
And love is an action “

That right there will preach.

Because faith without works is dead.
So if your faith never moves your feet toward justice,
if your faith never opens your heart toward compassion,
if your faith never makes room for the wounded, the doubting, the grieving, and the pushed aside—
then what exactly are we doing?

Hope requires truth.

Not denial.
Not pretending.
Not spiritual bypassing.
Truth.

Truth about our pain.
Truth about our fear.
Truth about what is broken in the world.
Truth about what is broken in us.

And still—hope.

Not because we are ignoring reality,
but because we trust that God can meet us in reality and do a new thing.

SAY IT WITH ME “JOY IS RESISTANCE”
In a world that wants people crushed, numb, divided, and ashamed,
joy becomes holy rebellion.

Joy says,
you do not get to take my soul.
Joy says,
you do not get to define my worth.
Joy says, even in grief, even in struggle, even in uncertainty,
God is still present and I am still held.
and as we say in the UCC, “GOD is still speaking”

And love is an action.

Not just a feeling.
Not just a cute church word.
Not just something we post and forget by Monday.

Love is what we do.
Love listens.
Love shows up.
Love tells the truth.
Love protects.
Love makes room.
Love feeds.
Love marches.
Love stays and LOVE goes.
Love risks.
Love opens the locked door.

And that is exactly what Jesus is doing in John 20.

He does not just feel love for the disciples from a distance.
He shows up.
He comes through the fear.
He stands in the room.
He offers peace.
He breathes Spirit.
He stays with Thomas long enough for doubt to become testimony.

That is love in action.

Dr. Rev. Yara González-Justiniano, in a Hispanic Scholars Program Exchange conversation on Hope said "Hope is made of trust, absence, the capacity to imagine, and promise."
(Disciples of Christ Pastor, Professor at Vanderbilt Seminary
Assistant Professor of Religion, Psychology, and Culture with emphasis on Latinx Studies)

Trust.
Absence.
and I love this one the capacity to imagine!
Oh hope is imaginary, creative, influential, and will not retreat!
OH I need that in my creative bones to be reminded we can create things from nothing.
A Promise.

That is exactly where the disciples are in this text.

They are living in absence.
Jesus is not with them in the way he once was.

They are standing in the gap.

Everything they thought they knew has been shaken.

They have to trust what they cannot yet fully understand.
And they have to imagine a future they never planned for.

A future where Jesus will not walk beside them in the same way as before.
A future where they must become the body of Christ for one another.
A future where the Holy Spirit will push them out of locked rooms and into the streets.

They had to trust the promise of community.
They had to trust that what Jesus breathed on them and the Holy Spirit would carry them.

And maybe—just maybe—they did not know what to do with that Holy Spirit gift yet.

Anybody ever been there?
Got the blessing, got the calling, got the healing, got the opportunity,
and then you sit there, I'm not ready.

And That is real.

And maybe that is why this text still speaks to us.
Because some of us are still living behind locked doors.
A escondidas (hiding)

Doors locked by fear.
Doors locked by grief.
Doors locked by disappointment.
Doors locked by church hurt.
Doors locked by betrayal.
Doors locked by the lie that we have to carry everything alone.
or people will think less of us
Mentiras del diablo '(lies)

But Jesus still shows up behind locked doors.

And he still says,
Peace be with you.

He does not say "shame be with you."
He does not say "hurry up and get over it be with you"
Not fix yourself first and then come find me.

BUT Peace be with you.

So here is the call to action, church:

Open the door.

Open the door to peace instead of fear.
Open the door to truth instead of pretending.
Open the door to community instead of isolation.
Open the door to love in action.

This week, choose one concrete act of resurrection:
check on somebody,
tell the truth,
ask for help,
offer welcome,
stand for justice,
bring peace where there has been fear.

If you have been hiding behind grief, open the door.
If you have been hiding behind doubt, open the door.
If you have been hiding behind exhaustion, open the door.
If you have been hiding behind "I'm fine" when we are anything but fine, open the door.

Because resurrection is not just a story we remember.
It is a life we are called to live.

Every time we choose courage over fear,
truth over denial,
community over isolation,
love over indifference,
we are opening locked doors.

Every time we feed, protect, listen, resist, welcome, and stand with one another,
we become living proof that Jesus is still alive and still moving among us.

ooh church, if you are like the disciples,
ready to rejoice because Jesus walked into your locked room and you do not need any
more proof,
or whether you are like Thomas and like me...
saying, I need to touch the wound before I can say yes—

you are still familia (family)
You belong here.

There is room in this community for the ones who shout halleluja,
feeling the Holy Spirit right there with me and the energy to type it and shout at
home, or the ones who whisper,
I'm just trying.

There is room for joy and questions.
For faith and trembling.
For peace and process.

So hold on to hope—
not fake hope, not shallow hope, but the kind rooted in truth and you need to water
it!
You need to add some sunshine to it.

Hold on to joy—
the kind that resists despair.
The kind that has a playlist when you are feeling pretty crappy and another one that
you can play when you need to dance.
dance like no one is dancing

Hold on to love—
the kind that moves, acts, heals, and liberates.
The one who fears but shows up

Because by the grace of God,
we are not called just to survive.

We are called to live.
To rise.
To love.
To THRIVE.

And when Jesus walks into your locked places and says,
Peace be with you,
do not be afraid AND YOU might not have it all together if at all...
The peace still belongs to you not just for them that have it all together.
For you.

Not just someday.
Right now.

Not just enough to get by.
Enough to rise.

La Paz de Dios sea contigo...
Peace be with you,
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.

Kieran The Light, KRL - God Way Remix (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKH585mbaJE&list=RD1JTXE-oCCIk&index=11>

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 peace,
meet us behind our locked doors.
For those carrying fear, grief, doubt, and deep weariness,
draw near and speak peace over us.

For those of us trying to believe again,
hold us with tenderness and without judgment.

Give us the courage, poquito a poquito,
to open the door,
to trust you again,
and to live with hope, truth, and love.
In the name of the Risen Christ,
Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

May the peace of the Risen Christ go with you,
through every locked door,
through every doubt,
through every burden you carry.
May God hold you with tenderness,
strengthen and remind you that you do not walk alone.
May hope rise in you,
may joy resist all despair,
and may love guide your steps on the journey ahead.
Go in peace,
go in courage,
go in grace.
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Bill Withers - Lovely Day (Official Audio)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEeaS6fuUoA>