

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. And now, let us center ourselves as we enter together our worship service on the third Sunday of Easter. We are glad you are here.

Because no matter what road brought you here today, you are not here by accident.

We believe the Spirit of the Lord is in this place, and my prayer is that before we leave, our hearts will be encouraged, our eyes will be opened, and we will recognize that Jesus has been walking with us all along.

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.

Holy one, we thank You for this day and for bringing us into Your house.
We thank You that no one is here by accident, but that You have ordered our steps.
Holy Spirit, have Your way in this place.

Touch every heart, lift every burden, strengthen every weary soul,
and let Your presence fill this room.

Open our ears to hear You, our hearts to receive You,
and our eyes to see that Jesus is near.

Be glorified in everything we do today.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Gathering Song

Crowder - Come As You Are (Music Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2zhf2mqEMI&list=RDr2zhf2mqEMI&start_radio=1

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading comes from the Gospel of Luke 24:13-35 NRSV

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus,
about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things
that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,
16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"
They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him,
"Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken
place there in these days?"

He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,
who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our
chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified
him.

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,
and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

Moreover, some women of our group astounded us.

They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.”

Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.

But they urged him strongly, saying,
“Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.”

So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.

They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!”

Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON - Clueless, or Just Listening?

Today’s scripture takes us on a road trip.

Literally, we are on the road to Emmaus.

Can you feel the dust on your feet?
Can you feel the heat of the day?

This is an all-day walk.
And on that road, we are invited into a conversation—
a tender conversation,
a heavy conversation,
a conversation soaked in grief.

A stranger appears.
He seems detached.
He seems unaware.
And Cleopas says to him,
“Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”

Of course Jesus knows.
But the deeper question is whether anyone could really understand their loss.
Because their friend is gone.
Their teacher is gone.
Their hope is gone.
And now, to make matters worse, the body is gone too.

It is a double grief:
Jesus is dead,
and the tomb is empty.

Cleopas says it plainly:
“We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”

We had hoped.
That may be one of the saddest phrases in all of scripture.
We had hoped the diagnosis would be different.
We had hoped the marriage would survive.
We had hoped the job would work out.
We had hoped life would be kinder than this.

That is where they are.
Not in resurrection yet.
Not in joy yet.
Only in confusion, grief, and disappointment.

The women have told them about the angels.
They have heard the words:
“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”
But let us be honest.

That does not change how it feels in the moment.
The body is gone.
And they do not know what to do with that.

Scripture tells us Jesus is right there with them, but they do not recognize him.
Maybe that is not their fault.
Scripture says their eyes were kept from recognizing him.
Or maybe grief can do that.
Maybe sorrow can narrow our vision until all we can see is the loss.

Can you recall a time like that?
I can.
And I imagine most of us can.

At one time or another, we have all walked roads like that—
roads of disappointment,
skepticism,
sadness,
and despair.
A promotion gone.
A home lost.
A loved one buried.
A life changing before we were ready.

And even when change is necessary,
even when change is holy,
while it is happening,
change can hurt.

Sometimes we cannot see Jesus because grief is too thick on our eyes.
And sometimes we cannot see Jesus because life is too full.
We have places to be.
Bills to pay.
Children to raise.
Schedules to keep.
And we do not really have time for all this Jesus talk.

That is why this commandment can feel so hard:
Love God.
Love your neighbor as yourself.

It sounds beautiful until you get to the “as yourself” part.
Because what if you do not like yourself?

What if you are your own worst critic?
What if the person you show the least grace to is you?

Barbara Brown Taylor reminds us that loving our neighbor is not about fixing people,
changing them, or controlling them.

It is about being present. It is about learning to encounter another person with attention and care.

And I have often found that difficult.

Because I am much better at defending other people than I am at showing mercy to myself.

There was a time when I was struggling to understand this whole idea of loving yourself.

And then I realized something about myself:

If I see someone hurt an animal, a person, a child, an elder—name it—I am all in. I go from peaceful monk to MMA fighter real quick.

Hold my monk sandals.

I am working on it, I promise.

But in that moment, I felt the Spirit ask,
“Why do you not treat yourself the same way?”

Why do you stand up for everybody else, but not for yourself?

Why do you defend everybody else, but not extend grace to yourself?

That is the point I am trying to make.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus comes near people who are grieving.

He walks with them.

He listens to them.

He lets them speak.

And maybe that is where grace begins.

Maybe grace begins when someone comes close enough to ask what is hurting us.

Maybe grace begins when Jesus draws near, even when we do not recognize him yet.

Perhaps that is what Jesus is doing on the road.

He comes near.

He asks.

He listens.

Talk it out.

It does wonders for the soul.

When I was doing my two-year residency with Stillpoint in New Mexico, training to become a spiritual director, the hardest thing for me to do was stay still and remain in the moment.

I remember telling Pastor Kris, who is my mentor,

“I’m not going to make it.”

First of all, I have ADD.

Second of all, I was terrified I was going to fall asleep and start snoring.

People meditating in the mountains would think a bear was sneaking up on them.

But Pastor Kris said,
"Perhaps your way of meditating is different."
And that changed something for me.
So my prayer became walking.
Drawing.
Collecting rocks.
Painting.

Maybe somebody here needs to hear that:
Your walk to Emmaus may not look like mine.
Your road to healing, freedom, or hope may look different.
But Jesus will still meet you there.

Recently, I was working on the house, and everything was going wrong.
The electricians were rewiring the place—another setback.
The plumbers had just redone all the plumbing, including replacing a cracked sewer line.

My stress level was through the roof.
So I sent my youngling to my aunt's house.
I needed to be alone.

I was mad.
Upset.
Worried.
A mess.
I could not keep food down, and I was praying hard.

Then this boy from next door came over.
Literally, a neighbor.

And I am thinking,
"Oh God, I do not have time for this."

He introduces himself and says,
"Excuse me, neighbor, I heard you are hiring contractors. I wanted to introduce myself."

And I am looking around thinking,
Is this 10-year-old seriously asking me for a job?

Then he says,
"I heard my grandparents say you needed help. And I said to myself, 'I'm the solution.'"

The boy is 10.

I told him,

“I’m not hiring. But you can help me clear some things out here.”

He says,

“I can get paid a daily rate of \$50, \$30, or \$20 depending on the work.”

And I am still thinking, I do not have time for this.

Then he says,

“I was born working hard. I don’t know a lot, but I learn fast.

And I need money for shoes.”

Now that right there—

That was my divine moment.

That was my stop-and-listen moment.

So I hired him.

And there I was, teaching him how to use a drill,

how to use a weed eater,

how to sand a door.

And all the while, I am still saying in my head,

I do not have time for this.

But in that boy, the divine showed up.

The divine showed up to slow me down.

To interrupt me.

To pull me out of the storm in my own head.

And then there was the elderly woman from the front of the house,
bringing us water and helping us out.

And I realized something:

My prayers were being answered, but not in the form I expected.

I thought I needed speed.

God sent presence.

I thought I needed control.

God sent neighbors.

And while I was thinking I was wasting time, I heard the Spirit say,

“You have wasted more time doubting, stressing, and thinking you could do this on your own.”

I stand corrected.

I stand humbled.

And perhaps it was only when I welcomed the interruption, only when I made room for others, that I finally began to see Jesus.

That same day, my uncle called.

My loan had been approved.

The house would be finished by Wednesday.
No more inspections.
No more contractors.
No more chaos.
And I realized how blind stress had made me.
I could not see past my anxiety on that road to a new home.

So here is the question:
What road are you on right now?
What disappointment are you carrying?
What grief is clouding your vision?
What stress has made it hard for you to see grace standing beside you?

And who is your neighbor?
Not the one you can fix.
Not the one you can manage.
Not the one you can control.

But the one you are called to love.
The one you are called to notice.
The one you are called to listen to.
The one you are called to be present with.

So here is the action for this week:
Pause for one holy interruption.
Just one.

When someone speaks, listen.
When the Spirit nudges, do not rush past it.
Have one conversation this week where you do not fix, advise, or hurry.
Just be present.

Listen long enough that maybe, just maybe, Christ will reveal himself there.

Because that is the good news of Emmaus:
Jesus still comes near.
Jesus still walks with the grieving.

Jesus still shows up in the middle of disappointment, anxiety, and interruption.
And sometimes we do not recognize him at first.

But he is there.
He is there in the stranger.
He is there in the pause.
He is there in the breaking of bread.

So do not rush the road.
Do not dismiss the interruption.
Do not overlook the neighbor.

Because what if the one slowing you down,
the one asking for your attention,
the one walking beside you,
is the very Christ you have been praying for all along?

May we have eyes to see.
May we have hearts to listen.
May we have courage to love.

And on whatever road we walk this week,
may we find that Jesus has already drawn near.

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.

Casting Crowns - One Step Away (Official Lyric Video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hktP9LHaRI0>

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-One, we lift up Your people to You today.

For the weary, bring strength.
For the grieving, bring comfort.

For the anxious, bring peace.

For the sick, bring healing.

For the discouraged, bring hope.

For every silent burden and every private pain, be near, O God.

Bless every household represented here, provide for every need,
and remind Your people that they do not walk alone.

Pour out Your Spirit on us, renew our hearts,
and teach us to love one another well.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now in the strength of God.

Go now in the peace of Christ.

Go now in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And as you go,
may you recognize Jesus on the road,
in the stranger,
in the neighbor,
and in the interruptions of your life.

Amen.

Music for the Journey

James Brown - I Got You (I Feel Good) (Live 8 2005)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrv-Morm-c0&list=RDLrv-Morm-c0&start_radio=1

Go in peace.

Go in love.

Go in power.