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 fifth Sunday of Easter.

Today it is also the first of the month which is our communion Sunday.

I invite you to gather something to each, such as a bread, cracker or a cookie.

As well as a cup of grape juice or wine to drink after we pray over the elements remembering our savior Jesus Christ with the ritual of Holy Communion.

After the message of good news we will share in the breaking of the bread.

And now I invite you to pray with me.

INVOCATION
Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.

God of life,
God who calls us by name,
We come into this space carrying so much–

noise, questions, distractions,
and sometimes voices that are not yours.

Quiet our hearts.
Center our spirits.

Help us to hear you clearly today—
not the loudest voice,
not the most convincing voice,
but your voice.

Give us wisdom to discern,
courage to listen,
and hearts open enough to follow.

Y que tu Espíritu nos guíe—
that your Spirit would guide us—
into truth, into peace, into life abundantly.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Gathering Song - A Maya Angelou reading.

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings ~ Maya Angelou | Best Motivational Poem
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwKsjTVhfcU

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading comes from the Gospel of John 10:1-10 NRSV

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.

They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers."

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

All who came before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the gate.
Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON

Title: No Te Dejes (Don't let yourself be pushed around)

No te dejes.(Don't let yourself be pushed around)
Not by people.
Not by fear.
Not even by the wrong version of God.

“Because in a world full of noise…
we need to know which voice is actually Jesus.”

“Today’s Gospel is one of my favorites—Jesus’ teaching in John 10:1–18.
It’s a warning.
Advice.
A ‘watch out’ kind of lesson.”

In Jesus’ time, this imagery was simple: sheep, shepherds, gates, land, trade.
Everybody got it.
There’s a front door.
And if someone comes in another way…
they’re probably not there to bless you—
they’re there to rob you.

The sheep know their shepherd’s voice—his call, his tone, even the way he says their names.
Just like you know when your mamá, your guardian, or your abuelita (grandma) calls your full name…

You already know—you in trouble.
Turns out, sheep are actually pretty smart.
They don’t just follow anyone.
You can’t trick them.

Simple lesson: pay attention.
Don’t be fooled.

Stay alert.

This passage always brings to mind the story of Little Red Riding Hood.
You all know that one, right?

This little girl in a red cape is on her way to visit her grandma, carrying a basket of food.
The wolf hears about it, runs ahead, and disguises himself as the grandmother…after eating her.

He climbs into bed, waiting.
When Little Red Riding Hood arrives, something feels off.

She starts asking questions:
"What big eyes you have."
"The better to see you," the wolf replies.

"What big ears you have."
"The better to hear you."

And finally—
"What big teeth—and mouth—you have…"

"The better to eat you!"
Classic story. Somebody rushes in and saves her—
I think it was a hunter… depending on the version.
Sometimes grandma makes it out. Sometimes… not so much.
Or maybe I made that part up—

But every time I hear this story, I keep thinking:
How did she not hear the difference between the wolf…and her abuelita?

Porque let me tell you…
I know my abuelita's voice.
That tone?
That warmth or not…
You don't confuse that.

Would you?

The sheep know what their shepherd sounds like.
Simple as that.
These things are supposed to be easy.

I mean, even with today's technology—Siri, Alexa, Google—they still can't understand my accent half the time.
I'm over here like,

“Play some Vicente Fernández,”
and they’re like… “Playing ‘Vintage Furniture.’”

And yet…in today’s world, hearing Jesus?
Not so simple.

Hearing the Gospel—and all the interpretations that come with it—not so simple.
Listening to a preacher…
a wisdom guru…
an evangelist…
or a pastor…
doesn’t automatically mean we’re hearing Jesus.

Why?
Because we all come with something.
Our story.
Our lived experiences.
Our wounds.
Our survival.

And sometimes…we don’t just hear Jesus—
we hear what we need to hear.

These words… these Scriptures… these Gospels…they can be picked apart.
Used.
Trimmed down.
Ignored.
All to fit a purpose.

It used to terrify me.
Honestly… it still does sometimes.

In my early years of preaching—and even now— in particular when I venture out of my Second Life family,
I’ll have Pastor Chris look things over.

“Does this make sense?”
“Am I being honest?”
“Am I staying close to what Christ is actually leading me to say?”

Because I have to ask myself:
Is the Holy Spirit guiding my words… or am I?
Is God still speaking through me… or am I just speaking?

The truth is, only the voice of Jesus can truly lead us through the noise.
And when we lose that—when we stop listening carefully—

That’s how things sneak in.
Not through the front door…but por la ventana (through the window like Jesus warns)
Quiet.

Subtle.
Like chisme (gossip) that turns into truth if you hear it enough times.

That’s how things like Christian nationalism take root.
Quietly.
Subtly.
Until suddenly—
it’s everywhere.
Stirring fear.
Fueling division.
Robbing us of peace.

And next thing you know there goes voting rights.

It’s how stories like Margarett Attwoods’ The Handmaid’s Tale…
start to feel less like fiction…
and more like a mirror.

So what do we do?

How do we recognize the voice of Jesus in a world full of noise?

I keep coming back to the fruits of the Spirit.
Is it real?
 Does it bring joy—or division?
 Does it build up—or tear down?

Measure it.
Every time I had to cut wood or sheetrock, I could hear my dad:
“Did you measure it twice?”

And if you grew up like me…
 that wasn’t a suggestion.
That was a warning.
Don't be wasteful!

What if that’s how we discern the voice of God?
What if the Spirit is asking:
“Did you measure it twice?”

Does it line up with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness?

Or is it just a voice that sounds right…because it fits our fears…
our preferences…our need to feel morally right?

Jesus said it clearly:
If someone has to sneak in—through a window…in disguise…hiding their true intentions—
they’re not there for you.
They’re there for themselves.

And what about our relationships?
Sometimes we tolerate the painful lows…
Porque the highs feel like love…even when the lows feel like pain.
Sometimes we stay…And we tell ourselves,

"Así es… that's just how it is."

But no… that's not abundant life.

It's time to question everything.

MEASURE TWICE.
Ask:
Does it hurt?
Does it help?
Does it build?

So I ask you today:

Is your liberator coming through the door…
or the window?

Jesus said:
"Be innocent as a dove, but shrewd as a snake."
That's not weakness.
That's wisdom.
That's a third way.

Not just surviving…
not just getting by…
not just living in a golden cage—

Not losing your dignity—
but standing in truth.
A life of peace.
Of joy.
Of resistance.

And like Maya Angelou says:
"But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage…
so he opens his throat to sing."

We might not have power.
We might feel like things are being taken from us.
But we can sing.

We can sing together.
We can rise together.

We can still hear the voice of Jesus—
leading us to life.

Abundant life.

So this week—

choose one voice. Una voz.
The one you've been listening to…online…in your relationships…even in your own head.

Measure it.

Does it bring life?

Does it sound like Jesús?

And if it doesn't—dejalo...leave it.
Don't follow it.

Stay still.
Listen again.
Y espera…wait…for the voice that calls you by name.

The one that brings peace.
The one that brings life.
The one that knows you.

No te dejes. (Don't be pushed around)
Not by people.
Not by fear.
Not even by the wrong version of God."

Don't be pushed around, no te dejes....
because the voice of Jesús—
always leads you to abundant life.

May it be so,
Amen

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

We have now come to the time to share in Holy Communion together and I invite you gather your elements.
Place them before you and let us take a moment to take a deep breath as we remember.

On the night Jesus was betrayed he shared a meal with his friends, his followers the people he called family.

At a simple table Jesus gathered with friends, he remembered the liberating story of the Passover,
shared the bread, passed the cup, and asked us to do the same, and remember – remember God's liberating work in the world – work embodied in Jesus.
We remember how the greatest gift he gave to us was very life.

This table is open to all who seek nourishment for the soul.
Join together in this holy communion
not because you must, but because you may
not because you are full
but because in your emptiness you are in need of God's mercy and assurance
come just as you are
It is the Lord's table
And it is spread for you.

I invite you to hold your hands over the elements as we pray:
God of liberation, with this bread we remember.

Let us pray
Come Holy Spirit upon these gifts of grape and grain.
Make them before us the life and love of Jesus, that we may
become the life and love of Jesus, for the world.

In Real Life, in Second Life,
We are connected to each other
Through our faith in you,
In and through this community,
we may find that your love
Is as real and tangible
As this bread and cup
We share.
Amen.

Now take the bread.
Feel it in your hand.
And let us remember another time, and another table,
when Jesus gathered in a upper room with his disciples,
his closest friends.
When he took the bread on the table for the evening meal, blessed it, broke it, and shared it saying "This is my body, given for you. Take. Eat. And remember me."

Let us eat this bread of life together.

Now pick up your cup of drink,
Because at the end of the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine, the juice of the vine,
And said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, a new relationship in my blood.
Drink, and as often as you drink, remember me."

Let us drink this cup of blessing together.

PRAYER PREPARATION

And now lets us transition into petitioning heaven together.

Let us give thanks to the Holy One 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.

Zauntee - Jesus Called My Name (Official Music Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Va70aCnD4&list=RD1JTXE-oCCIk&index=6

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 life, who knows us by name,
We thank you for your voice—
steady, loving, calling us toward life.

In a world full of noise,
help us not to be confused.
Help us not to be led by fear, by distortion, or by voices that do not come from you.

Give us discernment, Holy one to pause, to measure twice, to walk away from anything that does not give us or bring life.

Teach us to recognize you—
in love, in joy, in peace,
in kindness and truth.

Y danos oídos para escucharte,
y corazones valientes para seguirte—
give us ears to hear you,
and brave hearts to follow you.

Remind us, God, that we are yours.
That you call us by name.

And that your voice always leads us to life abundantly.

We trust you.
We follow you.
In Jesús’ name,

Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now—
listening for the voice that calls you by name.
Walk with wisdom.
Stand with courage.
Choose what brings life.

Y no te dejes—(Don't let them push you around)
not by fear,
not by false voices,
not by anything that pulls you away from the love of God.

Go in peace, go in joy, and go in the abundant life of Christ.
Amén.

Music for the Journey

Lets dance!

Katy Perry - Firework (Official Music Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGJuMBdaqIw

Go in Peace
Come back with Hope