

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
sixth Sunday of Easter.

Where we are delighted you are with you.
Please know that your questions are welcome.
Your doubts are welcome. Your joy is welcome.
Your grief is welcome.
Your tired spirit is welcome.
(Note: Send me an note, lets make arrangements to chat, speak or pray together if you
wish to voice these.)

Please know that whether you came in full of faith, barely holding on, or just
curious about what God might still be saying, there is room for you here.

In this place, we do not gather to force belief.

We gather to practice love.

We gather to remember that Christ calls us not into fear, not into shame, not into
control, but into mercy, justice, grace, and wholeness.

So take a breath.
Settle your heart.
You are here.
God is here.
And together, we are invited into love.

Let us pray

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

Conditional- Tracy Chapman

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_hgANZuzM8&list=RDe_hgANZuzM8&start_radio=1

SCRIPTURES

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

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON; “If you love me...”

Have you ever heard that question—or expression—followed by a statement?

If you love me...

Maybe you’ve heard it in a novela, a soap opera, a friend’s bad relationship, or even from a familiar voice.

If you love me...

Growing up, we didn’t talk about our feelings, or politics, or complex issues—and forget talking about sex.

For example, as kids we knew someone who had a “roommate” for decades, and we never asked a thing. Still don’t.

Therapy was for locos (crazy people).

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) was for chiflados—spoiled, lazy, badly behaved kids... insert any synonym for “bad.”

There were no learning disorders either. See ADHD comment above.

I mention all this because, through my lens and my experience, I can tell you about normalizing things that probably weren’t right.

One time in seminary, my pastoral care professor, who is also a licensed therapist, surprised me with a comment about unconditional love.

Dr. McClure said, “There is no such thing as unconditional love.”

I think the whole class was probably spaced out, because I remember looking up from my paper and realizing I was not the only one struck by such a comment.

She continued, “There is a condition to my love. You will not disrespect me, hurt me, injure me physically, emotionally, or mentally, and expect me to unconditionally love you and all that entails. There is a condition to my love.”

The lecture continued, but I was glued to that statement.

There is no such thing as unconditional love.
There is a condition to my love.

There is something about learning that your life, your dignity, your whole person, is valuable.
If you love me...

In today's scriptures Jesus said, "If you love me... you will keep my commandments."
What commandments?

It's beyond valuable to learn that you matter.

It is crucial to this commandment we keep going back to—the greatest of them all:
"Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Jesus immediately followed it with, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40).

That commandment?

Yes.

Jesus also said, "I did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17).

So that commandment was to infuse the law with love from above—for all, not just a selected few.

When Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments," was this the commandment of all what came to mind?

Or was it the Ten Commandments?
I'm curious.

In the great state of Texas—since I speak from my lens and my context—Senate Bill 10, signed by Gov. Greg Abbott, went into effect on September 1, 2025.

The law requires all public elementary and secondary classrooms to display a framed poster copy of the Ten Commandments, at least 16 by 20 inches. Bigger is encouraged.

This law was upheld by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on April 21, 2026.
Schools that do not comply may now be subject to investigation by Attorney General Ken Paxton.

That's good, right?

As Christ-led people of faith, that's good, right?

As Christians who see this text before us, that's good, right?

Or are you conflicted, as I was, when I first read about this going through legislation—and now it is in full effect?

I mean, in full effect.

Classrooms have this now, and those not complying may be subject to investigation and pressure from the state.

If you love me...

Perhaps that is what the folks who make all these rules were thinking about. Let US love God and make sure that, like Jesus said, people follow his commandments.

Yes!

Let's put this sacred text in the schools and make everyone read them, regardless of gender, age, race, religion, no religion, beliefs, no beliefs, culture, or ANYTHING!

If you love me... Jesus said, you WILL follow MY COMMANDMENTS.

Yes! Great idea. Let's make it law!

And so we did.

So why does it feel yucky?

Let me read this beautiful and profound verse by John of the Cross, who, in my opinion, was way ahead of his time in spiritual and psychological understanding of the law:

“When you regarded me
Your eyes imprinted your grace in me,
In this, you loved me again,
And thus my eyes merited
To also love what you see in me...
Let us go forth together to see ourselves in Your beauty.”
– St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle, 32, 33

American Franciscan priest, author, and teacher Richard Rohr, reflecting on this poem,
says that love is at its best when we give ourselves to another without demanding something back.
Real love lets us see a piece of ourselves in the other.
It allows us to participate in something bigger than ego, bigger than control,
bigger than being right.

Rohr calls it a “Bigger Gazing and Loving,” the kind of love that awakens something

alive in us.

And here is the part that gets me:

we accept being accepted—for no reason and by no criteria whatsoever.

That, Rohr says, is the key that unlocks everything in us, for others, and toward God.

So much so that we call it salvation. (Rohr, Richard. *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics*)

In nothing we read does it say we **MUST** force anything upon anyone.

To follow Christ is to see what and how his ministry was led on earth, and not just focus on his death.

It is through the resurrection of Christ—the bird’s-eye view from above—that we can see the journey of his life and death.

Jesus chose not scholars, not high-and-mighty or teachers at the synagogue, but fishermen.

Jesus spoke of the law, but when he needed to demonstrate it with love, he broke the Sabbath and said that placing law before people is not love, nor is it from God.

But just in case you are curious, these are the commandments displayed in Texas schools.

You know many of them: no other gods, keep the Sabbath holy, honor your father and mother, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet.

They are a bit more than ten when written out, but who is counting?

And why are they so important to enforce and make everyone see every morning, as one pledges allegiance to the United States and then the Texas flag?

Yes, indeed, we say both here in Texas.

I mean, what is wrong with this?

I think it’s great.

Kids should **KNOW** that they should honor their parents, **NOT KILL**, not steal, not throw shade at their neighbor—or friends, etc.

Right?

Then why does it feel yucky?

Maybe it’s just me.

These commandments given to us were really given to Moses and the Hebrew people.

Last week, I shared with you how easy it is to take things out of context and out of their given space in the Scriptures to fulfill a purpose.

Church, in everything we do, we MUST frame our language, our behavior, and our actions toward a movement of love and inclusion—not one that separates.

To sin is to be separated from the presence of God, the very nature of not being in the light that restores us into wholeness.

What do we say to the Buddhist child?

Or the Catholic one with their sacred spiritual art?

Or what do we say to the Muslim child, or the child from India with their own sacred culture?

“See those commandments on the wall? That is the LAW.”

In the United Church of Christ, we believe that Christian nationalism is an “oxymoron,” a sin, because it is a dangerous ideology that merges religion and political authority, that threatens democracy, and contradicts the teachings of Christ.

If you love me... you will stay, regardless of what is done to you, an abuser might say.

If you love me... you will not tell anyone that you are being...(fill in the blanks). I heard this one from a thirteen-year-old girl whose mom told her not to say anything—if she loved her—even though her uncle was sexually abusing her.

If you love me...

I speak of what is going on in my beloved state of Texas, because I am a Texan at heart.

I love where I am now living where I was born and raised at the international border of Brownsville and Matamoros Mexico. I am home.

I tell you all these things going on in my great state of Texas with the hope that where you are similar things are not happening.

And if you don't know if they are, I urge you to go and find out.

Young people need you to stand up for those with no voice.

Because as children of God, we aim to reframe Christianity as a movement of love, of justice, of wholeness for all—regardless of who you are, what you believe in, and who you believe in, if anyone at all.

Jesus said he came to give us life, and to live it abundantly.

He also told us that the greatest commandment to love your God... with all your heart. The heart that beats when excited.

The heart that survives on joy and grace from above.

Why not allow that for all, without you, or me, or the LAW dictating what that means?

Love your God with all your mind...

Ask questions.

My God is not afraid of your questions.

If a faith breaks that easily... well...

Jesus said to love your God with all your soul.

A broken heart will never be pushed aside or denied a space to weep, to hurt, to break, and to mend at its time.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

To love yourself means to give yourself kindness, joy, and wholeness.

Wholeness means that, in the complexity of life, you are complete with your body, mind, soul, and spirit.

Be true to yourself and move beyond perfecting your strengths and weaknesses.

As an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, a certified Spiritual Director from Stillpoint, and a member of Spiritual Directors International, I tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, that I stand with faith traditions like mine, and not like my own against any and all political behavior, Christian nationalism, harmful ideology, white supremacy, or anything that opposes a just world for all.

There is a time and place, as the wise Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, and I believe in the separation of church and state.

Why?

Because when a child goes to school to be among friends, teachers, and colleagues, they are not there to be converted.

Texas took it further because we are Texas—why not?

Texas then brought to public schools the Bluebonnet Curriculum, with optional (conservative) Bible-based references woven into school lessons.

It says optional, but districts are financially rewarded for using it per student.

So let me ask: how many school districts do you think don't want to be compensated?

So now a Muslim child sits through the Christmas story.

Again, what's wrong with that?

Well, these Bible-based lessons and stories go beyond historical context.

Slavery, never happened.

They begin to shape whose story is centered, whose faith is normalized, and whose sacredness gets treated like an elective.

That is where it starts to feel yucky.

Then we banned books that are against "Christian morals" for good measure.

I was not surprised that the Harry Potter books were the first to be removed from the library, but To Kill a Mockingbird?

In John, Jesus said that we will receive an Advocate.

One that would come when he was gone to guide us, to show us the way, and to remind us what the greatest commandment of all is:
Love.

Now that is the ONLY unconditional love I can speak of in truth and power.

Jesus came to disrupt a system under a Roman Empire that crushed the people, and he was revolutionary in his love of others.

Systems of power, friends, do not just emerge; they hold sway in communities.

If we can remember one thing from Jesus's walk, his talk, and his miracles, it is fair treatment.

Regardless of how we behave, how many times we sin, or how many times we cross the line, when we come to Christ with a repentant heart—a body, mind, and soul ready to be free from shame and from other things that are not part of the fruits of the Spirit—we are, by grace, forgiven.

And that, my friend, is unconditional love.

If you love me...

Yes, Jesus.

Feed my sheep.

Meaning, feed people, will you?

If you love me... feed, clothe, and help those who don't have any.

(Matthew 25:31-46)

If you love me... invite, talk to, and treat with kindness those you can't stand.
(Luke 6:35)

If you love me... invite to your party, to your table, to your meal, those who can't repay you: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.
(Luke 14:12-14)

At no time did Jesus say, If you love me... you will force these commandments, beliefs, and miracles upon a person.

He even asked a person in need, "Do you want to be healed?"

So here is our action item, Church:

This week, before we post, quote, correct, debate, vote, or condemn, ask this question:

Does this move someone closer to love, mercy, dignity, and wholeness?

And then do one concrete thing that looks like Jesus.

Feed someone.

Call someone.

Protect someone.

Listen to someone.

Make room for someone whose faith, story, culture, or life does not look like yours.

Not to convert them.

Not to win.

Not to prove a point.

But because love, when it is rooted in Christ, does not need to be forced to be faithful.

Walk the talk. Don't just tell me about your faith, live it.

If you love me... you will follow my commandments.

Let's start with the greatest of them all and infuse it with love as we stand for mercy, grace, and a just world for all.

Yes, Lord, I love thee.

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.

Samm Henshaw - Church (Official Video) ft. EARTHGANG
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_8-P4eZ1jA&list=RDeu0KsZ_MVBc&index=24

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:

Loving God,

Teach us to love you not with force, fear, or control, but with hearts rooted in mercy, minds open to wisdom, souls honest before you, and lives committed to justice.

Help us love our neighbors as ourselves—not only the ones who look like us, pray like us, or believe like us, but every child, every stranger, every wounded heart, and every person longing to be seen.

May your Spirit guide us toward wholeness, courage, and compassion.

And when we say, “Lord, we love thee,” may our lives answer back with grace.

Amen

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now in the love of Christ.

Not a love that forces, controls, or demands,
but a love that heals, restores, and makes room.

Go with hearts open to mercy,
minds brave enough to ask questions,
souls rooted in grace,
and hands ready to feed, clothe, welcome, and protect.

And as you go, may the Spirit remind you:

You are loved.

You are whole.

You are called.

Go in peace,
go in courage,
and go in love.

Amen

Music for the Journey

Lets dance!

MercyMe - Happy Dance (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I32vblmQ714>