

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 as we
enter this season after pentecost.

Today I am jumping out of the lectionary which is our church readings and circling
back to a sermon on the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes remind us that God meets us not only in our strengths, but also in
our struggles.

They remind us that blessing is not reserved for the powerful or the comfortable,
but is spoken over those who are hurting, longing, and hoping.

Today, as we join our siblings across the country, we will name some of the burdens
carried by our communities and our world.

Together, we will hold them before God, trusting that the Holy One draws near to the
brokenhearted, comforts those who mourn, and calls us to be people of compassion,
justice, and peace.

Let us pray together.

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence.
God of life,
God who calls us by name,

Quiet our hearts.
Center our spirits.
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

Jonny Diaz - "Breathe" (Official Lyric Video)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnjeMwxFuBA&list=RDhnjeMwxFuBA&start_radio=1

SCRIPTURES

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

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he began to speak and taught them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,
for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON -

The Beatitudes for Our Time

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 was one of my grandmother's favorite passages. I remember being young and listening to her reading them one by one pausing at each for dramatic effect.

The story of Jesus teaching his disciples and talking to an eager crowd who would listen to every word he was saying.

Grandmother would emphasize a few verses more than others.

Like...

Be meek.

She really likes that one and the one about being a peacemaker.

She would say if you do these things God would bless you.

I might have been too young to understand what being poor in spirit was but I understood don't cause or be trouble if you want God to bless you.

I understood being blessed and finding favor in God's eyes as not being a troublemaker.

The truth is these blessings were different from what people expected back then in Jesus times and even in today's world.

Today it seems that it's not just about working hard but rather knowing how to get ahead by only trusting yourself.

It is about looking out for number one, you.

If Jesus was to write these Beatitudes to match what many society might expect, they would sound like these:

Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.

Blessed are those untouched by loss.

Blessed are the powerful.

Blessed are those who are “realistic” about righteousness, compromising at every

turn.

Blessed are those who demand and exact an eye for an eye.

Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.

Blessed are those bold enough to make war and strike first.

Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.

Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

Each of these are an obvious blessing.

The rich are blessed with more money.

The powerful are obviously blessed when they control everything.

The crafty and opportunities seemed to be blessed when they got ahead in life.

It's a dog-eat-dog world.

A Darwin thinking of survival of the fittest.

These modern blessings totally make sense because they appear to be working for many.

Or are they?

Jesus seems to always change things around.

There was this formula he had when teaching.

Jesus would say, "You have heard this..."

"BUT I say to you this..."

You have heard eye for an eye but I tell you don't hit back.

Now that's not what people expected to hear.

My partner Shelly has been watching these shows where people compete for millions of U.S dollars.

One of these shows is called The Mold and the other is called The Traitor.

Each of these shows have people working together to earn a huge cash price while also thinking of how to win for themselves. The games have clues, and obstacle courses and mind games.

As the people compete in these things they keep adding money to the winning price.

So they all work as a team to get the rewards but at the end of the day they also work out a plan to eliminate each other.

This sounds like life in general.

Perhaps this is the game, and Jesus was giving us clues along the way to survive somebody sabotaging your inner peace.

Or perhaps it is life obstacles that show our endurance and dedication at the end of life.

Today we live in a world of instant gratification.
The news at your fingertips.
Buying things right off your phone on an app as soon as you think about them.

Teens today are not used to researching or going to the library to look for anything, they got Goggle, they got their phones.

So perhaps when Jesus was saying you will receive a blessing, you will see the face of God. It was a future promise.

We would have to wait to see and receive those things.

Now you know the obvious question is, when?
When do you see the blessings?

Perhaps it was my upbringing in a conservative evangelical mindset that I equated being blessed with finding favor before the eyes of God.

Like the Modern Beatitudes I will be blessed and rich.

But...

If I lost my job, I did something wrong.

If I could not pay my bills, I did something wrong.

I must have short changed God somewhere and my prosperity went out the window and now I'm poor.

Does any of this sound familiar?

When the world says blessed and highly favored people are those who have a table full of food.

Jesus flips it and says blessed are those who have nothing.

Now how does this make sense?

Perhaps at first glance it does not make sense.

But if you look again it's showing us this new way of thinking.

In all he did, Jesus would teach his disciples a new way of looking at things. He would do it by walking alongside them, by performing miracles and this case sitting around talking to them.

Jesus was showing us all a new social and economic practice filled with hope.

This was a way of looking at the empire and the realm of God side by side.

The difference of putting all your hope on what the world gives you or what you can earn for yourself.

Right next to the blessings that God gives you regardless of what you did, have done, or will do.

You don't have to fight each other to receive a blessing.

See despite a change in your finances, or a loss, you are still blessed, God is there.

Jesus was talking about blessings that had nothing to do with what the Roman empire said or did.

Today they have nothing to do with what the empire says we deserve or not.

God's favor is yours and it is not measured on attitude.

My abuelita was wrong in saying do all these things so you can be blessed.

Friends you are blessed so live your life.

You are blessed when you are authentic and know wholeness.

Be kind so you can see others benefit from your awesomeness.

Comfort, because you know what it means when someone comforts you.

Live your life in a way that is marked by justice, practices of piety, and shared accessible resources. You will see blessings all around you, my friends.

The shows my partner watches have a winner at the end who takes the money.

But most of them at the end of the show say, "I feel bad that my behavior caused so much anxiety and pain, but it's a game."

Jesus very well could have been telling us today you have heard your life is a game and you deserve to win at all cost.

But I tell you, there is no need to stress, the blessing is yours.

Name calling, bullying, rumors, social antagonisms are inevitable when the Empire puts people against each other and when the powerful are challenged.

But the challenge that the Holy one gives you is to stand against the Empire and to know your truth by the way you live.

Because there is power in communities rising together against the Empire by creating a no king marches across the country.

Jeff Chuff, a writer and theologian wrote recently on his blog titled "A song for the Broken hearted" that cultivating joy when life around is faced with tragedy is a complex feeling.

But he said, "There is something hopeful here- something that promises ultimate healing, somewhere, somehow."

Perhaps we add to that comfort by joining our siblings throughout the land, lifting our prayers together and naming the burdens we carry, the sorrows we hold, and the discomfort we cannot ignore.

For we are a people of promise, trusting that comfort is not absent from suffering but meets us within it. We gather as a community believing that God's embrace is

wide enough for every wound and every hurting heart.

So today friends I'm going to invite you to re-imagine these blessings together.

The promise of what it is to come but also the hope through Christ that is among us today.

I will wait a few seconds, add my additional text and welcome yours in the local chat. But even as I'm going forward add to these blessings.

Here we go..

Blessed are those who are at the end of their rope, who know what it means to be at their lowest, those who have nothing.

Blessed be...
(Those who are depressed)
(Those who have anxiety)
(Women lacking reproductive resources)

For yours is the hope that comes from the God of the brokenhearted.
Blessed are those who mourn, who know the gut-wrenching pain of losing someone.

Blessed be...
Mothers, fathers, parents.
Sisters. brothers. siblings.
Children and families torn apart by ICE raids

Yell, kick, pound your fist, cry, shout, lament,
and know that in the middle of it all,
the Holy One of Comfort holds you tight, holds you near.

Receive a holy embrace.
Blessed are those who, at one time or another, had to give in.
You have yielded so much.

Blessed be...
(Those who are bullied)
For you have an inheritance of everything that cannot be bought.

Blessed are those who are starving to see people treated with human dignity.
Blessed are those who are dehydrated by the suffocating loss of life in the streets.

Blessed be...
(The family of a Black person killed at the hands of police)
(A community holding on to one another during a time of grief)
For they will be filled with the Holy One of Righteousness, who quenches the thirst and satisfies the hunger.
Blessed are those who care for others.

Blessed are those who care enough to do something.

Blessed be...

First responders in our homes and boss

For you also will be cared for. Mercy and love are yours.

Blessed are those who have found a way to make peace within their hearts and not cheat others; those who do not step on others to get ahead.

Blessed be...

(Hard-working students)

(Small business owners)

(Service workers)

Raise a mirror and see the Holy One reflecting back, for the Holy image is upon you.

Blessed are the peacemakers, the non-agitators, the chill, the non-combative, the nonviolent people.

Blessed be...

(The hippies)

(The anti-war people)

(The people risking everything to hold on to their humanity)

For you are called family. Yours is a place among the children of God.

Blessed are you and those who are chased, harassed, called out, and ridiculed because you protect human dignity, are merciful to the earth, and mindful of the world around you.

Blessed be...

(The activists)

For the Holy One of the Oppressed is showing you the realm of God all around you—and it is yours.

Blessed are you when people come at you, when they make up stories to hurt you, when they try to bring you down because of your commitment to the people on the margins.

Rejoice and be glad.

Blessed are you among the legends, the saints, the people who are lovers of God's creation.

Friends, let us be a living example of compassion, of righteousness, and seekers of justice.

Let us commit to shining a light for those chasing the illusion of life while carrying burdens of despair.

Let us offer comfort, dignity, and a place of rest within a community that embraces the Holy One of All.

Blessed are you who strive to make the Realm of God visible—not as a distant promise, but as a living reality breathing through our words, our choices, and our love.

Jesus does not ask us to become poor in spirit or to seek suffering.

Rather, he reminds us that when life brings hardship, loss, uncertainty, or grief, God's blessing is already drawing near.

The reward is not only waiting in some distant future—it is breaking into our lives even now.

So go from this place and be the blessing.

Stand beside those who are overlooked.
Speak when silence protects injustice.

Offer hope where cynicism has taken root.
Build tables that are longer than the walls around them.

Let your life proclaim that love is stronger than fear, that mercy is stronger than judgment, and that community is stronger than isolation.

And may those who encounter us catch a glimpse of God's dream for the world—alive in us, alive among us, and alive through us.\
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.

Rare of Breed - Don't Grow Weary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n107Yqu59rU>

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 of Comfort,

We come before you carrying many things.

Some of us arrive with grateful hearts.

Some of us arrive weary from the news, weary from work, weary from carrying burdens

that feel too heavy for one person alone.

Some of us are grieving losses that are fresh, and some are carrying wounds that have lingered for years.

Today we lift up all who mourn.
Those separated from loved ones.
Those searching for safety.

Those who feel forgotten.
Those who wonder where hope can be found.
Wrap them in your compassion.

Hold close those who are afraid.
Strengthen those who are exhausted.
Comfort those whose tears have become their daily prayer.
We pray for communities longing for justice, for neighbors seeking peace, and for leaders entrusted with great responsibility.

Teach us to see one another with mercy.
Give us courage to choose kindness when bitterness is easier.
Give us wisdom to build bridges where others build walls.
When the world feels overwhelming, remind us that we do not walk alone.
When despair whispers loudly, remind us that your love speaks louder.

When our hearts are broken,
remind us that blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Make us instruments of that comfort.
May our words heal.
May our actions reflect your love.
May our community be a place where every person is treated with dignity and welcomed as beloved.
We place all these prayers, spoken and unspoken, into your care, trusting that you hear us, hold us, and walk beside us.
In Jesús' name,

Amen.

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now, knowing you are loved.
Loved by God.
Loved by this community.
Loved beyond measure.

Carry that love into the world.
Share it with your neighbors.

Offer it to the weary.
Stand with the vulnerable.

And never forget that the Holy One walks beside you

.

Vayan con Dios.

Go in peace, and be a blessing.

Amen.

Music for the Journey

Lets dance!

Capital Cities - Safe And Sound

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47dtFZ8CFo8&list=RD47dtFZ8CFo8&start_radio=1