

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 on this season
after Pentecost.

It is also June, it is Pride Month.
A time to celebrate our LGBTQ+ family, diversity, and rainbow beauty.
We will be celebrating a Pride service on the last Sunday of June more to come on
that.

For today church I want to invite you to gather something to eat, such as a bread,
cracker or a cookie for Holy Communion which we partake on the first Sunday of the
month.

Also gather 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.

Today, our preacher is Tritonia (Ruth Jones) who is a United Church of Christ Member
in Discernment, at Community Congregational Church of Chula Vista, Ca. and is also
part of our lay leader team for our morning meditation time.

Welcome friend and thank you for joining us tonight to lead this service with me.

Let us pray:

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place with your presence and wherever each of us is found bless our homes and our families.

En tu nombre (In your name) we pray,

Amen

If there are any announcements about the life of the church, please type them in Nearby Chat during our Gathering Music.

Gathering Song -

The God of Abraham Praise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKAIWQpbSH8>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading comes from the Hebrew Bible with the book of Genesis 12:1-9

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh.

At that time the Canaanites were in the land.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."

So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord.

And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

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

SERMON

Sermon:

Our scripture today was about Abraham having the faith to obey God, to pick up and leave his father's home to go into a strange land.

A land that you might note was already inhabited by some other people, the Canaanites.

But God promised to make of Abraham a great nation and promised the land to his offspring.

You probably know the rest of the story, Abraham had one son by his wife's slave Hagar, and that son, Ishmael, founded the people that became Islam.

His other son Isaac's descendants later became the 12 tribes of Israel, so he is the forefather of the Jewish faith.

And as Christians, we claim that same Jewish history of the Old Testament as part of our origin story, which then continues when Jesus, born in Bethlehem of Jewish parents, is shown to be God's son, the Christ, and proclaims that the Good News about God is to be spread to all the world, for all people.

We recognize that promise, or covenant, that God made with Abraham. The covenant God made with the Hebrews as Moses led them out of Egypt.

And a New Covenant that Jesus brought, that we would be saved by faith in him.

And, when we joined this church, we also made a covenant to be part of supporting the church and its works, and a covenant with God to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

The United Church of Christ, overall, is a covenantal church. Its structure is not a hierarchy as the Catholic church is, and as some Protestant denominations are, where the rules about how you must believe, and how we are to operate the church, are made in a central organization, and passed down to the local church.

Or that the local church is assigned a minister or priest by some higher level in the church.

Each local church in our denomination is autonomous. We manage our own money, choose our own minister, and actually leave it up to each individual to decide for yourself exactly what you believe, within the framework of the Statement of Faith of the UCC.

And that of course starts with we recognize Christ as the head of our church.

But we are a denomination that encourages our members to ask questions about God and explore what you believe. As its through that studying, questioning, and finding your own answers that your faith in God can mature and grow.

I was able to attend the Annual Gathering of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ last weekend, as it is also the conference where my real life church is.

So our conference is made up of 4 regions or associations (northern, southern, eastern, and central) and the Associations and the Conference might be viewed as the next "levels" in the structure of the United Church of Christ.

But the UCC describes the national offices, the conferences, and the local churches all as a "Setting" of the church, not as a hierarchy, and we all work together in a covenantal relationship of support. If some resolution is passed at the national or conference level, we are not told we have to adhere to it, we are only asked to hear it, and then prayerfully consider it.

The Southern California Nevada Conference reaches north to south from Paso Robles (which is sort of in the middle of the California coast) to San Diego (which is right down by the Mexican border) and east to west from Long Beach to Las Vegas, in Nevada. AND, they didn't even mention that it's also in Second Life!!!!

Which we know is very far reaching!!!

We were told It is the most diverse conference in the United Church of Christ and across its more than 120 churches, services are held in seven languages.

We are actually part of a very remarkable group. The conference has a new conference minister that has been there for just two years,

Rev. Rachael Pryor, and also two new associate ministers within the last year.

That conference staff, with the conference board of directors, has developed a Strategic Action Plan for the conference.

It addresses how they can operate more efficiently, but also how the conference can work with and help the local churches more effectively.

As it's a fact that the conference sometimes doesn't really have that much contact

with the local churches unless something is going wrong.
And they hope to change that and have a closer relationship with us.
And, I did do a 60 second speak out to invite the conference attendees to come and join us here and learn more about First UCC in Second Life.

The theme of the conference this year was We're the Ones.

We are the ones, as a community of faith, working with other faith-based groups, that must not be afraid to take a stand against injustice, and the oppression of marginalized groups.

We must be willing to speak out, and take actions, that will help address homelessness, poverty, immigration, and the rights of women and LGBTQ people.

We must speak up to defend the planet, God's creation, from business interests that will do it harm.

We are called to Witness for the type of world, the type of society, that Jesus taught us about.

Rev. Pryor made the point that when the church is silent on these social issues, that silence is taken as consent.

We Are the Ones that must speak up and take action.

And we are also the ones that must be open to doing church in new and innovative ways,
that will reach out to others in the community and to younger people. (Gee, do we think that Rev. Jerry Garber got that part right? What is more innovative than where we are?)

But to the Real Life churches, Rachel said we can't be so focused on keeping our churches the way they are, that we let them die.

We are the ones that must speak out on issues like immigration where people are not receiving due process, are being kept in inhumane conditions in private detention centers that are making money off of taxpayer dollars, and when people who try to help them are shot down in the streets by masked gunman.

We are the ones who must speak up when a woman can be denied necessary medical care when she is having a miscarriage or when carrying a child to term would put her life at risk.

We are the ones who must speak up when the right to vote is threatened if a married woman has changed her name or if an 80-year-old citizen moves and can't locate their birth certificate to prove they exist.

Even though they have voted for years.

We are the ones who must demand that our leaders care for the homeless and hungry.

In our great country, no child should be going to bed hungry, or veteran live on the streets in a tent.

We are the ones that must speak up when the government can spend billions on a war but cuts health care and food assistance from the most vulnerable in our society.

Jesus cared about the people marginalized in society.

He met with them.

He ate with them.

He healed them.

He welcomed all people.

So how can we make a difference?

I think regardless of which political party you are part of, it's important to make your voice heard, as We Are the Ones that need to stand up for what we believe, for what Jesus taught, and resist actions in our society that go against that.

There are opportunities to be part of organized events that strive to make our voices heard, but no one should think that individually we can't do anything.

We have to continue to live our lives as we know Jesus and God would want us to, but not to be afraid to speak out against oppression and injustice.

Send messages to our representatives, and Vote for a candidate that upholds the values you think are important.

A covenant takes two.

If you have never visited the United Church of Christ website, at UCC.org, I really encourage you to do so.

If you are in the United States, one of the things they have there is a way to help you make contact with your representative, with some prepared messages that address a variety of topics.

On that site, just follow the menu to Resources --> Individual --> Action Center to see what is there.

God made promises to Abraham and Abraham had to faithfully obey God.

God made promises to the Hebrews when he gave them the Ten Commandments and they were expected to follow the Jewish laws and worship only God.

Jesus gave us a New Covenant, that we will have salvation and forgiveness through his life, death and resurrection.

We will be reminded of that New Covenant as we take communion, and remember that Jesus is in our life.

And to remember that We are the Ones that must make a difference in this world as we live out our part of that covenant.

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

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.

Holy Ghost (feat. Bri Babineaux & Alton Eugene) | Maverick City Music
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBKT_aTbG6A&list=RDNBKT_aTbG6A&start_radio=1

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

Dear God, We lift these prayers up to you.

Those spoken out loud, and those spoken only in the silence of our hearts.

We know that You are always with those in need, to offer comfort and strength.
And we must remember to thank you for all that you have given to us in our life, as

well.

We would ask for peace and plenty for all people in the world, that we might live together in harmony.

We pray for wisdom for the leaders tasked with that job, but we remember that each of us is responsible for living our life as you would have us do, including having the courage to stand up against injustice.

Help us dear God to keep the covenant and be the faithful people you would have us be.

In Jesus name, we pray, as we say the Prayer that Jesus taught us saying:

Lord's prayer

Our Father (God) which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom (kindom) come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom (kindom) and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen

BENEDICTION

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Savior Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do God's will, working in you that which is pleasing in God's sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen

Go in Peace