

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.

Here is a little Pride msg from our Cleveland OH church celebrating Pride.
<https://youtu.be/LpYuz2S87Ck?si=yQUeX0orMELZCevW>

We will be celebrating a Pride service this coming Sunday of June.
And I would like to invite anyone that wants to share or testify of God's beautiful
inclusive love and what Second Life means to you to send me a note, I can read it,
or send me a song that means something to you.

Let's celebrate together.

Today, our preacher is our very own Doug!

Thank you dear friend for bringing a message of good news to our community.

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.

Loving God,

We thank you for bringing us together today. Meet us in this place, calm our hearts, and open our ears to your word.

Remind us that wherever you send us, you are already with us.

En tu nombre Jesus, (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 song.

Gathering Song -

Here I Am, Lord, Dan Schutte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBg-yDhM2KY>

Announcements:

This summer season we will be focusing on the writings of Kurtz, Ernest; Ketcham, Katherine, "The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning" Join us for Morning Meditation-

Morning Meditation - 7am Mon and Fri

Evening Psalter is at 5pm Mon, Tues, Wed, sometimes other days

If your seeing Pastoral care or will like to connect you can reach me by sending a note or e-mail me at: yadi@cre8tivepastor.org

SCRIPTURES -

Today's reading comes from the Hebrew Bible with the book of Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples did as the resurrected Jesus had instructed them; they went to Galilee,

to the mountain to which Jesus had told them to go to.

And when they saw him there, they worshiped him; but they also had doubts.

And Jesus came and said to them,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go out and disciple all the nations,

baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you in all the days to come, until the culmination of this age."

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

SERMON -

This Gospel passage is called the Great Commission.
This is the end of the Gospel of Matthew and Jesus is giving his disciples their marching orders.
Pastor Owen Griffiths, who served at my rl church during his intern year of seminary,
writes a weekly blog about the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday.
You can find it at oldreligiousguy.blogspot.com.
Here is his take on this scripture.

In Pastor Owen's words:
"Jesus tells his followers (and us) to "go and make disciples of all nations."
He doesn't tell them to go and make believers or make church members.
He tells them to make disciples—a word which comes from the same root as the word "discipline."
He's asking us to make and be people who live every day in the contemplation of the Holy Trinity."

My take from this is that we need to be more disciplined, more intentional in our faith to be more effective in following Jesus' command.
Today, let us dig into this scripture in more detail.

I want to set the stage by looking at the context of this passage.
This is the second time in Matthew where Jesus sent out the disciples.
The previous time, in Chapter 10, Jesus sent them on a limited mission.
He gave them authority to heal the sick, drive out demons, and to preach.
But they were sent to the "lost sheep of Israel" and told to avoid Gentile and Samaritan towns.

But now Jesus is not limiting them - they are to go out to all the earth, everywhere, to everyone.
That is quite the step up!

One of the things I have learned to do when reading scripture is to look for the words or phrases that jump out at me.
The key phrase that jumped out at me was "some doubted" or "they also had doubts".

The Greek word for doubt used here has no hint of unbelief.
I found that interesting,

It is better described as "wavering" or "hesitating".
Like... the disciples saw Jesus and they froze.

Why, we wonder?
Again, let's look at the context here.

Just a short time ago Jesus was handed over, crucified, buried, and raised. They looked for him at the tomb and were told to go to Galilee. Then they arrived in Galilee and saw Jesus. This was the first time they had seen the risen Christ since the crucifixion. It was probably overwhelming.

It says that some doubted.

Now, who doubted?

We think immediately of Thomas, aka Doubting Thomas from one of the other Gospels. But we don't know if it was him, or some of the other disciples, or the other people who were with them.

We just do not know.

And because of that we can assume it was not really important.

Let's go back to the Greek. The Greek word used here is closer to the third-person word "they".

As in - they doubted, they hesitated.

Likely all of them.

What I like about this is that the focus changes from an individual to the group. It removes the distraction of judging whoever it was who doubted.

I started thinking...

What if something similar happened to us?

Remember at Pentecost, when something like tongues of fire settled over the disciples' heads

as they were prophesying and speaking in different languages?

Everyone listening could understand them.

For you Star Trek fans, the first Universal Translator!

Then the thought came to me - what if Jesus appeared suddenly, standing right here for example.

The first question is, how would we know it was him?

There have been many paintings depicting Jesus, but was that actually how he looked?

Some of us would say yes, some no.

Time magazine many years ago ran a picture of a short, middle-eastern man, very nondescript, as what Jesus might have looked like..

Would we all agree that is what Jesus looked like?

Probably not.

Regardless what pictures we see, we likely would not agree on any one depiction.

So what would Jesus do if he showed up and wanted us to recognize him without controversy?

Throughout scripture Jesus is seen as knowing deeply the person he was interacting with.

So, it follows that Jesus would know exactly how each and every one of us expected

him to look and could present himself to each of us that way.

So he is standing here, we see him, and we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is Jesus.

Would we at once jump up and down with excitement?

Or would we be overwhelmed? Would we freeze, hesitate?

That would be me, fer sher!

How about you?

I guess this is just us being the imperfect people that we are.

The disciples worshiped Jesus but also hesitated.

What did Jesus do?

Of course he ignored that and cut to the chase.

Jesus told them what he wanted of them.

Go therefore and make disciples.

Here's another great phrase - Go therefore.

Looking back to the Greek the original tense for "Go therefore" can be understood as "As you are going".

A continuing process.

The mission is not just a special trip to a foreign country, but a 24/7 lifestyle.

It means teaching, baptizing, and serving "as you" walk through your neighborhood, work at your job, or go to the grocery store.

Notice we have moved from Galilee to us here in the present!

I hear some of you saying...

Me, a evangelist?

Don't worry, I am chiming in with you!

Why?

Because this evangelizing thing is intimidating.

I think that is also because we don't have a good understanding of what it really is, whether we would do it the right way.

What do we think when we think of evangelism?

When I worked in New York City I remember a guy on the median on Park Avenue waving a Bible and preaching to nobody in particular.

My reaction? Stay away from that guy!

How about those folks who show up at your door with leaflets? I will occasionally chat with them but frankly, showing up unannounced is annoying. I've got things to do.

The TV evangelists who promise your woes will be over if you just send them money.

Boy, do I sound cynical!

So what if we take a leap of faith and decide, ok, Jesus, I'll give it a go, show me how.

Ooops, wait a minute.

I don't have time!

I need to work.

I have a yard to take care of.

Then there is cooking, laundry, taking care of the kids or grandkids, walking the dog.

And oh yeah, that thing called sleep?

Can I just get some more of that please?

We can be full of excuses can't we?

But maybe it is something else getting in our way.

Who me?

Who am I, Lord, that you are mindful of me?

Who am I that God would ask ME to take on this responsibility?

This is something I struggle with.

Why do we ask these questions?

Because we downplay our strengths and we emphasize our faults.

Let me repeat that.

We downplay our strengths and we emphasize our faults.

We don't see ourselves like God does.

We ask, why me?

The best answer is why not me?

If you look at scripture you will see that God picked people just like you and me to do God's work.

Moses - Hey Lord, I stutter, I can't put three words in a row that make sense. Pick someone else.

Peter, James, John - fishermen, the blue-collar workers of the day.

Matthew - the tax collector, smart, educated, but a hated Jew who worked for Rome.

Ok, so if we accept that maybe, just maybe, we can be one of those people, what can we do?

I for one am not one to knock on doors, or go up to strangers and say, "Do you know Jesus?"

To me, that is annoying, presumptuous.

But there are other ways.

The most important way is to just be yourself.

I remember a particularly hard time of my life when a friend told me, don't fight it, ignore all the mud being thrown at you.

Just be yourself, and people will see who you really are.

Live a life that makes people feel seen and valued, so that they might just want to know more.

How do we do that?

Again, be yourself.

Talk conversationally about things going on at church for example.

Something a kid may have said during church that made you laugh.

The children's sermon is often full of those!

Or how you have been concerned about someone on our prayer list.

Or someone who died recently that you will miss because they were important to you.

In this way you enter people's lives and encourage them.

Who you are talking to might show an interest, and you can ask, "want to come with me one Sunday?"

Shoot I first started coming to my rl church, after years of atheism, because someone invited me.

That first Sunday I came here, I was greeted by a guy who treated me like we had known each other for years!

That was in 1992 and I still remember it.

Think about people who affected you that same way.

Think about how you have may affected other people in that way.

Be yourself.

There is a saying I really like, attributed to St Francis of Assisi:

Preach the Gospel always.

If necessary, use words.

And that is the key.

You don't need to beat someone over the head with a Bible.

Just be kind.

I know that can be hard with some people, but do it anyway.

It gets easier.

Then we can take the next step to where Jesus said, "make disciples of all nations". Here is where it gets.... wait for it... RADICAL!

Jesus says, I am sending you to people who you don't think are worthy.

I am sending you to everyone!

That is tough.

Remember Noah, when he was told to go to Nineveh but he went the other way because he felt the Ninevites were not worth saving?

And then he threw a tantrum when they actually did listen and repent?

We run into people all the time who rub us the wrong way.
It can be a stranger, a co-worker.

How about that person who cut you off on the highway?
Yup, that one.
That family member who is always pushing your buttons?
Yup.

How about those in government that you dislike? Yup, them too.

All of these people are worthy of our attention, regardless of our feelings.

Really????? Yes, really.

It is hard, I will admit it.
But if you don't try, then it ain't gonna happen.
How can you even try to reach out to these people?
It's not easy.

Just like before, be yourself, a child of God wanting a better world.

And by remembering that you are a Child of God, you can also believe that that person is also a child of God.
When you find yourself of complaining about them, name them as a "child of God".

"Can you believe what that... child of God... just did!?"

See how it feels different?

Make it a habit.

Day by day, you can learn to treat these people the same way you treat friends and family.
There really should not be any difference, right?
Be more disciplined, more intentional, plant the seeds.

Jesus said he was given all authority to do these things, and he is passing it along to you.
Jesus said he would be with us always, so we don't have to feel overwhelmed.
Let us be Jesus in our communities.

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.

CeCe Winans: Goodness of God (Live),
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y81yIo1_3o8

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 and merciful God,
We come before you today as your people,
your familia, carrying many things in our hearts.
Some of us come with joy. Some of us come tired.

Some of us come worried about our families, our communities, our country, and the world.
Some of us are carrying grief that we do not always have words for.
Meet us here, God.
Hold us with tenderness.

Jesus, you send your disciples into the world with courage, but you do not send them alone.
You promise, "I am with you always."
Remind us of that promise today.

When we feel afraid, be with us.
When we feel unsure, guide us.

When we feel tired, give us strength.
When we feel alone, surround us with your presence.

We pray for our communities, for our barrios,
for our neighborhoods,
for every place where people are longing for justice,
peace, safety, and love.

We pray for families separated by borders, by violence,
by grief, by illness, and by fear.

We pray for those who feel forgotten, pushed aside, or unseen.
God, make us people of your good news.

Send us out with compassion in our hearts, truth on our lips,
and love in our hands.

Help us to see Christ in one another and to carry your hope wherever we go.

And when the road is hard, remind us again:
You are with us always.
In the name of Jesus, we pray.
Amen.

BENEDICTION -

Go now, familia, in the love of God.
Go with courage in your heart, compassion in your hands, and the promise of Christ
in your spirit:
"I am with you always."
Amen.

Music for the Journey

U2, Beautiful Day-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=co6WMzD0h1o>

Go in Peace
Amen