

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of our Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Whether this is your first time here or this community has been your spiritual home for years, we are grateful that you are here today.

This is First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life, a real UCC church with full standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

A place that welcomes you and wants you to know that:

No matter who you are,
or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here.

In a world that too often tells people they must hide parts of themselves to belong, we proclaim a different message: that God's love is wider than our fears, stronger than our divisions, and big enough to embrace us all.

So wherever you are on your faith journey, whatever questions, hopes, joys, or burdens you carry today, know this: you are welcome here.

You are valued here.

You are loved by God.

Just a quick reminder that our 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.

Today is also the first Sunday of the month and we will be celebrating Holy Communion.

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

As well as a cup of grape juice or wine to drink as well together when the time comes to pray over the elements and remember our savior Jesus Christ with the ritual of Holy Communion.

And now friends, let us open our hearts to the Spirit's movement among us as we worship together.

INVOCATION

Holy One,

Thank you for gathering us here today across distance, screens, homes, and hearts.

Meet us in this space with grace, courage, and truth. Open our ears to hear your wisdom, open our hearts to receive your love, and open our lives to become part of your healing work in the world.

May this time together remind us that we are not alone, that love is still stronger than fear, and that your light still shines in every corner of creation.

Amen

Gathering Song -

Jon Batiste - FREEDOM

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YHVC1DcHmo&list=RD3YHVC1DcHmo&start_radio=1

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading comes from two different places.

The first one is from the book of Proverbs 31:8-9 (NRSV) " Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out; judge righteously; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

The second one is gospel of Mathew 5:13-16 NRSV

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

Sermon -

Holy Disruption - When Scripture, Patriotism, and Power Collide

Today is July 5th, the day after a major American celebration.

Here in the United States, we celebrate the 4th of July as Independence Day. I name that because many in our church family may be joining us from other countries.

The 4th of July commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, when the 13 colonies declared their separation from Great Britain and named themselves an independent nation.

Growing up evangelical conservative, that meant singing "God Bless America," waiving an American flag from the altar.

By July, schools were out, so it was more of a church, family, and a God thing.

I never thought of anything different, even here at the Rio Grande Valley border.

In fact, it meant barbecuing with family, laughs, and maybe even time at the Island because the adults did not work that day if it landed on a workday.

It was what we call a "pachanga day" (party day).

I don't remember much else.

Seminary has a way of taking your embedded theology, putting it in a box, and shaking it until you begin to question what you were taught was unquestionable.

For me, seminary gave me a new lens for what it means to be American and a follower of the Gospel.

It showed me the gospels unapologetically through the lens of the oppress.

One such example is Frederick Douglass, an American social reformer, abolitionist, and leader of African American civil rights, who was invited to give a speech during a 4th of July celebration in 1852. (Frederick Douglass first delivered this address in 1852. See "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner, New York: International Publishers, 1950, 2:192.)

Douglass took it as mockery, but he used the stage to call out how hypocritical the invitation was.

He told the crowd, for starters, that it was their celebration, not his.

He asked them, "What is this holiday to an American slave?"

In his speech, Douglass challenged the hollow mockery of prayers, hymns, and religious parades in the face of those who were still treated with cruelty.

Orale'... talk about some hardcore speech that, sadly, today might still ring true.

And I know some people hear words like that and might say it was rude, bitter, and definitely un-American.

But asking hard questions about America does not mean we hate America.

My parents are from Mexico. I was born and raised in a borderland where Spanish was, and is for the most part, the norm.

But I am an American.

In school, they taught us our history and how to be good American citizens.

I pledged allegiance to a flag every morning for 12 years.

So yes, as a pastor and as a disciple of the one they called Jesus, the Son of God, I have a complicated relationship now with the 4th of July and with the whole "God Bless America."

Not because I do not love the people of this country or this country.
But because I also love the truth.

And I love my neighbor, even though they might not have been born here or look like an "American."

And I cannot follow Jesus and ignore the ways Scripture, patriotism, and power have been used to harm people.

The reality is that it is easier to be a pastor who holds on to the writings of 1 Peter, or as we learned in seminary, someone who penned Peter's ask of those in exile in Galatia and Asia to listen to Roman authority.

See these new believers, the Jewish and Gentile Christians, were told to listen to the people who were over them for the sake of peace.

These scriptures we read from 1 Peter were also used by the Germans when the Reich moved into their church. And who are we to question the law and those appointed rulers by God?!

These scriptures were used and quoted when churches wanted to uphold and defend segregation.

And now we uphold it when the church wants to uphold mass deportations, segregation, and separation of children and parents in the name of our ruler, ICE.

My son wrote a song called "Melting Point" by Josh Camacho, and I share the link for you to listen to it later if you would like to.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=665LpUbY1rE&list=RD665LpUbY1rE&start_radio=1

In it, he talks about the land of the free becoming a country he never thought he would have to leave.

He composed the song and played his own instruments after I kept nagging him to carry his passport with him to university.

See on campus, students walking late at night to their dorms, classrooms, or music halls were being pulled over by police, sometimes with ICE agents present.

After seeing several incidents of people being questioned or taken because they looked "un-American," I kept telling him, "Carry your passport, boy."

So he did what many young people do when the world feels heavy.
He turned fear into music.

And maybe that is one action item for us this week.

When fear feels heavy, do not let it stay trapped inside your body.

Turn it into something.

Write a song.

Paint something.

Plant something.

Grow something.

Journal the truth.

Dance the anger out.

Make a meal for someone.

Share a poem.

Create something that reminds you and someone else that fear does not get the last word and that my friends is not putting a light under a bowl, it is adding seasoning (seasoning) to something that seems out of taste, and bland.

Because art, music, gardening, and creativity are not escapes from the world.

But sometimes they are how we survive the world.

Sometimes they are how we tell the truth when our voices shake.

Sometimes they are how we become holy disrupter.

St. Augustine said, "An unjust law is no law at all."

What does faithfulness look like when the law itself becomes unjust?

Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermon at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, said, "A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies.

WE are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that cannot be the only act. One day, the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that people are not constantly beaten and robbed along life's highway.

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It means seeing that the systems producing suffering need to be restructured."

So what are we to do?

The thing about being a disciple of Christ is that we have to look at all he did on earth, not just a few verses here and there.

From the banks of the Jordan River, Jesus became the hope people were waiting for—the Messiah.

The one they hoped would free them from Roman Empire abuse.

The one they hoped would rise against the Empire and free the people from oppression.

These were people suffering under excessive taxation, abuse, and heavy religious requirements.

And then Jesus comes talking what sounds like nonsense.
Give to the poor. Wait, what?

Turn the other cheek? You're kidding, right?

Walk an extra mile if they force you to walk one?

Stop along the road and help the one you might not even want to sit next to?

(nombre...nonsense!)

Is Jesus inviting us to the same in today's world?

He is kidding, right?

But this is the message of the Gospel.

Do justice.

Love mercy.

Walk humbly with your God.

Doing justice begins loving your neighbor.

The Gospel of Matthew 5 turns things upside down, blessing people left and right.

See, church, we can't change history, no matter how much people today try to make America a nation born in Christianity. It was not.

And if we believe this nation is, was, and must be Christian, we whitewash the pain, mistakes, and sins this country has made.

We also create a false peace.

A peace that protects power.

A peace that protects patriarchy.

A peace that asks women to step back and let their husbands speak for the household.

But Jesus' friends are called to another way.

We are called to see that those with less are blessed.

We are called to tend to those in need.

We are called to remember that blessing is not something you earn.
Like grace, it is yours—no questions asked.

America is called a land of opportunity, but where is opportunity when the system is rigged?

Where is opportunity when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer?
So what do we do?

I tell you what we do: we become holy disrupter.
We pray, even with a lump in our throat.

We hold on to the good news, even when things do not seem to be getting better.

We back up ministries, businesses, and people challenging unjust systems.

We call out what does not look right.

We notice when a law does not match the Gospel.

We look for the innovative ways people are already rising up to help one another.

I founded an organization called Color Splash Out, and from July 16th to the 19th, we will hold camp.

Every year I freak out because funding comes from the community so I hustle.
And you know what?

We make it every year.
What are you passionate about, my friends?

Is there a group growing food for the community?

Is there a way to write to Congress or your elected officials to stand against anti-trans policies?

Here is the action item I want to leave with you:
This week, choose one holy disruption.

One letter.

One phone call.

One donation.

One conversation.

One young person you encourage.

One neighbor you check on.

One unjust thing you refuse to ignore.

Do not try to fix the whole world this week.

Just choose one place where love needs a witness, and show up there.

I will stand up in creative ways as things get harder in this country.
Y tu has lo mismo (Do the same)

But by God, I will not stay silent.

I will hold on to the First Amendment and the freedom to speak.
And I will hold on to my religious freedom, too.

Because I have a religious freedom right to love my neighbor, to welcome all.

Especially those who in the name of religious freedom choose to mistreat, push away, ignore, or justify oppression.

We will choose to stand with those who have nothing.

To be the light that Jesus is inviting us to be and the salt of this world.

To be the holy disruption the light to everyone in the house that shows the good deeds and retreats the shadows.

So this season, may you be a holy disruptor in your own way.
May you create joy where fear has tried to settle.

May you shine light in this country, in your community, in your home, and in your corner of the world.

May your courage remind someone they are not alone.

And may your life preach the Gospel before you ever say a word.

In the name of Jesus, who turned the world upside down with love,

I challenge you holy disruptors to stand up and May God Bless everyone.

Amen.

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

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.

COMMUNION

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.

Amen

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY

Go now as holy disrupters of love.
May the Holy One give you courage to speak truth,
wisdom to know where love is needed,
and strength to show up when fear feels heavy.

May you be light.
May you be salt.
May you be joy that makes the shadows retreat.
Go in peace, go in justice, and go in love.
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Pharrell Williams - Freedom (Official Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1Y90lG_Fuw&t=71s

Go in Peace
Amen