

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.

My name, in Real Life, is Ruth Jones, and I am a Member in Discernment
at Community Congregational Church, United Church of Christ. in Chula Vista,
California,

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.

Call to Worship: (Psalm 86:11-12)

Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.

Prayer of Invocation (Psalm 139)

10 Lord, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
:
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.
24 See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen

Rejoice Ye Pure In Heart

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4q7mHRXwys&list=RDY4q7mHRXwys&start_radio=1

Scripture

Romans 8:12-17 - Life in the Spirit

12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—

13 for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption.

When we cry, “Abba! Father!”

16 it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified.

God bless to us the reading of this scripture.

Sermon - Spirit and Spirituality

You know when I’m going to preach, I usually start by looking at the options for the texts assigned for the lectionary for the day, but as I think about those passages, it has often happened that something else is going on in my life, or around me, that helps me choose which ones to preach on, and what message I would like to share with you.

Maybe God exerting a little influence?

This time, the Morning Meditation I attend here at the First UCC in Second Life has been using some readings about Spirituality.

And it has made me think of how that is the same or different from THE Spirit, either ours, or the Holy Spirit.

In the King James version of the Bible, Genesis 1:2 says:

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

But in the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition it says:

While a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Spirit of God Wind from God...the same thing?

In Acts 2, verse 2, it describes the day of Pentecost.

2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.

And then the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit.
Again, Wind and Spirit. Spirit of God? the Holy Spirit?
As believers in a triune God, one and the same?
Or because God is the Three in One, does it matter?

In our scripture today, in Romans, it tells us that
“all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” and later, “When we cry,
“Abba! [1] Father!”
it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”:

We often describe being a Christian as being filled with the Holy Spirit or having
the Holy Spirit live in our heart.
But Wow, that CONNECTION of Our Spirit and the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, is
what Paul wrote about to the church in Rome.

Google tells me that, usually in the way we use it, the word “spirit” is a noun,
and it’s defined as the non-physical, vital essence that animates living beings,
often equated with the soul.
Or, it also refers to supernatural beings (like ghosts) or in our case the Holy
Spirit.
We may not be able to see it, but the spirit is a THING.
Our spirit or soul.
The Holy Spirit.
Still an entity.

But, according to Google, spirituality is a broad human experience concerning the
search for meaning, purpose,
and a sense of connection to something larger than oneself. It explores fundamental
questions about existence, consciousness,
and the sacred, often emphasizing a deep inner life rather than strict adherence to
organized religion.
That definition may sound more philosophical or more Buddhist than what we normally
think of here in church.
Or maybe, it sounds a little like looking for the “living water” that Jesus can
provide, so we would never be thirsty again.

And if you’ve ever read anything about a study of people in America being asked
about their religious preferences,
there is an answer often given that they are Spiritual not Religious.

So, what does that mean?
For all of us, sitting here at the church in Second Life, and many that may already
attended a Real Life church this morning,
we probably identify as Christian, and probably as religious as well,
because we come here on Sundays to worship together,
and this place, this family of believers that we are part of are something that we
care about.
Hopefully something that helps us feel closer to God and God’s presence.

But we had better also be Spiritual, because we should all be trying to better understand the nature of our God,
our relationship with God, and what the meaning of that is in our life.

Although the UCC has a Statement of Faith, that we recite occasionally as part of our service (at least my Real Life church),
we don't mean to be a church that just gives you dogma and tells you that is what you must believe.
We are each encouraged to discover more about our beliefs for ourselves.

In the reading from the Morning Meditation, The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning, by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, it likens Spirituality to the wind.
Because it is also something you can't see, you can't hold on to or lock up.
And we can't measure Spirituality.
We can't measure how much each one of us is searching inside for meaning, and purpose, or for relationship with a greater power.

We may see some difference in external behaviors when someone becomes a Christian, but we can't actually see the transformation inside them when they are filled with the Spirit of God.

And because of that, because we can't see that in ourselves either, do you ever wonder how Spiritual we really are?
Does Spirituality mean more than believing in God and saying a prayer to God.

In recent years, in many Christian churches, some of the practices that help us develop some of that spirituality have become more common. Mindfulness, Meditation, Centering Prayer.
It's our modern world discovering some of the ancient practices, as the Desert Fathers went out alone to experience God,
or monks in monasteries hold long vigils of silence and prayer.

In Real Life church this morning, before I started this sermon, I did a children's story about meditation.
I shared that: Meditation is a practice where you train attention and awareness to achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm state.

It's something that we may think a person that goes up a mountain alone and just sits in a cave might do,
but actually, it is something that many people, in many countries, and of many religions do,
because it helps them to also become more aware of themselves and the world,
and it can also be a way to open your mind to listen for God talking to you.

But you know what... its not that easy to clear your mind, because we have so many things to think about.
What's for dinner?
What are we doing later today?
What chores do I have to do?

And now, because we are all so tied to our phones.. Who is sending me a text?
Or posting a cute cat video I have to see?

It's gotten to be that we humans are so busy that we are always multi-tasking, doing multiple things at once,
and so our minds are thinking of that many more things all at the same time.
So I asked the children, and my congregation to try something with me, and I'll ask you to do this as well.

When I say Go, I want you to close your eyes, and keep them closed till I tell you to open them,
but while they are closed, I want you to clear your minds, and think of NOTHING.
NOTHING at all. Ok? Ok Go.

Ok, you can open them.
So what did you think about?
How long is she gonna keep us here?
What's happening around me ?

Was it hard to think of nothing?
Well another way can be to concentrate on a specific thing, like your breathing, and try to think of ONLY your breathing.
Slowly, in through your nose, and out through your nose.
Let's try that, again, when I say Go, close your eyes, but now concentrate on your breathing.
But still, try not to think about anything else. Ok? Go.

Ok, open your eyes. Was that easier, to keep focused? Did other thoughts still pop in?

Did it feel calming?
Because the benefits of being able to quiet your mind like that can be also to help you relieve stress,
like when you are worried about something, maybe to help you fall asleep at night, and maybe...
if you can stop thinking about everything else, you might also be able to hear God talking to you.
What do you think?

So, back to the sermon, these various spiritual practices have been practiced by the Christian church as well.
Practices that enable the opportunity for you to open yourself to the world around you and to the word of God.
And interestingly, some of that can come with being able to detach from the real world.

The readings used some quotes from the eighteenth-century Jesuit spiritual director Jean-Pierre Caussade.
Some of the things he said we should do (and I want you to think about each one of these for a second), include:

- Rejoice every time you discover a new imperfection (in yourself)
- If we find ourselves getting impatient, we can try to bear our impatience patiently.
- If we lose our tranquility, we can endure that loss tranquilly.
- If we get angry, we ought not get angry with ourselves for getting angry.
- If we are not content, we can try to be content with our discontent.

Very Zen-like.

And I read a little bit of how we should be treating ourselves into that, so maybe we can extend that same grace to others,
treat others, love others, as we love ourselves. (As Jesus told us to do.)

So if you encounter anyone that says they are Spiritual and not Religious, you can say Great,

but remind them it is definitely possible to be both.

Spirituality is more private,

Religion can mean choosing to be part of a community of believers, part of the Body of Christ.

We all have our own Spirit, we have a belief in the Holy Spirit always with us, and we can practice Spirituality to allow ourselves to explore God's presence in us, in the world,

and to grow as Christians who have a relationship with God. God's Spirit, leading our Spirit. Amen

COMMUNITY PRAYER

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

Great is Thy Faithfulness - Stacey Plays Hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLh2utBwHhA>

O loving God, we know that you hear our prayers.

Those said out loud, and those only in our hearts.

Please bring healing and hope to those in need, and blessings on all those rejoicing.

(Review the prayers and pray for them before going into the pastoral prayer)

PASTORAL PRAYER

God, we also pray for all those being effected by fires and floods, smoke and heat.

We would pray some of that rain could fall where it is most needed.

We pray for the world in this time of wars and turmoil, and pray that all people could hear your message of peace and love,

and treat their neighbors and they want to be treated.

We would pray that people remember not only the death and resurrection of Jesus but also his life, as he welcomed those that were outcast and oppressed and as he challenged those more concerned with their own power than with the good of the people.

Please help us to live our life as he did.

In Jesus name, we pray,

Amen

Spirit of Gentleness – Golden Ears United Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9q0ydibNHcs>

Benediction:

Dear God, Please give us the blessing of peace for ourselves and our world as we go forth from this place.

And help us to carry that message out into the world. Amen

Thank you for coming Go in Peace.