

WELCOME

Grace and Peace be with you in the name of our Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.
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, we gather to remember that the Holy One meets us in all of it: in the silence, and in our questions and fears.

Some of us come carrying joy.

Some of us come carrying grief.

Some of us come tired, overwhelmed, or just trying to make it through the storm.

So bring your whole self—your faith, your doubts, your laughter, your tears, and whatever you have been holding too tightly.

May this time together remind us that we are not alone.

Today I rejoice to be the one to welcome you to worship.

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.

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.

Before I continue last Sunday I shared with you the non profit I run and I wanted to
share with you also the published article link if you would like to read more about
it later on.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/aug/04/texas-summer-camp-trans-kids>

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/gallery/2026/aug/04/texas-summer-camp-trans-kids-gallery>

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

INVOCATION

Come Holy Spirit and fill this place and wherever this worship service is being tuned in with your presence.

We ask at this moment that you infuse the wifi waves with your peace and joy.

And may our time together be one that fills our cup as we begin a new week together.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

GATHERING SONG:

for KING + COUNTRY - burn the ships (Official Music Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOVrOuKVBuY&list=PLGPw66brtuzEdYycOsESEo4lFLCj8TZtu&index=4>

SCRIPTURES

Today's reading comes from the gospel of Matthew 14 v. 12-14; v. 22-27 NRSV

His disciples came and took the body and buried him; then they went and told Jesus. Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.

Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea.

But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON - When Grief Has a Plate at the Table

Last week, we encountered the story of John the Baptist,
the troublemaker who could not keep his mouth shut to save his own skin.

We spoke about Herod's niece dancing for him and pleasing him to the point where he
promised to give her anything she wanted.

We read how Herod was sleeping with his brother's wife,
the mother of this child who pleased him so well.

We encountered the challenge of seeing beyond the murderous request to behead John
the Baptist
and noticing the self-preservation effort by this mother and child.

And as I read the Scriptures, what came to mind through it all was how Jesus, in his
human side, must have felt.

I could not help but think about how, if you keep reading, miracles keep occurring.

Jesus keeps on working.

Jesus keeps doing his thing after losing John.

We started today right where the disciples come, bury the body, and tell Jesus about
it.

The chapter continues right into the story of the loaves and fishes.

But notice how Jesus keeps trying to withdraw.

I could not help but think of fellow clergy members, and even my own life,
moving as young as 17 so quickly through grief, death, misfortunes,
challenges, and life-changing situations because no one has time for all that
sadness.

Who has time to grieve?

And if you are like me, or know someone like me,
you might plunge right through all kinds of challenges because it feels best to just
go through and weather the storm.

I felt so close to Jesus in these readings.

The man keeps trying to get away, but there is so much work that must be done.
"Send the people away," they tell him.

But he continues on.

Finally, he sends the disciples onto a boat, and then he walks right through the storm on the water, freaking everyone out.

Despite the work that must be done, if you notice through his ministry, through the gospels, Jesus goes away to pray.

He sleeps on a boat.

He goes up the mountain.

He seeks seclusion in a way that honors care for himself.

Today's culture is fast-paced.

Today's culture is in your hands, at the tips of your keyboard, and in the chiming of our notifications.

Who has time to stop and be still?

Or maybe you do.

I'm still trying.

But in a world that expects more and more, we must guard our lives and seek quiet moments and a practice of self-care.

Perhaps it is gardening, planting, cooking, spending time with your fur babies, swimming, reading, or even playing video games.

When loss happens, we must pause to grieve.

But for how long?

How do you grieve death, the end of an era, a challenging time, a divorce, or a breakup?

In the book *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, writers Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson define grief this way: "Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost."

Grief is a collection of emotions, and we all respond to them differently because grief is anything but systematic.

But how long do you grieve?

An elderly lady in front of my home was having a difficult time six months after her husband died.

They had been together for 40 years.

When I met her, she said she had trouble getting up and doing normal things. She would eat once a day, and that was just so her stomach would not hurt.

A person going through a breakup described just about the same emotions this lady had shared with me.

Another person going through serious anger at the husband she was divorcing also sounded the same.

Three completely different scenarios described to me the same emotions:

Not being able to sleep.

Feeling a complete and overwhelming sense of emptiness.

Not being able to eat.

Are they all grief?

I think so.

Grief over the death of a loved one.

Grief over a future, and perhaps the possibilities of a life together, ending.

Grief over a marriage ending, even when anger is vivid.

When I read in the Scriptures that the disciples had picked up John's body, I could not help but think Jesus knew.

You know JC knew about it already.

And maybe he also knew he would see John again.

Or at least, when I think of the divine part of Jesus, I cannot help but feel a little cynical and say, "He knows the story!"

But then I remember his human side.

And I think about my own human side.

I would be marching right over to that platter, grabbing John's head, putting John back together like a holy Beetlejuice moment, breathing life back into him, and saying, "Let's go, John. We are not done. And where is Herod?"

But like many of the human decisions Jesus made, he did not use his power that way.

He kept going.

Performing miracles.

Feeding people.

Walking on water.

Mitchell and Anderson say this about grief: "We need to avoid the rush to meaning in any form,
for living through grief requires an ability to tolerate unanswered questions."

I do not know why the Spirit leads me to talk about grief, but as I read the Scriptures continuing
after our last Sunday meeting, grief came to mind.

Perhaps you know someone who is going through a loss.

Or perhaps it is you.

But the message of hope today is this:
There is no wrong or right way to move through grief.

Perhaps that is why we have rituals.

A funeral.

Time with friends and family.

Time alone.

Candles.

Prayers.

Stories.

A meal after the service, because somehow somebody always brings potato salad, or a casserole,
and suddenly grief has a plate and a chair at the table.

As Jesus walked on water and the storm raged, making everyone in the boat afraid, he said,
"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Grief and loss, like the storm, can batter our boat.

They can rattle our lives.
They can throw us off balance.
They can even make us seasick.

But take heart.
Do not be afraid.

Peter asking Jesus if he could come to him is a whole other sermon.

But I encourage you to do the same in the sea of unknowns.

Voice your fear.

Cry out your concern.

Yell in anger if you must.

Let it quietly sit still, if that is your way.

But whatever you do, try not to bury it without its ritual.

Try not to ignore it without seeing it for what it is.

And when you start to drown, reach out.

For me therapy and spiritual direction has done wonders.

Do not let the shadows overtake you.

You are not alone.

So here is the action item for this week:
Name one grief you have been carrying.

It does not have to be the biggest one.

It does not have to be neat or easy to explain.

Just name it.

Then give it one small ritual.

Light a candle.

Say a prayer.

Write a letter you may never send.

Sit with a picture.

Plant something.

Take a walk.

Tell a trusted friend, "I am still grieving this."

Because grief does not always need to be fixed.

Sometimes it needs to be witnessed.

And sometimes the holiest thing we can do is stop pretending the storm is not real and let Jesus meet us right there on the water.

Take heart.

It is Christ.

Do not be afraid.

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.

Meet Me In The Valley- Tasha Layton

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLas2emT-SY&list=RDuLas2emT-SY&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

Holy One,

Meet us in the middle of whatever we are carrying today.

Be near to those who are grieving, tired, afraid, or overwhelmed.

Calm the storms around us and within us, and remind us that we are not alone.

Give us space to breathe, courage to name what hurts, and faith to reach out when we feel like we are sinking.

May your love hold us, your peace steady us, and your presence guide us.
Amen.

Music for the Journey

Andy Grammer - Keep Your Head Up

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmrOB_q3tjo&list=RDCmrOB_q3tjo&start_radio=1

Go in peace!

Amen

Blessing for the Journey

Go now with courage for the storm and tenderness for your grief.

May the Holy One meet you in the boat, on the water, and in every place you feel overwhelmed.

May you remember to breathe, to reach out, and to trust that you are not alone.

Take heart.

Christ is near.

Do not be afraid.

Amen.