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.

Welcome to First UCC in Second Life!

Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, mi gente!

Wherever you are joining us from, welcome to First UCC in Second Life!

We are First United Church of Christ and Conference Center in Second Life, a recognized congregation with full standing in the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Whether you're a longtime member of this community, visiting for the first time, or just happened to wander in wondering what this place is all about, we're glad you're here

For we are 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.

There is a donation bowl in the back by the door

Last Sunday, we celebrated All Saints Day, remembering those who have gone before us and the love they continue to leave in our lives.

Today, we're continuing that conversation, but looking at grief and loss in a slightly different way.

Because, friends, not every loss comes with a funeral. And not everything we grieve has a photograph.
Our sermon today is called "Give That Loss an Easel."

And before we begin, I'm going to invite you to gather a few things.

Gather something or somewhere to write and a candle if you can.

I have placed some candles in the viewer if you wish to get one of those of
Throughout the sermon light one up here.

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

Let us pray

INVOCATION

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

Holy One, thank you for opening new doors, new opportunities, and new ways to reach your people.
Because your love has no borders, and your Spirit needs no walls!

May those who have been rejected find welcome, those who are hurting find healing, and those searching for hope find you.

I ask today Holy-One for a shield of Holy protection on our congregation, that nothing distracts from your good news, from the work we are doing, and the journey each of us are on.

May your blessings be upon you and your anointing on those who share good news.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen

And now for our gathering song and some church announcements.

Gathering Song -

Adele - Rolling in the Deep (Official Music Video)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYEDA3JcQqw&list=RD6dYWe1c3OyU&index=3

Church Announcements

This season in morning meditation we will be reading the poetry of Mary Oliver and practicing the three-tier listening of lection divina.

Meditation is on Monday, and Fridays at 8 am (all times Pacific)

Evening Psalter

5pm Tues, Wed, Thu, sometimes other days

SCRIPTURES

Today’s reading comes from the gospel of Luke 15:8-10 (The Message)

Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one.

Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it?

And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors:
‘Celebrate with me!

I found my lost coin!’

Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.

The Word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

SERMON - Some Losses Deserve a Frame

Friends, at the beginning of worship, I invited you to have a notebook, a journal, or somewhere digital to write.
I also invited you to have a candle nearby.

Keep those close.

Last Sunday, as we celebrated All Saints Day, we placed photographs of loved ones on easels.

We remembered their lives, celebrated the joy they brought us, and made room for grief.
But something kept stirring in my spirit.

And you know how the Holy Spirit works.

You think you're finished with something, and the Spirit says,
"¡Espérate! (Wait up) We're not done talking about this!"

I began wondering:
What about the losses that don't have photographs?

What about relationships we've lost?

Dreams that never happened?

The home we had to leave?

The peace of mind that disappeared?

What about the things nobody knows we're grieving?

Because, friends, not every loss comes with a funeral.

Not every grief comes with flowers or a sympathy card.

And sometimes the world expects us to move on before we've even acknowledged what happened.

So today, I want to give those losses something.

I want to give them a Frame

First Frame: Relationships

Let's begin with relationships.

Some relationships end because they've become harmful, toxic, or unsafe.

And let me tell you, some of those doors needed to close!

Can I get an Amen?

Some relationships were one-sided.

Some were exhausting.

Some simply reached the end of their season.

And for survivors of domestic violence, walking away may be necessary for survival.

I'm not suggesting anyone return to a harmful relationship.

But here's what I've learned:
You can make the right decision and still grieve what you've lost.

You can know a relationship needed to end and still miss what it once represented.

The companionship.

The hope.

The possibility of what might have been.

Sometimes people tell us, "Don't waste another tear on that person!"

And perhaps they're right about not returning.

But they don't get to decide whether we grieve.

Maybe the relationship you lost was with a sibling, a friend, a partner, or even your family.

I've witnessed this with young people who have experienced rejection and found belonging through their chosen families.

I've also witnessed grief in the young person we're raising.

Six years later, he still misses his mother.

Because grief doesn't follow our calendars.

It doesn't say, "Well, your six years are up! Time to move on!"
¡Ay, Dios mío!

If only our emotions worked that neatly!

But they don't.

So if you've lost a relationship, I invite you to write it down.

You don't have to share it.

Just name it.

And if you wish, light your candle or touch one of these little candles up here.

** The Second frame: Things We Have Lost

Now, what about the things we've lost?

And yes, I mean actual things!

A home.
A vehicle.
An heirloom.
Something you worked hard to acquire.

For example, I had to sell my Kia.

Now I can hear somebody saying, "Pastor Yadi, we're grieving cars now?"

Yes! My Kia!

My baby girl, my boxer, became seriously ill.

She needed a specialist, and at that moment I didn't have the resources to get her the care she needed.

So I sold my Kia.

Would I make that decision again?

Absolutely!

But I still grieved that car.

Because sometimes the right decision still costs us something.

Maybe you've had to sell something meaningful.

Maybe you lost an item connected to someone you loved.

What might seem insignificant to somebody else can carry enormous meaning for you.

The value of a loss belongs to the one who experienced it.

Give that loss an easel, too and candle if you wish.

** The Third Frame: Stability

Sometimes what we lose isn't a person or a possession.

Sometimes we lose stability.

I've witnessed this among transgender young people and families who have faced restrictions on gender-affirming medical care in Texas.

Some have had to move to other states to seek care and support.

Imagine losing your home, school, friends, and familiar surroundings, not because you're looking for adventure, but because circumstances have made staying difficult.

That's a loss.

Maybe you've experienced something different.

You lost your job.

Your income disappeared.

You couldn't afford your home anymore.

Suddenly you're couch surfing, staying with relatives, or trying to survive paycheck to paycheck.

And sometimes life doesn't just throw you one problem.

No, no, no!

Life throws the whole chancla collection at you!

¡Ave María!

And now you're wondering how you're going to make it through another month.

Friends, losing stability deserves to be grieved.

Write it down if this your case.

** The Fourth and Fifth Frame: Peace and Dreams

What about peace of mind?

You still show up.
You still answer emails.
You still smile.

People ask, "How are you doing?"

And what do we say?

"I'm fine!"

"Blessed and highly favored!"

Meanwhile, our peace of mind is somewhere in the lost-and-found department!

Can I get an Amen?

Sometimes we're exhausted, anxious, disappointed, or overwhelmed.

Not because we lack faith.

But because life is hard.

And what about our dreams?

That project you poured your heart into.

The job you thought you'd get.

The ministry, business, or idea you believed would become something beautiful.

You gave it your time, your resources, your imagination.

And then the funding didn't come. The opportunity disappeared. The dream fell apart.

And somebody says, "Just move on!"

¡Pues qué fácil decirlo! (Easy for you to say!)

You weren't the one carrying that dream.

Friends, we can grieve a future that never happened.

So Frame It, Name It, and Give It Grace.

The Woman Who Lost Her Coin

Now, I know what some of you might be thinking.

"Pastor Yadi, this sermon is sad as hell! Where's the Good News?"

Well, stay with me!

In Luke 15, Jesus tells us about a woman who has ten silver coins and loses one.

What does she do?

She lights a lamp.

She sweeps the house.

She searches carefully until she finds it.

And when she finds that coin, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me!"

Now, this parable is often used to talk about someone who is spiritually lost and found again.

And yes, that's part of how we've understood it.

But something else caught my attention.

The woman doesn't dismiss what she lost.

She doesn't say, "Well, I still have nine!"

She doesn't tell herself she's being dramatic.

She doesn't pretend the missing coin doesn't matter.

She searches because that coin has value.

And I wonder what might happen if we treated our own losses with that kind of care.

Not because everything we've lost needs to return.

Some relationships need to stay in the past. ¡Gracias a Dios!

Not every dream will come back.

Not every possession can be recovered.

But that doesn't mean the loss wasn't real.

Sometimes naming what we've lost is part of how we begin healing.

And when that woman finds her coin, she doesn't celebrate alone.

She calls her community.

Because joy, like grief, is something we're invited to share.

Healing Doesn't Always Mean Restoration

Now, here's where we need to be careful.

Because sometimes, especially in the church, we act as though healing means everything must return to the way it was.

Theologian Karen Baker-Fletcher, in Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective, challenges the idea that a good Christian must be healthy, wealthy, and living the American Dream as proof of God's favor.

She writes:
"This notion of 'healing' always means that there are no visible illnesses or disabilities remaining. Healing must evidence itself in the utter disappearance of an affliction."

Friends, think about that.

How often have we heard that if someone has enough faith, their illness will disappear?

That if they pray hard enough, everything will be fixed?

And if nothing changes, somebody starts questioning their faith!

As if God were a heavenly vending machine!

Put in three prayers, two Amens, and a hallelujah, and out comes your miracle!

¡Ay, Señor!

But that's not how God works.

Baker-Fletcher goes even further:
"Unconsciously, this perspective reveles a desire to control God. GOd MUST heal ONLY and ALWAYS in the way that I UNDERSTAND."

Can I get an Amen?

Who are we to tell God what healing must look like?

Who are we to say someone using a wheelchair cannot be whole?

Who are we to decide that a person living with grief, illness, or disability cannot testify to the goodness of God?

Maybe someone's testimony isn't that their circumstances changed.

Maybe their testimony is that they are living fully, faithfully, and joyfully exactly as they are.

Maybe healing doesn't mean returning to who we used to be.

Maybe it means learning to live with what is.

Finding peace without every answer.

Discovering that we are still worthy of dignity, belonging, love, and abundant life.

And recognizing that God's presence has not abandoned us.

When the Sun Comes Out

You know, when a storm passes and the sun comes out, the water doesn't immediately disappear.

When a flood happens, sunshine doesn't erase the damage.

There's still cleanup.

There's still repair.

There's still loss.

But the sun has returned.

And perhaps that is how hope begins.

Not by pretending the storm never happened.

Not by denying the damage.

But by recognizing that light can still break through the clouds.

Sometimes we can't see that light because we're wearing some really thick shades!

And I'm not talking about fashion, although some of us know how to rock those sunglasses!

I'm talking about the shades we wear to hide our tears.

Sometimes we even start throwing shade because sarcasm becomes our armor!

But even when we can't see the sun, we can sometimes feel its warmth.

And perhaps that's what the Spirit offers us.

Not the demand that we stop grieving.

But the warmth of God's presence while we grieve.

Action Item: Frame It, Name It, and Give It Grace

Now, mi gente, before we close, I want to invite you to do something.

Look at what you've written today.

Choose one loss.

Not the whole family drama. Or maybe its just me but we will be here till next Sunday if I do this.

Just one.

And beside it, write these words:
"This mattered. And I give myself permission to grieve."

Now write one small act of care you can offer yourself this week.

Maybe it's calling someone you trust.

Maybe it's talking with a therapist or spiritual director.

Maybe it's praying, resting, crying, or remembering.

Or maybe it's simply admitting, "I'm not ready to let this go."

And that's okay.

Because healing is not a race.

And grief is not a test of faith.

If you feel comfortable, share just one word in nearby chat that represents what you need this week.

Peace.

Courage.

Rest.

Community.

Hope.

Permission.

And if you'd rather keep that word between you and the Holy One, that is sacred too. [Pause for reflection and chat responses.]

** Closing: Joy Can Find Us Again

Friends, the woman who lost her coin rejoiced when it was found.

And she invited her community to rejoice with her.

Maybe that's what we need.

People who will sit with us in grief without rushing us.

People who will not force us into happiness.

But people who, when the time comes, will help us recognize joy again.

Perhaps not everything we lost will return.

But perhaps, through grief and healing, we begin finding parts of ourselves we thought were gone.

Our courage.

Our clarity.

Our hope.

Our capacity for joy.

And here's the Good News:

Even in the midst of loss, we are not lost to God.

The Holy One continues to seek us, hold us, and love us.

Christ came so that we might have life, and life abundantly.

Not a life without grief.

But a life where love, grace, community, and joy remain possible, even after loss.

So, mi gente:
Give your grief an easel.

Give your loss a name.

Give yourself some grace.

And when you're ready, give joy permission to find you again.

If you lit a candle, I invite you to gently blow it out when you're ready.

The flame may no longer be visible, but remember the warmth it offered.

Carry that warmth with you.

Because the Holy One is still searching.

The Spirit is still moving.

And heaven still knows how to rejoice!

Can I get an Amen?

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.

Detroit Youth Choir 'Glory' - featuring IndigoYaj
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDWsm7lcGXM&list=RDEDWsm7lcGXM&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

Let us pray.

Holy One, God of love and grace,

We come before you carrying both joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment, gratitude and grief.

You know the prayers shared aloud, those typed in chat, and those held silently in our hearts.

Today, we lift up those who are grieving, those who have lost loved ones, relationships, stability, dreams, or peace of mind.

We pray for those seeking safety, belonging, healing, and hope.

Remind us, Holy One, that healing does not have to look a certain way, and that we are worthy of love exactly as we are.

Teach us to be a community that makes room for grief, celebrates joy, and walks alongside one another.

And when we cannot find the words, remind us that your Spirit is still present, holding us in love.

May we find comfort in your presence, strength in community, and hope in the promise that joy can rise again.

In the loving spirit of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

BENEDICTION -

Mi gente, as we prepare to leave this sacred space,

Remember this:
Not every loss needs to be recovered.

Not every relationship needs to be restored.

Not every dream will unfold the way we imagined.

And not every wound will disappear.

But none of that means you are any less whole, any less worthy, or any less loved.

So go from this place knowing that your grief matters, your story matters, and you matter.

May the Holy One meet you in the places where words are not enough.

May the Spirit wrap you in warmth when the world feels cold.

May Christ remind you that abundant life is still possible, even when things are not what they once were.

And may you find people who will sit with you in your sorrow and dance with you when joy returns.

Because, mi gente, weeping may be part of the journey, but joy has not forgotten your address!

So go in peace.

Give your grief an easel.

Give yourself some grace.

And when you're ready, make room for joy again.

In the love of the Creator, the companionship of Christ, and the ever-moving presence of the Holy Spirit, go knowing you are loved.

Amen, amén, and amen!

Music for the Journey -

Kirk Franklin - This Time ft. GloRilla
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOvn4KnTjMg&list=RDgOvn4KnTjMg&start_radio=1