WELCOME
Thank you for coming!
We're so glad you've chosen to worship with us today.
This is a sacred time, as we gather in community to open our hearts to God.
I invite you to light a candle,
wherever you are,
as our candles are lit here in our sanctuary,
to remind us of God's presence with us,
and to set aside this as a time of worship for you..
Now let us all take a deep breath,
breathing in the peace of God
breathing out the stresses of the day
we may have carried here with us.
Let God hold them for you, at least for a while,
as we gather on this holy ground to worship God.
I'm going to start our Gathering Music and run the rest of the announcements underneath.

“Whichever Way You Turn” by John Philip Newell, sung by Fran McKendree
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3btooRmw_38

Our service will be in voice and text.
Music will be on the media viewer, so be sure that you have media turned on. .
There will be a link in Nearby Chat if you want to view the video in your own browser.
First United Church of Christ and Conference Center Second Life is
a church with full real life standing in the
Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC).
And anyone you see with a "Minister" tag is an ordained UCC minister in real life.
As we like to say, it's good to be real in Second Life!
And as a UCC church, we'd like you to know that
"No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here."
We celebrate God's Love everyday.
and seek to be a place of belonging for those who need it, where all people will be included, accepted and supported in their journey of faith and their struggles in life.
If you would like to make a donation to support this ministry
there is a donation bowl in the back,
or you can go to our website
firstuccsl.org
We thank you for the blessing of your presence and your support.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION
Our lectionary reading for today comes from the Gospel of Matthew,
Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year,
Traditionally called “Christ the King,” or “Reign of Christ” Sunday.
Diana Butler Bass writes that this “is one of the most conflicted feast days in the entire church year.”
It’s also one of the more recent, first proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1925

as a response to the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism in Europe.
And yet, just a few years later, that same Pope
Signed an agreement with the Nazis that gave moral legitimacy to Hitler's regime.
All of this seems very relevant given the rise of Christian nationalism and authoritarianism in the U.S.
Let us listen to God speaking through the words of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 31 through 46.

MATTHEW 25:31-46
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,
then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
All the nations will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.
Then the king will say to those at his right hand,
'Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
for I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me.'
Then the righteous will answer him,
'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,
or thirsty and gave you something to drink?
And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,
or naked and gave you clothing?
And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'
And the king will answer them,
'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,
you did it to me.'
Then he will say to those at his left hand,
'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
for I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,
naked and you did not give me clothing,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'
Then they also will answer,
'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison,
and did not take care of you?'
Then he will answer them,
'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'
And these will go away into eternal punishment,

but the righteous into eternal life.”

The Word of God for the people of God.
Thanks be to God.

Where is Jesus Now? – Sara Thomsen
https://youtu.be/FMcCNbYYb6s?si=MBeWIG67mLTTW55d

"Christ the Kind"

Let us pray . . .
This is not my favorite celebration day in the church.
Because people so easily conflate this divine king,
With an earthly king,
No matter how often we tell them that Christ is “not that kind of King.”
Then what kind of kind of king is he?
Diana Butler Bass suggests that he is – well – kind.
That instead of calling this “Christ the King” Sunday,
We change one letter and call it “Christ the Kind” Sunday.
But she’s not just talking about the Sunday school image
Inviting the little children to come close to him.
She goes back to the origin of the word “kind” – which was a synonym of “kin.”
We are kin.
Jesus Christ is one of us.
He is our kind, and we are like him.
After all, that’s the whole point of the incarnation,
God taking human form.
The is not a new idea.
Medieval mystic Julian of Norwich called Jesus Christ “our kinde Lord.”
You may have heard a story about a man named Tom Stone.
He was on his way home from a New Year's Eve party.
He'd had a lot to drink and didn't want to drive,
but he didn't live far away, so he decided to walk.
He had to walk through one area that was a little rough, and it worried him.
So as he walked, he kept his eyes open for signs of trouble.
But he knew that once he crossed, 32nd street, he would be safe enough.
So he kept walking.
He was almost there, to 32nd street,
when out of the corner of his eye he saw what looked like a man's body
on the other side of the street up ahead.
Probably somebody passed out, he thought, and began to walk by.
But then, for some reason, he paused, and looked.
Really looked.
And as he looked, in the dim light he saw that the man was naked,
and there was something, it could be blood.
Still looking around for trouble,
Tom made his way across the street and over to the prone man.
The man didn't move.
He’d been severely beaten, stripped of his clothes, and robbed.
But he was still breathing, and groaning softly.

Tom called an ambulance, and waited.
The man opened his eyes once and looked right at Tom.
Then he seemed to lose consciousness again.
Tom went with the man to the emergency room
and stayed until he could see that the man would be well taken care of.
Then Tom took a taxi home.
The next day, when Tom woke up in the afternoon,
he decided to go to the hospital to see how the man was doing.
It took a while to find him, because he hadn't known his name,
but he found his room, and went in.
The room was quiet, but the man was awake and looked at Tom as he came in and whispered,
"I know you. You helped me last night.
When I saw your face, I thought it must be the face of Jesus."
Tom was speechless for a moment.
And as he struggled for words, the man said it again. "When I saw your face, I thought it must be the face of Jesus."
Then Tom replied,
"No, it's the other way around.
When I found you, beaten, stripped naked, I thought you must be Jesus."
Both are true, right?
In contrast to the “Christ the King” images you can find if you Google that phrase,
With Jesus Christ wearing a crown, holding a scepter, and sitting on a gilt throne,
Placing Christ above us,
this text depicts Christ’s “throne” of “glory” among the poor and the outcast.
Right here, with us.
Because we are kin.
That’s why I use the phrase “kin-dom” rather than “kingdom.”
Christ isn’t a king looking down on his subjects,
He is one of us.
I don’t think this text is about a king’s judgment at all,
I think it is about seeing Jesus Christ,
In each other, in ourselves,
And acting accordingly.
It’s about treating each other as we would treat Jesus,
Especially the “least of these.”
Treat them with “kindness.”
Or, in the words of artist Brian Andress,
“absolutely everything you do is a chance to give love.”
In this parable, Jesus used a traditional teaching method of his time:
This is an “apocalypse” -- which literally means "revelation";
to "reveal" or "lift the veil."
The purpose of apocalypse wasn't to reveal the future,
it's about the present.
It's a diagnostic tool -- like going to the doctor for a physical or a wellness check.
It's purpose isn't to condemn or scare us,
but to provide a snapshot of our overall health right now,
and to tell us what we need to do to be more healthy and flourish in our lives.
But, you know, sometimes when we get a check up

we find out that if we don’t change our diet, exercise more, and get our blood pressure down,
things could get really, really bad.
According to Jesus, our spiritual health isn’t so good. We’ve got a heart problem.
Did you notice that neither the sheep nor the goats in the story
recognized the face of Jesus in the “least of these”?
But then, they didn’t expect to.
It’s just that the even though the sheep didn’t see, they still acted out of love.
They treated each other with kindness.
The others may have been able to argue to the king,
“how were we supposed to know that was you?”
Of course, in a perfect world, with perfect people,
everyone would act out of love, always.
But Jesus is a realist,
and he knows the brokenness of the world comes out in many ways.
So now everyone knows.
No one can plead ignorance.
Jesus has told us all, straight up,
that he will always be with us in the hurt, the broken, the hungry, the lost.
This may not be where we expect to see God:
lying bloody and beaten,
or sitting beside an injured man on the sidewalk.
Or helping an old woman to stand so she can bathe.
Or cradled in the arms of a firefighter carrying a child away from a bombed building.
Or taking food to a sick neighbor.
And yet, that is where Jesus invites us to meet, or be met by, God.
Whichever way you turn, there is the face of God.
A quote, by the way, from the Quran.
Our gospel reading for today also invites us to see Jesus Christ in the faces of this broken world
but also to see the world with the eyes of Christ, the eyes of compassion,
and then to act accordingly.
Every choice we make is a choice of love.
Every choice is a chance to experience the presence of the God who is love.
And every choice matters.
What we do in our lives matters.
Every little thing.
In a world that seems too big to be changed,
our lives, our choices, our actions, big and small,
they matter,
they have more meaning and value then we can imagine.
Kindness matters.
Why?
Because on such little things the kin-dom of God depends.
With each choice to help,
or to act not just for ourselves but for the greater good,
a window opens, and we see a bit of the kin-dom of God, here on earth.
And each time we look away, or chose the easy path,
a window closes, and we miss it.

But this parable shines it’s diagnostic light not just our own health,
but also the health of our systems, our institutions, our corporations, our government.
In the parable, "all the nations" are gathered before the doctor - ah - king.
It matters to God how our country treats the vulnerable and broken.
It needs to matter to us too.
Each choice to support or reject actions or policies of our governments and institutions
is just as important as the choice to help the person we see lying on the street.
When we act in love -- one person, one choice at a time,
It's a drop in the bucket, perhaps, in the face of that overwhelming need.
But there is a Swahili proverb that says,
"Drop by drop the bucket fills."
And our one drop makes a difference, whether we know it or not.
It's an ongoing process.
Tom Stone and the man he found on the street,
they were both right.
Jesus was there.
Not as the king on the throne,
but in the “glory” of a tear in the eye and the touch of the hand.
Christ the Kind.
This may not be where we expect to meet God, but it’s where we need God to be.
And that is good news indeed.
Amen.

What if God was One of Us – Joan Osborne
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRsjHjZyask

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE
Worship is a time when we,
as a community,
join our hearts together,
to connect to God and to each other.
So this time is the essence of what we do here together.
If you have a prayer that you wish to lift to God,
and have supported by the energy of those gathered here, type it in Nearby Chat at this time.
As people share their prayers in text
please read them prayerfully
and hold this space as sacred and safe
to open our hearts to God.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord hear our prayers.
Those voiced here today.
Those spoken only in the depths of our hearts.
Those for which we have no words.
We lift them all to you, O Lord,
with faith in your boundless love and grace.

I always play this video on Reign of Christ Sunday, because even while using
a traditional Christ the King hymn,
it reinterprets it in an irreverent way
that illustrates Christ the Kind,
Christ our kin,
beautifully.

The King of Glory Comes – Stephen Colbert
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oASYa-Wkroc

BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY
An now, our worship is over,
but our ministry to the world is just beginning.
The world is waiting for the seeds of love only you can sow.
In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself, I bid you:
Go in peace, come again in hope.
Amen.

“Testify to Love” – Wynonna Judd
https://youtu.be/GHBdGz2wH6Q?si=YlKs_e6KtB9TWUBh

THANK YOU FOR COMING! GO IN PEACE!