

UU History & Identity

Lesson 3: What is Unitarian? (part 2)

2.5.2017

Objectives: Focus on Unitarianism in America

Materials: flipchart, lesson attachments, camera, blindfold, copies of news script, religious props.

Time allotments suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Who do you think Jesus was? Put your name under the category of choice :
Fully human-----Fully God-----Both human and God
 - ▶ What’s one question you’ve always had about Christianity?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: “Guess Who’s a Unitarian” (5 minutes max)

Put a chair in the middle of the room. Have everyone stand in a circle around the chair. Get a volunteer to be “IT,” who sits in the chair with blindfold over eyes. Shuffle the circle around. Teacher points silently to one of the youth, who then DISGUISES voice and says “I’m a Unitarian” and “IT” tries to guess the correct identity. Give anywhere between one and three guesses, depending on the size of the class. If “IT” guesses incorrectly, “IT” has to take one more turn.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from UU minister, Doug Kraft)

“Unitarian Universalism is not a rock to hold onto. It is a river to swim in. If you want a set of beliefs to hold onto, if you want rules to guide your life in all situations, if you want a foundation for a spiritual fortress, you will probably be disappointed with us. However, if you want to dive into the river and explore, if you think that what you experience and what you do is more important than what you believe, we may have something to offer. Life itself is more like a river than a rock... Unitarian Universalism is about learning to swim in the river rather than climbing out of it onto a rock.”

4. **Joys and Sorrows** (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of *meeting* one another with our lives and *sharing* in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

5. **What is a Unitarian? Part 2** (40 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Last week, we talked about the first millennium or so of Christianity and mostly about Europe. The United States was not in existence for most of that history; the First Nations people living in North America certainly were not affected by the argument over the Trinity. *So how did Unitarianism show up in America, where it took hold and flourished?*

Today, we are talking about America and ideas from the early to mid-1800s, before the American Civil War. Up to this point, Unitarians still thought of themselves as Christians, and this lesson introduces ideas of the earliest "breakaway" preachers, like William Ellery Channing and Hosea Ballou. Channing preached a famous sermon in Baltimore in which he put forth (1) the claim that Jesus might be human, not God; (2) the Bible might not be the inerrant (mistake-free) word of God; (3) the Trinity is NOT biblical as there is no mention of the "trinity" anywhere in the Bible. Hosea Ballou came along and said, "That's right, there is no Trinity. Oh, and maybe there is no hell, either." This was MAJOR news and the first time that Unitarians in the new nation really declared their "party line" on the Christian faith. We are going to make a broadcast of that major news.

Filming: We need a director, news anchor, field reporters, Channing, Ballou, Emerson, a modern Christian, and Jesus. Each youth gets a prop according to the script. Hand the "Channel 1 News" script (see attached) over to the kids and let them run with it.

6. **Post filming discussion: What "Unitarian" means to us today** (15 minutes)

- We are NOT a Christian denomination anymore (we'll learn about how that happened in future lessons).
- What legacy of our Unitarian ancestors is left to us? What lessons can we learn from the faith they lived?
- How do you think most UUs in 2015 relate to the life story and teachings of Jesus?
- How do you think most UUs in 2015 relate to the idea of God? How might modern ideas be similar to/ different from earlier ideas?

- What might the word Unitarian mean to an atheist UU?
- Have you have been a part of Unity's Christmas pageant? Why do you think we celebrate Jesus' birth here at Unity? Most other UU churches don't so much.

7. **Say goodbye until next time:** Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

8. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets

Channel 1 News – October 4, 1828

BREAKING STORY: JESUS MAY NOT BE GOD

Technical Crew:

- 👤 Director
 - 👤 Camera operator (teachers)
-

Newscast Characters:

👤 Anchor

Props: desk, with microphone and papers

- Sits at desk
- Introduces story: Today's breaking story—The Bible may not directly say anywhere that Jesus IS God. Could Jesus be less than Divine? What does this mean for Christians everywhere?
- Throws to field reporters
- Wraps the segment up

👤 Field Reporter(s)

Props: microphone, notepads

- Interview various “witnesses” listed below
 - ▶ What do you think about Jesus – is he God or not?
 - ▶ What do you think it says in the Bible?
 - ▶ Does it matter whether Jesus is God or not?

***ask follow-up questions in response to their statements**

💡 Hosea Ballou (thinks about this on occasion)

Prop: Bible

- (1) The Bible says that God sent his son. You can't be someone's son and be your own Father, can you? (2) Jesus is sent to reconcile people to God, NOT that God needs to be reconciled to humans (God never screwed up, did he?). Jesus was meant to lead humans to God—to come from the side of human beings; not BE God.
- But in any case (as it can be tricky to sort out), that's not as important as why Jesus came in the first place. Jesus came to change people's minds about God, not about himself (as God). Oh, and by the way, salvation counts for everyone not just some people. Universalists rock!
- Anyway, like I always say, "Doubt is always the first step toward truth, and asking questions is the rest of the path."

💡 William Ellery Channing (has a LOT to say about this)

Prop: Bible

- The Bible is written in human language, so it must have been written by humans, right?
- The Bible has all kinds of inconsistencies because it was written for one group of people, in particular situations, a very long time ago. We need to be super careful when we read it.
- Anyone who reads the Bible knows that the Bible does NOT say that Jesus is God and should be worshipped as God. The Bible refers to three Divine Beings (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), but it NEVER literally says that they are all the same God.
- Okay, okay... So in the Book of John, Jesus does say, "I and the Father are One." But we don't think that he literally meant that he IS God, anymore than he literally meant it when he said "I am the door" or "I am the vine." It was meant metaphorically and spiritually.
- God didn't write the Bible. God wouldn't give us the Bible to *reveal* Truth, then mess with our heads by making some of it true and some of it not, and leave much of it obscure and hope that we figure it out. What kind of loving God would toy with people like that? There IS truth contained in the Bible, but people who wrote it made mistakes and inconsistencies.
- Unitarian Christianity is a new and ever-changing thing. We no longer just believe everything that earlier Christians believed. We want to FOLLOW Jesus, not WORSHIP Jesus.

💡 **An average contemporary Christian (has an opinion, but doesn't necessarily think about where it came from, although many thoughtful Christians *do*...)**

Prop: Christian T-shirt

- The Church says Jesus is God, so I believe them. We've always believed that, right?
- I believe in the Trinity—God is three and one at the exact same time. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and they are all the same being, like how water can be liquid, ice, or steam... but it's all H₂O. See how that makes sense? Crystal clear!
- The Bible talks about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and the Bible is *never wrong*. It was *written by GOD himself (maybe herself)*.

💡 **Emerson (gets himself in trouble at graduation when his valedictory speech says that Jesus was NOT God)**

Prop: Walking stick, graduation cap

- Making Jesus into God ruins the whole point. He was a prophet, trying to show us that ANYONE can live a holy life and have an experience of God for themselves. He was showing us how to be the best *human* we could possibly be.
- If Jesus is God, none of us has any hope of ever being good like him, because we can't be perfect like God. But if Jesus is human, we definitely have a chance.

💡 **Jesus (the character it's all about)**

Prop: Sheet to wrap around like a garment

- I'd like to help somehow, as I'm a helpful kind of person.
- Yeah, I *did* say that thing in the Book of John, "I and the Father are one." But I also went on to say, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Does that help any?
- Later in the Book of John, if you read it, you see that I also say that "The Father is greater than I." Check it out. Chapter 14, verse 28. Does that help?
- I never said people should worship me. Never said it. You can look, but I never said it. Does that help?
- Of course, the New Testament offers a biography of my life from several people's vantage points, including a bunch of people who later edited and translated it. No one even thought to write anything down until about 100 years after my death! Does that help?