

UU History & Identity

Lesson 4: What is Universalist? (part 1)

2.26.2017

Objectives: Explore Universalism as theological contrast to Calvinism.

Materials: flipchart, camera, lesson attachments, Lifesavers & Hot Tamales.

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

1. The game of predestination (** Important to the content of the class **):

Meet youth at the door. Give each youth a candy, but one out of four should get a roll of “Lifesavers” and the other three should get a box of “Hot Tamales.” Make it clear that no one should eat the candies until they are told to.

2. 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:
 - a) What’s your take on the concept of destiny or fate? Put your name under the category of choice:

*We each have a destiny
that just unfolds on its
own; fate is beyond our
control.*

*There is no such thing as
destiny/fate. Every
person chooses their
own path.*

- b) From your most recent worship (likely Story Sunday, Feb. 12), what’s one thing that you remember as interesting or meaningful?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.
 - **Please take a few minutes to invite reflections from youth about their recent worship experience. Use copies of worship programs as helpful reminder.**

3. Silly Fun: Tree Pose (5 minutes max)

We say that Unity is a place where people lead lives of integrity, service, and joy. We say that at church we find and keep our balance. So in the spirit of yoga.... who can stand on one leg the longest, in a tree pose, with their eyes closed?!?!



- 4. 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 Universalist, Lewis Beals Fisher)

“Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand. The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all; we move.”

- 5. 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.

- 6. What is a Universalist? Filming our Response** (10 minutes)

Filming: With teacher using camera, film each youth simply asking the question “What is a Universalist?” Encourage youth to use funny voices and expressions as well as serious, newscaster-style tone, or even in a different language. They can put emphasis on different words, like “What IS a Universalist” or “WHAT is a Universalist?”

- 7. To answer this question, we have to dig up our roots in Christianity again** (25 minutes)

- **Self Quiz: Are you a good person?** (see attached)

This quiz is actually a “set-up” for the lesson. Youth will take the quiz, score themselves, and teachers will launch into a “so let’s find out if you’re going to heaven or hell” talk. The youth will THINK their destiny has to do with their quiz score, but then the surprise will be revealed: destiny is entirely determined by which candy they got at the door. This juxtaposition of dumb luck versus being good will lead into talking about Calvinism and predestination.

- **Calvinism: NOT Universalists**

Teacher talk: John Calvin, a French theologian around in the 1500s, shaped Reformed theology and had some influential ideas about God’s relationship to people. His role furthered the Protestant Reformation but he also differed on significant points from Luther and his followers. Among his ideas, Calvin believed in destiny and thought that God predestined some people to be saved and others to be condemned. Predestination got people worked up enough to declare themselves ANTI-Calvinists, or... Universalists.

Hand out attachment, and ask for youth volunteers to read the five main points of predestination:]

- 1) All people are born stained with original sin. We come into the world depraved and ready to sin. No exceptions.
- 2) God chooses people—before they are even born—to be in relationship with God. You are either in or out, and it does not finally matter how good, how faithful, how “churchy” you are. Those chosen people are called “The Elect,” and you never quite know if you were one of them until you are dead and find out.
- 3) The sacrifice of Jesus’ death on the cross wasn’t supposed to secure forgiveness for everyone’s sins, just for The Elect.
- 4) No matter what, The Elect will be saved by coming to a perfect faith in God through Jesus, and will go to Heaven. Nothing can prevent this.
- 5) Once you are elected, you are always the elect. God does not change God’s mind about you.

Questions for Discussion:

- Revisit the quiz and candy game: How is it similar to the idea of predestination?
- Calvin wanted to inspire confidence in a God who perfectly knows all things, including each person’s salvation. Could a person’s salvation NOT be known by God, meaning it was undetermined and actually up to people to choose how to live their lives?
- Or another take: Might salvation be for everyone??

8. Why UNIVERSALISTS? (25 minutes)

Teacher talk: As a different stance from Calvinism, some people were baffled by and disagreed with predestination and The Elect in church. The Universalists’ main points against “double predestination” (of some going to heaven and others to hell) include the following:

[Ask youth volunteers to read from handout]

- God is too good and loving to condemn most of creation to hell. Why would God go to all the trouble of creating people in God’s own image, giving them free will, and then punishing them for using it?
- Jesus told us to love our enemies. What Jesus taught comes from God, right? So God loves God’s enemies, right? So why would God condemn anyone to an eternal hell?
- People are capable of forgiving each other for the worst crimes. That’s pretty good, right? Well, if God is way more merciful than people are, isn’t God much more capable of forgiving than people?
- Ergo... no hell (or if you still want to hold to an idea of hell, you need a different understanding of it.)

People who argued against hell, and against the idea of God loving and saving only some people, called themselves UNIVERSALISTS, from the adjective “universal.”

[Ask youth volunteers to read dictionary definitions of the adjective:]

u·ni·ver·sal adjective

1. of, pertaining to, or characteristic of all or the whole: *universal experience*.
2. applicable everywhere or in all cases; general: *a universal cure*.
3. affecting, concerning, or involving all: *universal military service*.
4. used or understood by all: *a universal language*.
5. present everywhere: *the universal calm of southern seas*.

Discussion Questions:

- We are Universalists, now – attending Unity 500 years later. How does the word “universal” help us explain our faith?
- What could the word Universalist mean to an atheist?
- Do you think that some of your religious friends believe in hell? Do they think you’re going to hell when you die? How do you respond to that idea?
- Several years ago, Christians were experiencing a controversy over a book written by a conservative pastor, Rob Bell. The book is called *Love Wins*, and the author makes a radical argument: all people are saved by God’s love and Jesus’ life, not just Christians. Why do you think some Christians would be angry at this author for writing these ideas?
- Some people call our Unitarian Universalist religion a “saving faith.” What might our faith save people from or for?

*Universalism did not get very far in Europe. Calvin had friends in high places. That’s why next week, we will talk about how the Universalists ran away to North America...

9. 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.*”

10. 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