

UU Identity & History

Lesson 4: What is Universalist? (part 1)

2.28.2021

Objectives: Explore Universalism as theological contrast to Calvinism.

Materials: Each youth should have paper and a pen/pencil. Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

Time allotment: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Zoom Icebreaker: **Destiny?** (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

- (a) Invite youth to write in the chat whether they believe in destiny (everyone has a path, which unfolds on it's on and is beyond one's control) or not (every person chooses their own path, there is no such thing as fate) or something in between.
- (b) Call on 2-3 volunteers to comment on their choice.
- (c) **Discussion question:** If hell existed, what do you imagine it to be?

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 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.”

4. **Brief Check-in** (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. **Predestination Game: How Good a Person are You?** (15 minutes)

Teachers note: the quiz is a class set-up, “predestination” is determined randomly.

(a) Everyone should have paper and a pen/pencil.

(b) Randomly split everyone including teachers into three groups: group Alpha, group Prime, and group One (group Alpha and Prime should be similar in size while group One should be smaller).

(c) **Screen share** lesson attachment 4b (How Good A Person Are You?)

(d) Instruct youth:

- Draw two vertical lines, making three columns on your paper.
- In the first column, write the numbers 1-18.
- As you answer each “would you ever” question, write a “yes” or “no” in the second column corresponding to the correct number.
- If you answer “no,” leave the third column blank. If you answer “yes,” write in the third column if you would feel bad about it with “yes,” “a little” or “no.”
- Score yourself! Add up your “yes” answers in the second column, add up your “no” answers in the third column, then add the two numbers together for your final score. *We will not share scores.*

(e) **Teacher says:** So, let’s find out if you’re going to heaven or hell! ... If you are in group Alpha or Prime, you go to heaven and if you are in group One, you go to hell. Surprise! According to Calvinism, your destiny is determined by sheer luck, not by your moral character.

Questions for discussion: What do you think?

- If there is an afterlife, do you think good people go to heaven and bad people to hell?
- How do you know what actions are good or bad? Who should get to determine what is good and bad?
- Can you think of situations when it might be *moral* to **not** determine if someone is good or bad based on their actions? (*Hint: believing in the inherent worth and dignity of every people even if their actions don’t line up with our UU values, restorative justice.*)

6. **Timeline Review** (5 minutes)

Screen share lesson attachment 4a (UU Timeline) and invite volunteers to read the three bolded events added to our historical timeline.

Teacher talks: Our last two classes we learned about early Unitarianism in Europe and North America. Today, we turn to Universalism in Europe.

7. Calvinism: NOT Universalists (15 minutes)

Teacher talk: John Calvin, a white French theologian around in the 1500s, shaped Reformed theology and had influential ideas about God's relationship to people. Calvin supported Luther and the Protestant Reformation, but he also differed some. Among his ideas, Calvin believed that destiny and predestination (that some people are saved and others are condemned) was central to the Christian faith and to be taken seriously. Predestination got people worked up enough to declare themselves ANTI-Calvinists, or... *Universalists*. Remember, *Universalism is a separate movement that happened before Unitarianism came to America*.

Screen share lesson attachment 4c (Predestination and the Universalist Response) and ask volunteers to read *only the first section: five main points of predestination*.

Questions for Discussion:

- How was our quiz game similar to the idea of predestination?
- Calvin wanted to inspire confidence in a God who perfectly knows all things, including each person's salvation. If there is an all-knowing God, wouldn't God already know who was going to heaven or hell? If it is actually up to people to choose how to live their lives, how does that challenge the idea that God knows everything about everyone?
- Why do you think some people want to believe that God is all-knowing?

8. Why UNIVERSALISTS? (15 minutes)

Teacher talks: Some people in the church were baffled by and disagreed with predestination and The Elect (the people who were predestined to be saved no matter what). Let's read the Universalists' main points against "double predestination" (some chosen for heaven and others for hell).

Screen share lesson attachment 4c (Predestination and the Universalist Response) again and ask volunteers to read the second section: Universalists' main arguments against double predestination.

Teacher talks: 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 the third section: dictionary definitions of the adjective u·ni·ver·sal.

Questions for discussion:

- More than 500 years after Calvin's theology, we are modern day Universalists. How does the word "universal" help us explain our faith today?
- 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 white 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?

***Note:** 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 fled to North America...

9. **Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*
10. **Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click "Leave" then "Leave Meeting."