

UU Identity & History

Lesson 5: What is Universalist? (part 2)

3.7.2021

Objectives: Explore Universalist thought as it comes to America.

Materials: 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: Guess the Rhythm (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

One youth leads and changes the rhythm. The group mimics the changing rhythm while another youth tries to guess who the leader is.

Teachers, pick one youth to be the “guesser” and ask them to turn around. Quietly, select a different youth to be the “leader” by writing their name on a piece of paper and showing it to the group. The “leader” can clap, snap, make sounds, etc. to start and change the rhythm. Once the rhythm starts, invite the “guesser” to turn back around. The “guesser” gets three tries to identify the leader. Hands should be visible and sound audible so that everyone can follow along and participate. If someone does not have working video, they can be the guesser. Repeat as time allows.

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 social reformer and UU, Susan B. Anthony)

“Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world’s estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences.”

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. Review and Discussion (15 minutes)

Teacher talk: Last week we talked about Universalism, a Christian movement that believed God loved everyone, and that salvation was universal (everyone would go to heaven). At the end of class, we noted that the message of Universalism didn't go over very well in Europe. This was at a time when Europe was ruled by hereditary monarchy, or royalty that was passed down through select families (or overthrown through wars). It was always the few who were the Elect.

Questions for Discussion:

- Who can remind us what Calvinists believe?
(Hint: predestination, the Elect, hell for everyone but a chosen few, decided from birth, nothing you can do to change it, being good doesn't matter, God picks people to save, God is all-knowing.)
- Why was the message of universal love so unpopular in Calvinist England? What did the Calvinists have to lose? What do people get out of believing that God only loves them and not those "others"?
- In contrast, what do people get out of believing that God loves all human beings, without exception?
- Do you think that some people don't deserve God's love—Adolf Hitler, Muammar Qaddafi, Mohammed Atta (one of leaders of September 11th terrorist attack)?
- Does being Universalist mean we should let people with ideas like Hitler or Qaddafi join our church?

6. What is a Universalist? Part 2 (35 minutes)

- **Screen Share** lesson attachment 5a (Universalism Crosses the Pond).
- Read the story together! Ask a youth to read aloud. After each slide, call on another youth to read. Teachers can also participate.

Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think John Murray's message of *salvation for everyone* resonated with white people in America? What else was happening in America in 1770 that set the historical context for a more inclusive, universal regard for human beings?

(Hint: The Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770. British troops fired into a Boston mob, who were demonstrating against British troops at the customs commission. This event

was later credited as the first battle in the American Revolution that began five years later, and was used as an incident to further the colonists' cause of rebellion against the monarchy—who were considered the Elect.)

- Do you think everyone in America appreciated John Murray's message?

(Historical anecdote: General George Washington appointed Murray as the chaplain of the Rhode Island Brigade, but many other preachers complained because of his lack of belief in hell.)

- How do you think a Black American would react to the idea that God loved everyone? What about Native Americans?
- Not all Unitarian Universalists today frame their religious beliefs around the idea of "God." How might humanist Universalists express their belief in Universalism?
- When we say "everyone has inherent worth and dignity" or "everyone has the right to search for truth and meaning," how do we know we are really including everyone? How are these principles different from saying "all lives matter" today?

(Hint: UU principles are aspirational. UUs are asked to recognize material inequality and inequity in the world and work to build a more just and loving world. Recognizing both aspiration and reality can be tricky! But also, prophetic.)

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