

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Our UU Christian Roots
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, December 2006

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

To Jesus on his Birthday by Edna St. Vincent Millay

For this your mother sweated in the cold,
For this you bled upon the bitter tree:
A yard of tinsel ribbon bought and sold;
A paper wreath; a day at home for me.
The merry bells ring out, the people kneel;
Up goes the man of God before the crowd;
With voice of honey and with eyes of steel
He drones your humble gospel to the proud.
Nobody listens. Less than the wind that blows
Are all your words to us you died to save.
O Prince of Peace! O Sharon's dewy Rose!
How mute you lie within your vaulted grave.
The stone the angel rolled away with tears
Is back upon your mouth these thousand years.

Check-in: *What is most on your mind today? Share one high and one low from your life right now.*

Focus Reading: by Stephen Kendrik, UU minister

Since this reading is longer than usual consider paraphrasing or asking the group to read it silently before discussion.

Nothing has ever been simple about Jesus. He confounded and confused people in his own time, and so it is no wonder Unitarian Universalists today are still wrestling with him, his message, and the tradition that claims him as a God. Yet I believe that people who are attracted to a place of free faith, spiritual seeking, and non-dogmatic religion have much to gain by grappling with the legacy of this teacher whose power and charisma seem undimmed from two thousand years ago. If anything, we are only beginning to understand the radical nature of his message.

I became a Unitarian Universalist because I would have made a very bad and quarrelsome Christian, but a pretty good religious liberal. This faith seems to claim the religious freedom that Jesus proclaimed and modeled. Jesus has taught me not to worship false idols, but rather the Divine Love that broods over all and lives inside each. This sort of love requires a tradition of openness, tolerance, freedom, and radical compassion. I became a UU precisely because I wanted to understand Jesus properly.

It is difficult to explain the label Unitarian Universalist Christian, yet it expresses the simple truth that Jesus and his life, message, charisma, and death haunt me. I find Jesus of Nazareth a compelling teacher, master poet, troublemaker, and insistent companion on the 'narrow path,'

which is to say reality. Jesus is a spiritual genius, one of many we may choose to learn from, but still the one who most compels me to become the person I am meant to be.

I do not believe Jesus is the sole revelation of the Divine, and I do not know, but seriously doubt, if he was raised from the dead, or for that matter, ever meant to create something called Christianity. He came into his own troubled time proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is present. If words like Kingdom trouble us today, the better translation of what he said is, “The realm of Abba dwells among us now.” When asked what the realm of God was, he did not spin metaphors about golden gates and heavenly vistas, but simply replied, “The Kingdom of God is within you.” I believe it still is.

Many Unitarian Universalists choose to turn away from our Christian roots because of experiences we are very uneasy with or troubled by. While this reaction is understandable, it strikes me that it is not ultimately healthy for a religious movement or for any of us as individual searchers. Why? Ignoring Jesus’ teaching and influence distorts our own past and heritage, which is deeply steeped in Christian origins. Furthermore, as Unitarian Universalists, we seek to build a religion based not on nay saying or rejection but rather on a positive, life-affirming message. And finally, Jesus is still worth hearing out. I can think of no more misunderstood and misjudged figure. I find him more compelling and inspiring as a human being who suffered and loved and claimed that no one is perfect but God than as the magical entity some of his most devoted followers worship. It is equally ironic that this prophet of liberation and spiritual freedom, who said that the poor shall inherit the earth, is misunderstood by people attracted to the free faith and justice-seeking tradition of Unitarian Universalism.

Focus Questions:

What do you know about the Christian history of Unitarianism and Universalism that you find personally relevant?

What teachings of Jesus do you find compelling? We sometimes speak of the religion of Jesus vs. the religion about Jesus. What kind of religion did Jesus practice? Is it consistent with your Unitarian Universalist values and practices today?

If you could describe, the Kingdom of God or the Realm of Abba within you what would it look and feel like?

During this Christmas season how can we honor our Christian roots? How can we practice the religion of Jesus?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: *Did this session meet your needs for connection and spiritual growth? Was our covenant honored?*

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,

to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations
to bring peace among the brothers,
to make music in the heart.

For further study of UU history consider reading:

Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History by David Bumbaugh

Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson and Parker

The Larger Faith: A short History of American Universalism by Charles Howe

These are all available in our MLUC bookstore or at the UUA bookstore at www.uua.org