

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
UU Views of Jesus
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

“He felt respect for Moses and the prophets; but no unfit tenderness at postponing their initial revelations, to the hour and the man that now is; to the eternal revelation in the heart. Thus was he a true man. Having seen that the law in us is commanding, he would not suffer it to be commanded. Boldly, with hand, and heart, and life, he declared it was God. Thus is he, as I think, the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of a man.... And thus by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only. To aim to convert a man by miracles is a profanation of the soul. A true conversion, a true Christ, is now, as always, to be made, by the reception of beautiful sentiments.” ~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Check-in: How is your spirit today?

Focus Readings:

The nature of Jesus has been debated since the early days of the emergent new religion of Christianity. The Arian view of Jesus – that Jesus was not co-eternal with God but rather a distinct being – was defeated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 in favor of the Trinitarian view. In 19th century America, Unitarians emerged as distinct from Trinitarians in rejecting the divinity of Jesus. Like the Thomas Jefferson Bible, Unitarians embraced the humanity of Jesus in story and metaphor, but not the miracles.

Historically, Universalists embraced the focus on the loving nature of God, and saw Jesus as an essential part of that love and spirituality. In their 1935 Washington Declaration of faith, they avowed, “Our faith in God as Eternal and All-conquering Love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, in the supreme worth of every human personality, in the authority of truth known or to be known, and in the power of men of good-will and sacrificial spirit to overcome evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God.”

As we learn more about Jesus, the first century rabbi, trained in the wisdom of the Jews, impatient with religious bigotry and hypocrisy, champion of the powerless, a healer, and resistant to Jewish religious leaders who collaborated with Roman occupation forces and disgraced the dignity of their ancient wisdom, Jesus comes into focus more and more as a charismatic, non-violent, compassionate freedom fighter. He is not the supernatural God/man. He is not the flawless human being. He is not the one who miraculously changed water into wine, multiplied loaves and fishes, and walked on the water. Those are beautiful stories, full of wisdom, but Jesus is the one whose charismatic and spiritual power attracted a band of followers that frightened Jewish and Roman leaders. He is the one whose exceptional closeness to God gave him extraordinary wisdom and courage. He is the one whose compassion and healing power gave people new life and hope. *Rev. Dr. Thomas Mikelson*

At the heart of the story is this paradox about Jesus: he is fully human, and fully divine. Leave out the divine half and you miss a big part of the story. Namely, that the divine in Jesus may point to the possibility that the divine lives within not just Jesus, but each one of us... I connect with the human part of Jesus because I'm human, too, and the divine part because it points me to a greater truth: divinity lies within him and within each of us. *Rev. Roger Bertschausen*

Today, while not our sole example for moral living, Jesus' message remains strong in our efforts to create a beloved community here on earth, impelling us to witness to the injustices of this time. Throughout the multiple transformations of our faith, Unitarian Universalism has remained firm in the belief that people dedicated to compassionate human relations can uplift the oppressed in our society, that we have in our own hands the power to reform our world, and that communal exploration and accountability lead to principled living. *Rev. Dr. Kristen Harper*

Focus Questions:

1. Do you feel any resistance to references to Jesus? In what context – in the media, church services, specific references to historical fact, miracles, parables, etc.?
2. Do you agree that Jesus was fully human and fully divine?
3. Does the need for faith affect your thinking about Jesus?
4. Name another historical figure who is meaningful to you. In what ways has that “relationship” inspired or supported you?
5. Who is Jesus to you? Does any aspect of Jesus’ life, story, or myth, play a part in your life?

Check-out – Likes and Wishes: What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different, if anything?

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Let us begin by agreeing that to contemplate having a relationship with someone who has died over two millennia ago is irrational. Just because it is irrational, however, does not mean that it is impossible, or that it is not worthwhile. It simply means that your rational mind may not be the best tool to use. So what do you use? Your imagination.

~ *From Teacher, Guide, Companion by Unitarian Universalist Minister Erik Wikstrom*