



## **The Fourth Source: Loving Our Neighbors**

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Written by Denise Frick, inspired by a sermon given by Rev. Lisa Bovee Kemper on 10/27/2019\*

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**Welcome, Chalice Lighting:** *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

**Personal Check In:** Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

**Opening Words:** “The living tradition we share draws from many Sources: [The fourth of these sources is] Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves” —

**From Singing the Living Tradition, Fourth Source in List of Sources in Preface, UUA**

### **Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. In what ways are your personal faith or beliefs rooted in or reinforced by the teachings in Judaism and Christianity?
2. What aspects of your own Jewish or Christian roots trouble you? How have you processed and healed from those as a UU?
3. Reflecting on the five theological positions outlined by Rev. Lisa, which one(s) resonate with you? How do they play out in your everyday life?

**Sitting in Silence** (Reflect on questions just posed as you prepare to hear readings)

### **Readings- (see below)**

**Sharing** - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more responses to the session questions.

**(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)**

**Open Discussion** -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

### **Closing reading**

The source that calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves is not easy. It requires humility, curiosity, and courage, especially in this day and age. It is our work to embody the love of a benevolent and loving god, to protect the divine spark within each of us.

~ Rev. Lisa Bovee Kemper, from recording of sermon on GUUF website\*

### **Announcements/Plans**

**Check out:** As we close today, how are you feeling now?

**Extinguish the Chalice**

## Readings

In her sermon on Loving our Neighbors\* Lisa Bovee Kemper identified five primary theological positions in modern Unitarian Universalism that come from our Jewish and Christian heritage.

1. Radical hospitality: welcoming the stranger, drawing people in from the margins into the circle.
  2. God is love and all beings contain a spark of the divine. Nobody is outside the circle of love and all beings have capacity for goodness. Original sin does not exist, we think of the idea of original blessing.
  3. Salvation is both collective and universal. All souls are saved. Jesus did not atone for us; we are responsible for our own atonement.
  4. Revelation is not sealed. It is important to use reason to interpret scripture and theology. Meaning has not been finally captured, there is always something new to learn. It is our work to continue to explore and interpret our own experiences and beliefs.
  5. It is our work to repair the world. (see explanation of Rabbinical teaching on tikkun olam below)
- ~ Rev. Lisa Bovee Kemper, from recording of sermon on GUUF website\*.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

~ Matthew 25:35 Bible, English Standard Version (ESV)

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.

The world around us is deeply influenced, for good or ill, by the spirit of Jesus. We need to be familiar with this insistent and determined character if we are to live and do our work in this world. We will benefit by wrestling with him, not ignoring or bypassing him. There is no doubt that Jesus is troubling, provocative, even annoying at times, but we Unitarian Universalists are known as troublemakers as well. We should understand this kind of personality!

~ Rev. Stephen Kendrick, excerpted from *The Faith of a Unitarian Universalist Christian*,  
<https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/beliefs/christianity/uu-christian>

The difference between fixing and healing: This is the story of the birthday of the world. In the beginning, there was only the holy darkness, the Ein Sof, the source of life. Then, in the course of history, at a moment in time, this world, the world of a thousand thousand things, emerged from the heart of the holy darkness as a great ray of light. And then, perhaps because this is a Jewish story, there was an accident. And the vessels containing the light of the world, the wholeness of the world, broke. And the wholeness in the world, the light of the world, was scattered into a thousand thousand fragments of light. And they fell into all events and all people, where they remain deeply hidden until this very day.

Now, according to my grandfather, the whole human race is a response to this accident. We are here because we are born with the capacity to find the hidden light in all events and all people; to lift it up and make it visible once again and, thereby, to restore the innate wholeness of the world. This is a very important

story for our times — that we heal the world one heart at a time. This task is called “tikkun olam” in Hebrew, “restoring the world.”

~Rachel Naomi Remen, from interview with Krista Tippett, August 11, 2005.

<https://onbeing.org/programs/rachel-naomi-remen-the-difference-between-fixing-and-healing-nov2018/#transcript>

Religion is as much about faith in humanity as it is about faith in deity. And many of us will find that, over and over, our faith in humanity gets tested. We are immersed in a culture that's deeply corrupted by selfishness, greed, and oppression-borne privilege and fear. It's all too easy for us to justify the dehumanization, ostracization, suffering, and death of others. It's all too easy for us to devalue some humans' lives, and feel, somehow, like we're still good upstanding moral people.

Religion at its best asks us to do better than this: to rise above the selfishness and status-seeking, the othering and xenophobia that come so easily to us. Religion at its best — and our Unitarian Universalist faith — calls us to honor that which is sacred in each person, even those we might hate, even those who we find disgusting. It impels us to accept, on faith, that there is a sacred spark, a worthy spark, in every person. This can sound mundane but it's very radical — revolutionary even. Each person, sacred. Each person, worthy.

Accepting this, on faith, changes how we live. In this time when so many of us live in fear of a dehumanizing political regime, let us renew our pledge to live out those sacred and humane teachings that draw us toward compassion, love, and justice in ever-widening circles of care.

~ Rev. Sarah Gibb Millspaugh

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\*To listen to Lisa Bovee Kemper's sermon: Loving Our Neighbors, please go to this link:

<https://greenvilleuu.org/services/loving-our-neighbors/>