

Session Two

Writing Our Scripts

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider the concept of destiny and what we are meant to accomplish
- to think about what we are called to do in our lives
- to explore how our talents can help us in this calling

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Dogma*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- chalice and matches or lighter
- basket
- everyday items (batteries, paper clips, pencils, barrette, etc)
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Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to select scene #18 (or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right segment approximately one hour and 5 minutes into the movie)
- watch the movie in its entirety beforehand (even if you have seen it before)
- place the everyday objects in the basket

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Everyday Objects. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Dogma*. (25 min)

Reflection: Considering Destiny. (10 min)

Processing: Destiny's Child. (10 min)

Closing: Responsive Reading and Quote. (5 min)

Opening Activity

Light the chalice and share with the group Affirmation #457, "I am Only One" by Edward Everett Hale from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Pass the basket with everyday items around the circle of participants. Invite them to select an object that reminds them of themselves or a certain aspect of themselves and to share why they feel this way. After everyone has a chance to share, invite discussion on the types of objects chosen by members of the group.

Premiere

Watching *Dogma*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *Dogma*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

This is the irreverent and bizarre story of a woman who is given a very difficult task: save the fate of humankind. It seems two fallen angels, Bartelby and Loki, are hell-bent on the idea of unleashing the Apocalypse on the unsuspecting human race while God is mysteriously absent. She is on her way to stop them with the help of three unlikely companions: a stoner, his friend Silent Bob and the 13th Apostle who was left out of the Bible because of what his presence would signify.

Begin the video and watch scene #18 Bethany and Barry, scene #19 Train and Flight, scene #20 Epiphany, scene #21 Jesus' grandniece and scene #22 Foul Play Afoot.

These scenes start with Bethany talking to a man on the train that she believes to be someone named Barry. They share their experiences in being "dumped" and how painful that can be, sharing some beers and Bethany gets quite drunk. Then their discussion turns to faith and belief. He is surprised that she still goes to church and wonders when she lost her faith. Bethany says that it was after a crisis in her life and her mother told her that God had a plan for her. Bethany shares how angry she was over that and how she resented this idea. She laments that when we are children, we never question our faith and that she would give anything to believe that way again. She then goes on to say that must be why she had let herself get talked into this ridiculous quest. Barry asks her about this pilgrimage with an odd look on his face. She says she doesn't think he'll believe her, but he encourages her to tell him.

Bethany reveals that she is supposed to go to some church in New Jersey and stop some angels from going in there and thereby prevent the end of the world. Barry now has a look of horror on his face, and she thinks its because he thinks she's crazy. But what she doesn't know is that he is actually Bartelby, the angel who has engineered this whole plan and that he is horrified to discover that she has been dispatched to prevent him from succeeding.

Meanwhile, Rufus (also known as the 13th Apostle who was eliminated from the Bible because he is African American), awakes from sleep and wanders into the lounge car where he sees Bethany drinking with Bartelby. Of course, Bartelby also recognizes Rufus and the truth is revealed. Bartelby breaks a beer bottle and grabs Bethany, threatening to kill her. Loki, his friend and fellow angel, reminds Bartelby that he can't kill her because she has done nothing wrong. (They are Avenging Angels who kill humans for gross misdeeds and sins.)

A fight ensues between the two angels and

the group that has been dispatched to stop them from their quest to re-enter Heaven and thereby destroy the world. It ends when the two angels are tossed from the train.

After being tossed from the train, the two angels argue about whether or not they should continue with their plan. Bartelby complains about God's unfair treatment of them and rants about how lucky humans are to have free will and how he/she gave them everything yet they threw it away. He rants about God being unable to forgive them for their transgressions even though they are seeking his/her forgiveness.

Loki tells Bartelby that he sounds like he's lost it, says that what he's talking about amounts to a war on God and he saw how well that turned out when Lucifer tried it.

Bartelby is determined to continue with their plan despite the consequences, and Loki goes with him even though he has his reservations.

Meanwhile, Bethany and her fellow travelers talk over a campfire, having left the train in order to throw the angels off their trail. Bethany insists she wants to know why she has to be the one for this mission.

Rufus responds by claiming significant information about Jesus' life was omitted from the Bible for political reasons, including the fact that he had biological brothers and sisters who were born to Mary and Joseph after him. Rufus tells her that she is the one who must do this because she is the last person alive who has a genetic link to Jesus.

Bethany refuses to believe any of this and runs away, shouting that she can't do this anymore. She screams and curses God.

An angel appears to her, the angel who is the Voice of God (because apparently humans would be unable to withstand hearing God's real voice and it would kill them). As he walks on water toward her, he tells her that she must accept the truth. She refuses, saying she doesn't want this, that its too big. The Voice shares with her about the difficult time when he had to tell Jesus who he was and what his role would be.

The Voice says that he hated having to tell a child this, that he would have done anything to take it away and not force Jesus to shoulder the burden and responsibility of saving the sins of humankind. The Voice says he wishes he could also take it away from Bethany, but he can't because this is who she is. She doesn't know what to believe and says she doesn't know who she even is anymore. The Voice tells her that she is still the same person, she just needs to incorporate this new part of herself into her identity. When she seems to ponder this, he suggests that they adjourn to somewhere a bit more habitable.

Bethany, Rufus, the Voice, Silent Bob and Jay reappear in a fancy restaurant. Jay wants to know who the new guy is.

Rufus explains he is the Voice of God. Jay wants to where the rest of him/her is.

The Voice says that is a very good question since it seems God has gone missing. When the group seems surprised, the Voice wonders why. He says that if God wasn't missing, this whole thing with Loki and Bartelby would've been dealt with already.

Rufus explains that God likes to assume human shape from time to time – for kicks and to play skeeball. The Voice tells them that while on one of these “jaunts,” God disappeared. This means that he/she is trapped in the body of an unconscious human because if the person had been killed he/she would've returned to Heaven by now, and if they hadn't been knocked unconscious, God would've surely returned also. He believes that someone is actively working to help Bartelby and Loki succeed by making sure that God is absent during this time.

Jay, who has been looking at a newspaper during their discussion suggests they go ask the Cardinal who is planning this celebration at which the angels hope to re-enter Heaven to call it off. Bethany says they should do it. Rufus and The Voice want to know if this means she has changed her mind and will continue with this quest. She says that she “wouldn't want to let the family down.”

If you will not be watching the entire video, stop it at this point.

Reflection

Considering Destiny.

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and things which occurred to the group as they were watching the video. Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider:

Bethany has reluctantly taken on this quest, but at first she only half-heartedly believes in it and doesn't understand why she has been chosen for this mission. Have you ever felt called to do something you weren't sure about? What was that like?

Has the plan you had for your life changed since you were younger? Was it because you changed it, or because life circumstances changed it? How did you adapt?

What are Unitarian Universalist views of destiny? Do we feel that we, as individuals or as a group, are called to do something? How do we know what we are called to do when we don't have The Voice of God to encourage us?

Processing

Our Talents.

Encourage the participants to consider one way that we can approach the idea of destiny is thinking about what we are called to do. Each of us are individuals with special talents, skills and interests. How do these qualities add up to create the person we are and in what directions do they take us?

Pass out the blank sheets of paper. Invite the participants to draw three overlapping circles, like the one in Resource 2-A. Label one circle “Talents,” one circle “Resources,” and the third circle “Interests.”

Encourage participants to list some of their gifts and talents (such as writing or

mathematical ability) in the circle labeled “talents,” the resources that they have (such as access to a computer, college degree, etc) in the “resources” circle and some of their interests or causes they feel most strongly about in the circle labeled “interests.”

Once everyone has had time to work on their diagrams, invite participants to share some of the things they have placed in their circles.

Then ask them to look at the places their circles may overlap. For instance, if one of their gifts is gardening, one of their resources is owning property and one of their interests/causes is helping the environment, perhaps these overlap into a calling to work or volunteer as a person working to beautify and/or clean up natural lands.

Encourage participants to see places where their talents, resources, and causes may overlap and to identify some things they are called to do and place these in the center of the circles where they overlap.

Closing Worship

Reading the following statement, then invite participants who wish to share a calling with the group to call it out (as the spirit moves):

We all have gifts, talents and skills
some we seem to have been born with
some we have nurtured and grown
We all have interests and causes
things which ignite a fire in our bellies
help us to enjoy life or make a difference
Our gifts, our talents, our skills
the resources we have at our disposal
and the interests and causes which fire us
combine together to show us our calling
We are called to ...

Close your time together with this quote from William Jennings Bryan:

Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience and have some fun as a group:

More Discussion.

At the beginning of the movie, Bethany’s friend tells her that faith is like a glass of water. How does this analogy feel to you?

Consider the image of God which was presented in this movie, and how the pronouns “he” and “she” were used interchangeably. Did the participants like the image presented, or did they find it uncomfortable? Why?

Bethany agonizes over having lost her faith and seeks to gain it back again. Have you lost the faith you had as a child, or how has your ideas about faith changed since you were younger? What was that like? Have you found a new faith to believe in? What was that like?

More Activities.

Brainstorm some ways your group or faith community can nurture the talents of your group to help strengthen them. List these ideas on newsprint. Think about how these ideas can be implemented and how you might go about it.

If there were common interests, skills or callings members of the group had in common, brainstorm ways the group can act together on them. For instance, if a number in the group had gardening as an interest or skill and the same people (or others) had callings toward making a difference in overcoming issues hunger or poverty, consider creating a community garden project with the proceeds being donated to a local pantry or homeless shelter.

Resource 2-A

