

# UU Views of Jesus

UUs' thoughts on Jesus reflect the diversity of thought encouraged by our liberal faith. Our Principles include a commitment to "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning"; whatever one's views, there is likely a UU who shares them. Yet we are more than our individual stories. Unitarian Universalism is a religion that claims many sources, including the deeds and teachings of great teachers, the inspiring wisdom in the world's many religions, and our Jewish and Christian heritage. Clearly, Jesus has a place in this faith.

UUs may view Jesus as a moral exemplar, practicing the compassion, generosity, and mercy that he preached. In his own life and in stories like the Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan, Jesus calls us to connect: to transcend pride and selfishness and choose instead to love and serve, to do good, and to care for each other.

For some, Jesus is a prophetic leader and an instrument of the divine. They may or may not believe Jesus was the son of God or was resurrected but share with Christians a conviction that his witness has the spiritual power to redeem mistakes and save lives. Many describe a personal relationship with him that strengthens and inspires. Jesus calls us to discover new life and truth by following him.

Others view Jesus as a reformer and dissident, an underdog and ally. He was executed as a political criminal because of his teachings, but his life made an impact, then and now. He called out injustice in his own community and in the government. He stood with and spoke up for the most vulnerable, and he challenged his followers to feed the hungry and visit the imprisoned. Jesus calls us to transform, to resist the unjust systems that divide us, and reshape them for good.

—Joy Berry

As an agnostic humanist, I find a deep resonance with the Jesus portrayed in the early Gospels. Here is a man who healed the sick, fed the hungry, and clothed the poor. He did something about the suffering he saw around him because he felt connected to those who suffered. He was a revolutionary in this way, going outside the existing structures to right the wrongs of the system. This ethic is consonant with religious humanism, and I find it both educational and inspirational.

—Rev. Dawn Skjei Cooley,  
First Unitarian Church of Louisville, KY

As a Unitarian Universalist, I love reading the Gospels and witnessing the method Jesus would use to guide people to answers rather than simply giving them the answers. I connect to Jesus as a person who wanted to fix the problems he saw in his faith community and society, to build the community that he knew was possible rather than simply go through the motions of everyday life. It was in my deification of Jesus that I could reconnect with his story, trading messiah for mentor.

—Rev. Scott McNeill, Bull Run  
Unitarian Universalists, Manassas, VA

It took years of participating in and even leading UU congregations for me to re-discover the value of Jesus in my spiritual life. When I first came to Unitarian Universalism, I felt relief that I didn't *have* to know what I believed about God or prayer or Christianity. In time, God—or Goddess—came to life again for me through paganism, which was introduced to me by a sister UU. The same dear friend brought me to Interweave, UUs for BGLT Concerns, which provided support to me in coming out as a lesbian, as a gift from God/dess. As I grew into ministry as a profession, I was driven more and more

to reckon with the Christian tradition. “I need to figure out my relationship with Christianity,” I told my spiritual director. “No,” the Episcopal Buddhist replied, “you need to figure out your relationship with Christ.” Reclaiming Jesus reconnected me with other Christians, particularly those working for rights for BGLTIQ people. The misuse of scripture against queer people and against women troubled me, but I realized that only by owning those stories fully for myself could I honestly confront the oppression that worked against me and others who needed what church had to offer. Jesus provides inspiration, example, and strategy for the work I am called to do in the world. That’s why I call myself Christian today.

—Rev. Jonalu Johnstone,  
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
of Manhattan, Kansas

Among the various images of salvation in scripture, the one that most resonates with me is related to the root word of *salvation*, which is *salve*. Therefore, salvation is the process by which God’s healing salve is applied to the world. Jesus, for me, demonstrates the manner in which God would have many of us apply this healing salve to the world. When I examine interactions between Jesus and those whose lives he changed, I am inspired by his commitment to healing the wounds of the heart and of his society. Jesus, for me, demonstrates healing and shows us the power of salvation—a power that we are to seek and share in this life as often as we can.

—Crystal Lewis,  
Universalist National Memorial Church, Washington, DC

I left Christianity behind as a teenager. But when I sought a UU congregation to support my children’s liberal religious education and then began working as their director of religious education, I encountered Jesus again. As an agnostic, I saw him as one of an All-Star team of important religious teachers I promised to represent with care so young people could learn about Christianity alongside other world religions. I felt no special affinity to him. But in the years since, I have begun to see him as something like an experienced colleague in a challenging field, someone with whom I share a professional concern.

We like seeing Jesus as a revolutionary who spoke up for the disenfranchised, the voiceless. But a decade in religious education makes me find one of his most compelling teachings in the story of how he invited children to sit with him. Despite the resistance from other adults who tried to send them away, he insisted. His simple act of welcome reminds us that young people need to feel claimed by this faith and suggests that their wonder and joy might transform us, in return. Jesus asks us to make room in our hearts, minds, and congregations for learning and growing in faith together.

—Joy Berry, The Fahs Collaborative at Meadville Lombard Theological School

I grew up Unitarian Universalist. Jesus only showed up on Christmas in the form of a baby. When people asked me as a child who Jesus was, I answered “a fictional character some people think is God.” This answer said far more about me and my parents than it said about Jesus. Now I have children of my own. My four-year-old Eloisa, when asked who Jesus was, said Jesus is the “Queen of God.” My eight-year-old, Cecilia, said “the person who is always with me, in my heart.” And these answers makes sense, because Eloisa has always wanted to be Queen, and Cecilia has always wanted to be kind. Jesus resembles who they want to be in the world, and what they want the world to be like. We need to answer Jesus when he says “Who do you say that I am?” because the answer says a lot about what we want the world to be like. We need to tell a really important story about who Jesus is before someone else tells our children differently. So if Jesus were here, and if he said to me

“Who do you say that I am?” or “When you are talking to your children, what do you tell them about me?” I would say something like this: “Jesus, I say you are a person sent to show us what God’s love looks like. In your brand of love the last are first, the lost are found, the least are favored. You came to loose the chains of injustice, to create earth as it is in heaven. Thank you, Jesus.”

—Rev. Robin Bartlett,  
First Church of Sterling, MA

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