

Session 16

Well, To Be Honest ...

The objectives of this session are:

- to imagine a world full of absolute honesty
- to examine the gray areas of honesty
- look at the phrase “being brutally honest”)
- to look beyond external appearances and see the goodness and beauty within
- to explore the roots or origins of religion and belief
- to consider honesty as an important and integral part of our UU principles

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD of the movie, *The Invention of Lying*
- DVD player and TV monitor
- at least one copy of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- chalice and matches or lighter
- one copy of Resource #12A
- one copy of Resource # 12B
- a roll of blue painter’s tape

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or rent it from the video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to select scene #12 (“After you die”)
- watch the movie in its entirety even if you have seen it before
- print a copy of Resource #12A and post them on the classroom walls.
- read through Resource #12B so that you can choose which statements to read in case you are short on time

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Chalice Lighting, opening reading (5 min)

Premiere: Introducing and watching an excerpt of the movie, *The Invention of Lying* (45 min)

Reflection & Discussion: Taking an honest look at the world (10 min)

Processing: Honestly? (10 min)

Closing: closing words and extinguishing the chalice (3 min)



Opening Activity

Light the chalice (or invite someone to light the chalice) and share with the participants the following reading:

“A truth that’s told with bad intent
beats all the lies you can invent.”

~William Blake, "Auguries of Innocence,"
Poems from the Pickering Manuscript

If there are any newcomers to the group, invite the participants to go around the circle and check in with their names and grade in school. Otherwise, ask for any thoughts about the opening reading and then move on to introducing today’s movie.

Premiere

Watching The Invention of Lying

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *The Invention of Lying*. Ask if

anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

The setting for this movie is somewhat odd – in this world human beings never developed the ability to lie. In fact, they the word “lie” isn’t even in their vocabulary because it has never been done. Mark Bellison is just an average guy; a somewhat unsuccessful screenwriter at a very successful production company, Lecture Films. He gets fired from his job just after he’s had a date with the girl of his dreams, the beautiful Anna McDougals. Mark is crazy about Anna, but the feelings are not mutual - Anna doesn’t want a short, overweight, snub-nosed loser as her husband. That would ruin her chances to have genetically perfect, beautiful babies. Mark is about to get thrown out of his apartment due to his inability to pay the rent. So, he goes to the bank to withdraw all his cash and rent a moving van. The computers are down and the bank teller can’t check his account. When the bank teller asks Mark how much he wants to withdraw he asks for \$800 instead of the \$300 that he actually has. When the computers suddenly come back online, the bank teller assumes that the system is corrupt and apologetically gives him \$800. Inadvertently in a moment of extreme stress and desperation, Mark invents the art of lying. Everybody believes whatever he says. When Mark’s mom gets terminally ill and is frightened of dying, Mark makes up a story about an afterlife to help comfort her on her deathbed. But the doctors and nurses overhear him, and soon Mark becomes an international authority on the afterlife.

Using his new found power, he convinces his old company to publish his new screenplay and becomes rich and famous. He eventually gets the girl, marries her and they have children – one of whom shares Mark’s unique talent!

Begin the video and watch scenes #12 (“After you die”) through #20 (“So much more”).

This sequence starts with Mark rushing away from his second date with Anna to the nursing home in order to be at his mother’s side. As she confides her fear of dying to him, Mark resolves to ease her pain and makes up an elaborate story of the afterlife. His mom is comforted by this and dies peacefully with a smile on her face.

When Mark rises to leave he is confronted by the doctors and nurses who demand to know more about the afterlife. Mark and Anna leave and go back to her apartment. As Mark sits grieving, Anna sits close by trying to comfort him. When Mark returns home the next morning, a crowd of people, including the doctors and nurses from the nursing home, are gathered in front of his apartment building. They demand to know more about what happens after you die. Anna persuades Mark to share his knowledge with the people. Mark writes down the commandments from the “man in the sky,” pastes them to two pizza boxes and goes out before the crowd, ala Moses.

After hours of questions and answers, the crowd is satisfied and Mark goes inside. Meanwhile, the production of Mark’s new screenplay about the 14th century (which he totally made up complete with a visiting spacecraft), is being filmed. The movie soon becomes

the most popular movie in the world, Mark becomes rich and famous and buys a mansion.

One day while they are at the park, Mark asks Anna why they can't be together. She tells him that even though she loves the way he sees the world and has grown to love him, she wants to have beautiful, genetically perfect babies. She asks him if being wealthy and famous changes a person's genetics. Mark pauses, while Anna looks on hopefully, but he just can't lie to her and admits that regretfully, their children would be short and stocky with snub noses.

Much to Mark's dismay Anna starts dating his arch rival Brad. Mark goes into a deep depression and hardly leaves his mansion.

One day, Anna comes to see him to deliver an invitation to her wedding. Mark pleads with her not to marry Brad but Anna leaves. She goes to the park where she observes a group of "perfect" children picking on a short, chubby little boy with a snub nose. She intervenes on the boy's behalf and tells him that he is so much more than "short, fat Brian." He's "Brian with the beautiful smile." The boy thanks her and smiles and goes off to eat his ice cream.

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

Reflection & Discussion

Taking an Honest Look at the World

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and things which occurred to the group as they were watching the movie clip. Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider: *Can you imagine living in a world where*

everyone tells the absolute truth all the time? How do you think that would feel? Have you ever heard of the saying "being brutally honest?" What does that mean to you? How does this saying apply to the world depicted in this movie?

Why does Mark make up the story about the man in the sky and the mansions? What happens to Mark as a result of making up this story? Does Mark's religious "story" remind you of anything you might have heard? What do you think this movie implies about religion? What do Mark's religious rules remind you of? Can you imagine that Moses had to answer so many questions when he presented the 10 Commandments? After Mark answers their questions, why do you think the people are so eager to accept Mark's story about the man in the sky? What is the one rule that the people are the most interested in? (They are most interested in the 6th rule that says if you do bad things you don't get to go to the good place.) Does this remind you of any present religious concept? (i.e., the concept of sin) How does Mark calm down the crowd when they turn against the man in the sky? How does Mark's message change the world?

Why doesn't Mark just lie to Anna about his wealth altering his genetics? Why does Anna go out with Brad (and get engaged to him) even though she admits that she loves Mark? Do you think that meeting the little boy named Brian changes Anna in any way?

Processing

Honestly?

Tell the group that you are going to play an honesty game. Ask everyone to line up in the middle of the room and point out the signs on the walls (from

Resource #12A). Let them know that you are going to read a series of statements and they will decide whether to tell the truth or tell a lie. Each time they answer, they should take one step toward either the truth or lie sign depending on how they answer. Read as many of the statements (Resource #12B) as time allows or until everyone is on one side or the other of the room.

Closing

Invite the participants stand and form a circle around the chalice. Then close with the following reading:

“Today I bent the truth to be kind, and I have no regret, for I am far surer of what is kind than I am of what is true.”

~Robert Brault, American poet and blogger

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

Why does the bank teller give Mark \$800 even though the computer clearly shows that he only has \$300? Why don't Jim the Bartender and Mark's friend Greg understand Mark's explanation about what a lie is? When does Mark realize that he can use his ability to lie to make

people happy? How does he help Frank? How does he help other people? How does the way Mark views the world differ from how Anna sees the world? How is Anna limited by her absolute honesty? How are Brad and the others limited? If Brad believes that Mark is a loser, why doesn't he just ignore him instead of trying to hurt him? Do you think that Brad is intimidated by Mark? Why or why not? At the end of the movie, we see that Mark's son has inherited his ability to tell a lie. Is this as important a trait as Anna's idea of genetic perfection?

More Activities

Invite the participants to share stories about times when they told a lie to spare someone's feelings. How would they compare lying to spare someone's feelings to lying for personal gain? Are there any other times when it is better to lie than to tell the truth?



Resource 12A

Tell the Truth!

Tella Liel

Resource #12B

Honestly?

- 1.) Your best friend gets a new hairstyle that looks terrible. When they ask you if you like it, would you: tell the truth or tell a lie?
- 2.) At the store, you notice that the clerk has given you \$5 too much change. Do you: tell the truth (tell the clerk about their mistake) or tell a lie (you don't say anything and keep the money)?
- 3.) Pretend that you're at work, and the office assistant does a big research project and leaves her report on your desk. Your boss finds it and assumes that you did it and praises you for your hard work. Do you: tell the truth (let the boss know that your assistant did the project) or tell a lie (say thanks and keep your mouth shut)?
- 4.) You're online and accidentally discover that your next door neighbor has unprotected wireless Internet access. Do you: tell the truth (let your neighbor know that their wireless network is not secure) or tell a lie (don't say anything and use your neighbor's wireless when your connection is down)?
- 5.) You just got your driver's license and are parking your car at the mall when you accidentally give another car a minor scrape. Do you: tell the truth (get out and leave a note with your name, phone number and insurance information) or tell a lie (Drive away because that's just the risk of mall parking)?
- 6.) You are feed the neighbor's cat while they're out of town. One night you are playing with cat, you bump a table and accidentally break a lamp. When your neighbors return, do you: tell the truth (tell them what happened and offer to pay for the lamp) or tell a lie (blame the broken lamp on the cat)?
- 7.) You've spent hours arguing with your cell phone company because they overcharged you. On the next statement, you realize they've mistakenly given you 800 free minutes. Do you tell the truth (report the mistake) or tell a lie (call it karma and say nothing about the mistake)?
- 8.) You and your best friend have agreed to be exercise partners. They are going be out of town for a week. You promise to walk every day while they're gone, but you sleep in all week. When they return, do you: tell the truth (admit to not exercising) or tell a lie (say you exercised without them)?
- 9.) One of your parents is really proud of the new outfit they just bought and thinks they look really good. You think they look ridiculous, but when they ask you what you think about it, do you: tell the truth (tell them that it looks ridiculous) or tell a lie (tell them it looks good so you don't hurt their feelings)?
- 10.) You have an important assignment due at school. You're really busy and while you're researching on the internet, you find a paper on an obscure website that is exactly what you need. Do you: tell the truth (keep researching and write your own paper) or tell a lie (plagiarize the internet paper and hope you don't get caught)?