

## **Story for All Ages: John Murray**

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Our story today is about John Murray, who is often thought of as one of the founders of American Universalism. John Murray lived in England, with his wife and his baby. John Murray and his wife had started out going to an ordinary church, and people in that ordinary church believed that if you were bad, when you died you would go to a very unpleasant place called Hell. Fortunately, John Murray's wife, Eliza, found a Universalist church where she learned that love is the most powerful force in the universe, and therefore no one would ever go to Hell after they died. Soon, she brought her husband to that church, too, and they became enthusiastic about their new Universalist religion. John even became a Universalist preacher.

Then something very sad happened. Eliza and their baby got very sick and died. Feeling that his life was in shambles, John decided to leave everything, even the only thing left to him at that point: his belief in universal salvation. John was so sad that he decided to give up preaching Universalism and go to America to start a new life. So he got on a boat that was sailing for America.

Well, they sailed and they sailed and they sailed, and at last they were almost to America. They were headed for New York, but just off the coast of New Jersey, the boat got stuck on a sand bar! They couldn't get off that sandbar and had to wait for the wind to change directions in order to continue the journey. John Murray's ship got stuck near a town called, ironically, "Good Luck," something that John surely felt a lack of at that particular moment.

In Good Luck, however, there lived a man named Thomas Potter, who had built a meetinghouse for the Universalist discussion group in the town several years ago. Since building it, he was convinced that God would send a preacher to him who would preach about a loving God, who would preach that there was no such thing as Hell. When Thomas saw John Murray's ship, he was certain that the preacher he had been waiting for was aboard. When John came to his house looking for food and water, and Thomas Potter discovered that he had indeed been a Universalist preacher, Thomas got excited and said, "I have been expecting you a long time!"

Thomas Potter insisted that John Murray preach in his meetinghouse. John had wanted to leave all his religious connections behind, so he tried to refuse, but finally agreed that if the winds did not change by Sunday, he would take that as a sign from God and would preach.

He got the sign he was looking for. The winds did not change and John did end up preaching on Sunday. Thomas Potter was thrilled by all of this, feeling that God's will had finally been fulfilled and proclaimed that this was the happiest day of his life.

As soon as John Murray finished preaching, the wind changed direction and he set off to continue his journey to New York. But his experience in Good Luck had changed him. Instead of leaving his faith in a loving God who would not send anyone to Hell behind in England with the rest of his unfortunate circumstances, he embraced this belief—the only thing left of his old life—using it to turn his life around and become a well known universalist preacher in America and one of the founders of our faith.