



GROUPS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Series: At Commons - Part 4 October 1, 2023

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50, Romans 8:38-39 (NIV11)

Community is shaped by the conversations we share.

These questions are just a tool to help you meaningfully engage with the themes of this week's teaching.

Message Summary: This week we talk about the fourth affirmation in our journal: *We believe that Jesus came not to change God's mind about us but to repair our imagination of God*, by looking at the story (forgiveness of debt) within the story (a woman pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet).

- **Doctrine and Dogma** - Jeremy's Sunday message was mostly concerned with atonement (our at-one-ment with God). Dogma is what we call a core Christian idea. One of Christian dogmas is that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus we are made at-one with God. Doctrine is an explanation of just how exactly that at-one-ment works. There are all kinds of doctrines from all corners of the Christian story. But what makes us Christian is not thinking the right thoughts about God, but putting our trust in Jesus and following his way in the world.
- **Dinner Parties** - in Lk 7:36-50, Jesus tells a story within a story to help those around him see the woman who perfumed his feet with the same eyes he sees her. Jesus turns his body towards the woman,

makes eye contact with her, acknowledging her gratitude and her faith, showing her that she is not a distraction to this dinner party. He sees beyond what's broken and lifts her up. Sin is an important category in our lives, but God's voice always sounds more like healing and freedom from what's wrong rather than shame and condemnation.

- **A Second Encounter** - Many scholars agree that this is Jesus' second encounter with this woman. He is not offering her forgiveness as he speaks. She's already been forgiven and her showing up at the party is a sign of her gratitude. We are just not given that relational history (and in general the story protects the identity of this woman). It is another reminder that forgiveness is not transactional and good theology will not get us forgiven. Jesus announces the grace and forgiveness of God that the woman already received
 - **Fixing God** - and the story also shows that Jesus did not come to fix God. If Jesus is a full revelation of the divine, it means that God has always looked like Jesus. Our bifurcated imagination of the divine needs to be fixed. We did not have an angry God before Jesus and "puppies & cotton candy God" after Jesus (that view is actually an ancient heresy). The cross is there to show us to what extent God would go to tell us how much God loves us. And if God is immutable (doesn't change), then Jesus shows us a God worth trusting to.
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Connect: Reflect on you week, was there a moment of connection with nature, idea, book, or other human beings that made you feel come alive or feel connected, what exactly about that moment was special or made you notice it?

Share: Think about that opening part of the sermon about dogma and doctrines, how theology is important but how theology is not what gives us forgiveness, etc. then look at Jesus' response to the woman in Luke 7:36-50.

What stands out to you about the way Jesus treats that woman? What is he communicating to her through his words and actions?

Reflect: What does this affirmation that "*Jesus came not to change God's mind about us, but to repair our imagination of God*" mean to you? Is this a new idea for you? How does it connect with your faith story and experience of the divine?

Engage: How does the thought below resonate with you?
"Whatever we see in Jesus, whatever we are seeing in the cross, is not a new God...It's not a reinvention of God or a turning of God. The cross is not God changing God's mind or enabling God to do anything God couldn't do before. The cross is God demonstrating the lengths to which God would go to tell you that you are perfectly loved."

There is a kind of bifurcated imagination of the divine that says that God couldn't forgive us unless certain ritualistic obligations were met, and Jesus had to fix that for God.

In what way do you think your imagination of God needed to be fixed? How did it happen or is happening for you?

Take away: What would you like to take away from today's conversation? Is there anything that someone else has shared that you'd like to remember or anything that stood out to you from the sermon?

Pray:

*Holy God,
Who is love and who is therefore broken hearted at all that harms us,
Might we slowly come to understand the purpose of your divine anger
Not to pit us against each other, not to drive us into more fear of each other
But to direct us, slowly and gently back to what is good for us.
Might we trust that you are a parent to us,
A good parent that love us,
A creator that has our best in mind,
And from that might your Spirit remind us that you are always on our side,
Even when our actions break your heart.
May that love then slowly change and transform and welcome us into the story you have for us,
More graceful
More peaceful
More generous
More kind
More set apart from the brokenness that surrounds us,
So that we might model glimpses of your holiness in the world.
If today we need to reflect on changes we need make - speak truth to us.
If today we need to rest in the embrace of your love - speak that truth to us.
In the strong name of the risen Christ we pray.
Amen.*