



GROUPS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Series: At Commons - Part 6 October 15, 2023

Scripture: John 14:15, Jn 13:1, Jn 14:16-18, Jn 14: 26-27 (NIV11)

Message Summary: This week we wrap up by talking about our sixth affirmation: *“We desire to participate in that renewal by following the way of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, trusting that this good news is even better than we can imagine.”*

- **What's Wrong with Obedience?** John 14:15 reads “If you love me, keep my commands.” Obedience is good news for your flourishing. All the commandments (and the law) fit into one commandment for Jesus - love. “In their time and place, every commandment was a task of love. Obedience should stem out of love.
- **The Bad Parts** - John 13:1 is the beginning of the Farewell Discourse (John 13-17). Bobbi talked about how before we can arrive at obedience as love, we are invited (like Peter was) to let Jesus love us first. And Jesus’ love as service prepares the disciples for the bad parts ahead. Jesus will not dodge death, and the disciples will have their share of suffering too. “Renewal is on the other side of death” and the hope of the gospel is that the Spirit accompanies us in that renewal.
- **Theology of accompaniment** John 14:16-18. Jesus says to his disciples that they won’t be alone. The word he uses for Spirit is *paraclete*, it means “called to be alongside”, and can be translated as

advocate, legal advocate, comforter, helper, encourager, or true friend. There’s no doctrine of the Trinity in this text, but there’s “a triadic pattern, where one person/same substance of the divine blends into another. Jesus is linked up with the Father. The Spirit will be with the disciples forever. Jesus is going, but he’s also coming back.” Theology of accompaniment is this kind of awareness of God through tricky times. We cannot answer the question of why bad things happen, “but we can insist on a God who suffers with. And even, in the words of author Shusaku Endo, a God who allows for our weakness.” And in all that we get to be empowered by the Spirit, where we learn to trust in good over evil, where we get to keep growing, and changing, and participating in renewal.

- **Peace** John 14:26-27. One of the things we can do with the Spirit power is to work for peace. In the gospel, peace is more than the absence of conflict, it is actively given and pursued. If we are not to be motivated by obedience when we get out of bed, we can be motivated by renewal. In the Orthodox tradition, “the resurrection not an escape from this world, but the ongoing transformation of this world. And it is our vocation, calling, and mission to anticipate renewal in all things, and to work for renewal in all things.”

Connect: Take a few minutes to look at the first page of the journal, or just read the list of all Commons affirmations below. Which one

resonates with you the most and you'd like to keep thinking about even after this series?

1. We are completely fascinated with this complex and beautiful collection of texts we call the Bible – but we worship Jesus.
2. The scriptures lead us to the realization that Jesus is the only exact representation of the divine and that God has always looked like Jesus even when we didn't see that clearly.
3. Because of that we have abandoned the idea of an angry, violent God in order to fully embrace the good news brought forward by Jesus.
4. We believe that Jesus came not to change God's mind about us but to repair our imagination of God.
5. Realizing this and coming to understand that God is love we affirm surprising acceptance and scandalous grace as the way God chooses to heal all things.
6. We desire to participate in that renewal by following the way of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, trusting that this good news is even better than we can imagine.

Share: What is your relationship with obedience? What reactions does this word produce in you? What is the place of obedience in your relationship with God? And what is the connection between love and obedience in your own experience and practice of faith?

Reflect: Why do you think it was important for Jesus to spend that time which John describes in chapters 13-17 with his disciples, washing their feet, eating with them, talking to them? How was that, and especially the foot washing that Bobbi mentioned in the message, meant to prepare them for the bad parts to come?

Bobbi said that we all know that life has its share of bad parts.

If you feel comfortable, please share some of the “bad parts” that you're navigating in your life right now. (This is a good time to apply the “don't try to fix it” rule for group sharing and encourage people to just tune into listening).

Engage: In what way do you find “theology of accompaniment” helpful, in general and when looking at the questions of “why suffering” that we often pose to God?

Here's a quote from Elizabeth Johnson to guide you. *“The living God, gracious and merciful, always was, is, and will be accompanying the world with saving grace, including humans in their sinfulness, and humans and all creatures in their unique beauty, evolutionary struggle, and inevitable dying.”*

What is the connection for you personally between being accompanied and being empowered by the Spirit?

Take away: How does seeing yourself as a participant in the renewal of all things reframe obedience and service and love for you? (Basically your motivation to live the life of faith:)

What are one or two small ways in your daily life in which you participate in the renewal of all things and that give you hope?

In what ways can you give and pursue peace even this week?

Pray:

Loving God,

Thank you for all the ways we get to change our minds about what it means to follow you.

We can call it obedience, we can call it intimacy, we can call it love.

For all the suffering we witness and feel

For the bad parts of every story: collective and personal

We ask for a deep sense of accompaniment

And trust that you are near

We are not orphans.

We are not alone.

You have given us peace

And we will try (O Jesus, help us as we try)

To live your peace.

Spirit of the living God, present with us now,

Enter the places of our suffering, our attempts to get our needs met, our longing and heal us of all that harms us. Amen.