



GROUPS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Series: At Commons - Part 3 September 24, 2023

Scripture: Romans 1:18-19, Romans 5:9, 1 John 4:16-18 (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 look at the third affirmation from the journal: *"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."* In the sermon, Bobbi explores what it is that we want to abandon and what it is that we want to embrace and the reasons for those choices.

- **Our Shady Past** - the violent parts in our Bible remind us that violence comes to us naturally. "We live with a text that contains violence, just like our own hearts and histories." Bobbi walked us through some points in the history of Christianity that show - we need no help with being violent. "But our violence does not make God violent."
- **Decluttering Violence** - we need help decluttering violence in our lives and communities. In Rom 1:18-19, we are reminded that the wrath of God is not directed at us, but at what harms us. Further in the chapter, Paul shifts the source of wrath from God to us, and

eventually it becomes an impersonal force that just is. "It's wrath with a capital 'W.'" We could call that "consequences" of "comeuppance!". Wrath is the name for what can go horribly wrong." Then in Rom 5:9, we see that Jesus saves us from [God's'] wrath, but the word "God's" isn't in the original text. It takes the work of a lifetime to declutter the violence in our hearts and on the pages of scripture.

- **All There is to Embrace** - we locate our work of interpretation in love. In 1 John 4:16-18, people in 1 John community had a two-fold concern: "What do we believe? And how does that shape how we live?" Over and over, the writers and leaders, and community builders of those early christian communities spoke against vengeance and fear. 1 John uses the word "love" 46 times. It is the heart of the Jesus community. "And it is our right and our duty to abandon the idea of an angry, violent God in order to fully embrace the good news brought forward by Jesus."
- **Jesus: Friend** Bobbi is a proponent for this work of abandoning and embracing, especially when it comes to our ideas about God. She even has a list of bad metaphors for God, and we could have one too. Seeing God as a friend, seeing Jesus as a friend can be a great source of healing in our lives. "It's good news to be the friend, not the enemy, of God."

Connect: Bobbi mentioned this idea of embracing patience in our own transformation. Here's the quote: "Embrace the patience of God in your own transformation. What's the hurry?"

How does this apply to you today? How has being patient with yourself in your journey served you? And where are you currently giving (or want to give) yourself space and time to grow or change?

Share: What place does this image of an angry, violent God have in your story with faith? And what do you think about Bobbi's quick sweep through the history of Christianity and the legacy of violence that we carry?

How does the interpretation of wrath in Rom 1:18ff and 5:9 change and/or challenge this idea of an angry God?

Reflect: Reflecting on John 1, how do you see the role of community in reshaping our understanding of God and moving us away from a fear-based faith to a more love-based Christianity?

Engage: Bobbi talked about some personal struggles with certain language used to describe God. Are there metaphors or descriptions of God that you find challenging or hard to relate to? What's on your "bad metaphors for God" list and why?

Take away: How does the idea of Jesus as a friend shape your understanding of your relationship with God? In what areas of your life do you see God as your friend, and how does it impact you to see yourself as a friend of God?

Pray:

Christ our friend,

*We confess the centuries of our history where we have wandered so far away from your love
We confess the ways we drag your holiness into our horror
We confess our own anger that fails to propel us toward love and justice*

*For the work of abandoning ideas that take us into shady places
For the work of embracing all there is in life – the good and the hard parts
Remind us that we are not alone
Draw us into community
Spark in us the confidence of your love*

*Spirit of the living God, present with us now, enter the places of our shame and insecurity, and heal us of all that harms us.
Amen.*