**Anger as Holy**

Many of us have been taught that part of being Christian is being “nice,” and nice people don’t get angry. However, much of what we experience in our Scriptures, both Old Testament and New, reveal God and Jesus expressing anger. Similarly, Job, as well as many of our psalmists express anger at God. Today’s session invites a conversation about anger and whether it has a place either in our own spiritual lives, or in church.

**Readings for Reflection:**

From Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections*

We need to recognize that where the evasion of feeling is widespread, anger does not go away or disappear. Rather, in interpersonal life it masks itself as boredom, ennui, low energy, or it expresses itself in passive-aggressive activity or in moralistic self-righteousness and blaming. Anger denied subverts community. Anger expressed directly is a mode of taking the other seriously, of caring. The important point is that where feeling is evaded, where anger is hidden or goes unattended, masking itself, there the power of love, the power to act, to deepen relationship, atrophies and dies.

From Buxton, *Recreating stories*

It is the relationship between anger and love that is so transformative, for without love, anger can indeed be destructive. While Aquinas could not identify an opposite for anger, Daly’s labeling the opposite as “dissociation” and Carol Saussy’s study of women identifying it with numbness and indifference elucidate the connection between anger and passion. The leap from passion to love is not a difficult one to make. We do not feel passionate about those things that we do not care about. Anger’s companion is not always hatred, but more often love.

When Jesus was angry, he did not speak out of hatred, but out of love. Matthew’s gospel quotes Jesus following up the long “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!” speech with an image of the compassionate mother: “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” (Matt 23.13-37) As a mother, I can identify in his words the many times I have spoken angrily at my own children, the people whom I love most in the world.

**Questions for Discussion**:

1. What were you taught about anger at home? At church? What is your comfort level with anger now? How do you express anger? How do you feel when others express anger at you?
2. How does anger appear in the St. Paul's community?  In Bedford and surrounding towns?  Do people express anger at each other, at the institutions, etc.?
3. In the readings above, the authors argue that anger is an expression of care and passion. Does this resonate with you? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever gotten angry with God? How have you expressed that anger to God, and what, if anything, has come of it?

**A Prayer:**

Psalm of Anger (St. Mary’s Abbey, West Malling)

Rage ricochets off the empty cloister walls,

anger erupts at the altar.

The silence palls.

My serene piety falters and crumbles.

My lips mouth the prayers

but my heart lurches and stumbles

on the edge of this gaping pit

into which my cries have fallen.

I will storm this silence

not with praise but with venom.

I will blast this emptiness

not with patience but with anger.

My mantra is not ‘mercy’

but a cacophony of curses

hurled headlong at your distance,

spat in the face of your absence.

Show yourself!

Answer me!

I am sick of your silence,

I have had my fill of your hiddenness,

I am faint with the worry of waiting

on your word which never comes.

Have you not heard my pain?

Have you not heard

the anguish of my heart?

How can you stand far off

and watch me writhing and straining for you

with my bleary, tear-filled eyes,

crying for you with my dry and weary throat?

Why do you gloat from afar?

Will you not come?

Will you not show yourself?

Anwer me!