

## What Listening Makes Possible

Friends of open hearts and open minds: On this second Sunday of Easter, let us join in with the two sojourning disciples and Jesus as the walk toward Emmaus as well as to the servant girl in the kitchen. Let's be open to them teaching us lessons about possibilities arising through listening. With eyes open or closed, I invite you to join your hearts with mine in prayer.

Holy Loving Spirit, we are grateful for freedom to gather for worship today – on our live stream and on this land, which has been loved by First Nations and others across time and where we are now weaving our way of community. Help us to feel your steady, loving presence with us now and here even as our ancestors in faith felt you with them on the road to Emmaus. Teach us to listen for your voice. We pray this as followers of our great teacher, Jesus. Amen.

I find several lessons about listening in this morning's readings. I hope that one or more will resonate with a way in which you are growing in your listening in relationships.

**First, the two disciples model the shared action of discussion, which can lead to new understanding.** We heard: *"[t]wo of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened... they were talking and discussing..."* To discuss is to explore and examine interactively with another. The Latin root of the word discuss means to "shake apart" or "break up." In discussions, we invest together in examination and exploration, folding into our own expanding understanding the insights the other articulates. **With whom in your life to you value discussions that lead to expanded understanding?**

**Second, Jesus models careful listening that dares interjection.**

We heard: *“Jesus himself came near and went with them... And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’”* Jesus didn’t cheaply “bump into” the two friends, offer a half-interested ‘How you doing?’ and hardly listen for a perfunctory ‘I’m doin’ fine.’ Jesus did something that is radically countercultural in our space and time. He consciously worked to make space for the others. Jesus approached them, began to walk alongside them, and asked them several direct questions in order to learn what was on their minds and hearts. Direct interjection causes pause and prompts clarification so that the listener can actively follow what might be shared instead of zoning out. In other words, asking questions of clarification invites the possibility of establishing a clearer connection than if we were to skitter half-heartedly along the surface of conversation. **With whom in your life would you like to practice more genuine investment in conversation such that you develop more accurate understanding between you?**

**Third, Jesus models diving deeper through inviting the sharer to tell him more.** We heard: *“He asked them, ‘What things?’”* Through the “tell me more” move, Jesus encourages further exploration and getting to the heart of the matter. Jesus stayed focused on the two disciples, resisting the temptation to shift the conversation to his own thoughts and feelings. May we, like Jesus, make space for others to be listened into speech. Hear again how they were able to reach down within and surface the emotions and intuitions undergirding their storytelling. We heard: *“The things about Jesus of Nazareth... But we had hoped... Yes, and besides all this... Moreover, some women of our group astounded us... Some of those who were with us went to the tomb... [pause] but they did not see him.”* **With whom do you need to practice inviting deeper sharing so that you can each be listened into speech?**

**Fourth, Jesus models introducing common ground (which needs to be genuine) in order to weave his perspective into the conversation.**

We heard: *“Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”* **With whom do you need to practice interjecting your own perspective in the right timing and in ways that help establish genuine common ground?**

**Fifth, the gathered friends model engaging in ritual, which carries the power to thicken an experience.** We heard: *“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him...”* The two disciples experience a new revelation of God’s love through Jesus’ death and resurrection in that moment because their senses are opened by the blessing, breaking and sharing of bread. **With whom do you share embodied (perhaps mundane) rituals that do add thickness of meaning to your shared experiences?**

**A sixth lesson: The disciples model telling about an experience to help it stay alive.** We heard: *“Then they told what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”* **With whom might you share more of your precious, vulnerable experiences to help those memories stay alive?**

A final teaching comes from our contemporary reading for today. I was deeply affected when I came across Denise Levertov’s *“The Servant-Girl at Emmaus.”* What does listening make possible in the experience of the protagonist of the poem? By listening to her own memories, she kept them true and powerful enough to keep affecting her living. And no one could deny her the truth and power of her own memories. We heard this bit:

*“Surely that voice  
is his — the one  
who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,  
as no one ever had looked?  
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?”*

The girl had witnessed Christ light in Jesus of Nazareth – in the ways in which he connected with others during his short lifetime. That memory of Christ light burned so brightly within her that she could also witness it in the stranger the disciples welcomed into their home for a meal. **Where and when do you experience Jesus with you? And with whom will you share that palpable experience.**

I would like to close by sharing with you a poem by William Arthur Ward that I first read at the age of thirteen. In 1995, we fifth through eighth graders in my Lutheran grade school had the opportunity to purchase inspirational posters as part of a school fundraiser. I purchased a poster of Ward's poem and it has been informing my life ever since. In recent years, I framed my dog-eared beloved poster, and it now hangs in our main level restroom here at St. Croix United Church. The poem is entitled "Do You?" With eyes open or closed, I encourage you to receive Ward's poem as a note of encouragement to you as you absorb the stories of the two disciples and Jesus and the servant girl. Ward writes:

*"Do you **pause** to see the sunrise as you start each golden day?  
Do you **stop** to watch the sunset in the midst of work or play?  
Do you **listen** to others as they share their dreams with you?  
Do you **give** them inspiration for the great deeds that they would do?  
Do you **give** a cheerful greeting to the persons who are sad?  
Do you **reach** out, **smile**, and **touch** them? Do you leave them feeling glad?  
Do you **give** yourself in service? Are your motives good and true?  
When you **spend life** helping others, they will **see God's love** in you!"*

Beloved friends: Do you – recognize Christ alive in yourself and in others?

Do you – make Christ recognizable to those with whom your path intersects?

We would do well to follow the embodied examples of the two disciples and Jesus as they made their way to Emmaus, expecting to see and recognize Christ light in everyone everywhere.

We all need to know that someone sees or hears us before we will begin to trust that the person cares. So let's act out of the recognition that others need the same from our companionship. We manifest Christ light when we accompany each other.

So may we listen Christ light into shining, because Love is counting on us.  
Amen.

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Luke 24:13-35, "The Servant-Girl at Emmaus"