

“It’s Anything But Cheap”

May 4, 2014

Luke 24:13-35

*This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, WI.*

Dear Friends:

In today’s bible reading with Jesus and the two disciples, there’s a lot of talking taking place and some genuine conversation. There’s a lesson in that for us – and insight into some essential ingredients for our lives, relationships and faith development.

Have you heard the phrase: “Talk is cheap?” As an idiom the phrase applies to someone who promises you something that you do not think will come to be. Talking about something rather than actually doing it does make talk cheap. “My boss keeps saying she’ll give me a raise, but talk is cheap.” “You’ve been promising me a new dishwasher for five years now. Talk is cheap.”

There are many quips we use that give talking bad reviews. “They who think too little -- talk too much” or “A dog is smarter than some people. It wags its tail and not its tongue.” Talk, - - we surely don’t uphold it as a virtue. In some contexts, “talk is cheap” but in this bible reading Jesus shows us that talking can be one of the richest aspects of our faith and relationships with each other.

Today, there are sociologists who believe we are losing the art of conversation in American life. Eric Hoffer was social philosopher and he wrote books about conversation and the importance of talking. Ronald Regan awarded Hoffer the Presidential Medal of Freedom for literature shortly before his death in 1983. When Hoffer was five years old his mother fell down the stairs with him in her arms and she died. Two years later, at the age of seven Hoffer suddenly lost his vision. Until his eyesight inexplicably returned at age 15, he was cared for by a German immigrant named Martha. Hoffer credits her for learning the importance of talk. He writes glowingly of this nanny:

“Martha must have really loved me, because those eight years of blindness during my childhood, are in my mind, a very happy time. I remember a lot of talk and laughter. I must have talked a great deal, because Martha used to say again and again, ‘I remember you said this or you said that.’...She remembered everything I said, and all my life I have had the feeling that conversation is important and that what I said and what I thought are worth remembering. She gave me that.” (*From an article on Hoffer in 1957 article by Eugene Burdick*).

Do you know someone who has given you the feeling that conversation is important and what you say is worth remembering? I recall my mother and her sister, who would come up from Chicago to visit when I was a child. The two of them would talk for hours on end — sharing rich conversation filled with interest and love.

As I read today's Bible story from Luke, I see a wonderful conversation taking place. Two men, two of Jesus' disciples were on a long walk, seven miles to a town called Emmaus. While they walked, these two men engaged in a rich conversation.

The setting is the evening of the first Easter. Earlier that morning it was discovered that Jesus had risen from the dead. Can you imagine all the things these two men were talking about! Their lives had changed dramatically because of Jesus and of course they had many questions and feelings to share with each other.

The Bible tells us that while the two men were talking, Jesus joined them. For some unknown reason, they didn't recognize Jesus. But the two disciples welcomed Jesus into their conversation. In turn he asks some questions. The men in turn invite Jesus to stick around and later on they share a meal together, while still unaware of Jesus' true identity. But it was during conversation at the meal that they finally recognize Jesus.

As I look closely at this story of Jesus and the two disciples and pay attention to the conversation that takes place, I learn two important things from Jesus that apply to our lives.

1 Jesus was a fine conversationalist. He was always engaging people and getting them speaking about things that matter. He wanted to know about their values and their faith. Those disciples, after this encounter with Jesus on that first Easter Sunday evening said to each other: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us?" Jesus knew how to engage people in conversation and it touched them to their very heart.

Do you know any fine conversationalists? Think about the attributes they possess? People who are good at conversational know how to balance speaking and listening, interest and emotions, ideas and opinion. They know how to bring about dialog. And what most people want from conversation is dialogue and interaction, not just one way traffic. Jesus did that beautifully in this bible story today.

2 Jesus was also a remarkably active and attentive listener. Jesus was known to engage all sorts of people, asking questions of government officials, religious big-wigs, prostitutes, politicians, mothers, lawyers, fishermen, even antagonists. It seems that Jesus was interested in everyone and wanted to draw them out.

Jesus was quite unusual in that quality. While many people you and I know talk nonstop, or talk about themselves too much, Jesus always wanted to hear from the people he encountered, and to know them as fully as possible. Jesus listened -- heard their emotions and noted their faith or lack of it -- and he asked questions to further the conversation.

I wonder what affect technology is having on the presence of conversation in our lives. With email, texting, twitter and facebook -- we now communicate in bursts of abbreviated words, absent punctuation and snarky comments. With such means, communication and human interaction take on the electronic equivalents of speaking at one another. We never have to be physically present with each other to talk to each other anymore. So I wonder if these changes deter us from really get to know each other and build the skills needed for life-giving

relationships. I'm surely a consumer of these new means for communication— and it is true that some form of communication is better than none, but conversation is profoundly inhibited when it's dependent upon technology.

Jesus and those two disciples on that Easter night found their lives drawn together through conversation and also eating together. On that topic, researchers who study our western culture some time ago noted that we don't even do well eating together anymore. Restaurants are either set up to get us eating and moving quickly or they surround us with television screens and blaring speakers. In neither are we encouraged to linger and enjoy a dining and conversation experience.

The problem is that when we lose our capacity for conversation and for dining together we lose essential channels of grace and life-giving relationships. After those two disciples had eaten and enjoyed conversation with Jesus they said to each other: “didn't it warm our hearts when Jesus talked with us...?”

We can find our hearts warmed when someone listens to us – gives us the time – shows interest in us. The lesson from Jesus today shows us that through genuine conversation, channels are opened to discover the nature of God present in and through us. The human ability for meaningful exchange with each other is an abiding means of grace. The capacity to share a meal together is an important part of seeing how God works in our lives to bring joy and blessings.

Such goodness found in conversation and shared dining apply to all ages. Children need to be cradled in the grace of family structures where time spent together at a table is a classroom for faith development. Studies about teens today and what they need show consistently that young people want opportunities to talk about what matters to them. Conversations with other teens and caring adults remains high on the priority lists of most American teenagers. For all of us, conversation is an essential ingredient in reflecting on our experiences and faith and integrating them into our sense of self and God working among us.

I hope that your life is already enriched by the grace of good conversation. If so, thank God for it. Then go out and model that grace with others. If you have yet to experience this joy, reflect again on Jesus in this Bible story today. Reread Luke chapter 24 on your own. Ask God to give you the courage and the ability to be a good listener, to ask questions, to find interest in the lives and faith of others. And finally, realize how God works in your life through the people who engage you in talk -- which is anything but cheap.

*Prayer:*

*God, thank you for the stories of the Bible that show us how much you love us. Today, we see how Jesus loved to talk with people. This story of Jesus touches each of us, because, in some part of our lives, we have difficulty talking or listening or being understood. This week, God, prod us to be better listeners and to show interest in others. Where we need it God, give us the courage to speak. Thanks God, for those people who have touched our lives with good conversation because in them, we have seen you. Amen.*