

Easter evening

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Introduction

As one of the first encounters with Jesus following his resurrection, this is a story of wonder and joy. Cleopas and his friend did not immediately recognise Jesus and it is only later once he has accepted the hospitality they offer and has broken bread with them that they come to know him. It is a passage in which Jesus recalls the prophecies made throughout the history of the Jewish people and teaches the two people about how they led to the events of the day. However, before he does this, he asks them questions about what has been happening in Jerusalem and he listens to their answers.

As you read the passage, consider how it might guide us to have more healthy interaction and dialogue with one another. What does this encounter have to teach us about sharing our stories and listening to the stories of others?

Text

Luke 24:13-27

Now on that same day two 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. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?'

He asked them, 'What things?'

They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found

it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’

Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Comment

In the midst of conflict, engaging in dialogue enables participants to tell their story and to listen to the stories of others. Each participant has the experience of being empowered by having their voice heard and having the opportunity to show respect and compassion by listening thoughtfully to others. There are many courses, events and books that will provide a more detailed study on this but our reading about the encounter on the road to Emmaus gives some pointers toward creating a safe space for dialogue. This may prove to be helpful for our everyday conversations as well as for use in situations of conflict.

1. Jesus walked alongside Cleopas and his companion

Jesus shows his willingness to walk with them for a while. Whilst I would not suggest skulking up to someone with whom you are in conflict, it is productive to be willing to step into someone else’s shoes and consider what their perspective might be. Engaging in dialogue shows a desire to journey with others to a new point of respect and understanding. It is therefore important to be fully present and to expect dialogue to continue beyond one encounter.

2. Jesus used an open question, “What are you discussing?”

He doesn’t indicate that he had probably heard much of their conversation but instead invites them to share with him what they wish. He didn’t lead their answer in a particular direction and they certainly could not answer just yes or no. The types of questions we ask one another can directly affect the tone and course of a discussion. If they are open and measured, without prejudice or antagonism, it facilitates a conversation between equals who want to learn about similarities, differences and ways of moving forward.

3. When they gave a cheeky retort, Jesus did not rise to it

‘Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?’ they asked. It reads as an accusation, whether of ignorance or stupidity it is not clear. In my mind, I read, “Are you crazy? How could you possibly not know?” However, Jesus does not retaliate or react in any way to their words. Instead, he asks his question again. He does not get side-tracked or drawn into a petty squabble but retains a neutral stance by sticking to his open question. Sometimes in life when it comes to inconsequential little things, we have to be like Elsa in *Frozen* and be prepared to, “Let it go!”

4. Jesus listened without judgement

He allowed Cleopas and his companion on the journey the space and the opportunity to share their story without judgement or criticism. He honoured their story by not interrupting them or correcting their information. We do not often have the opportunity to tell our story from beginning to end. This experience is empowering and allows us to hear the content of what we are saying and the manner in which we are expressing ourselves. On occasions, saying aloud how we feel can cause us to reflect on our words or behaviours and consider modifying them.

5. Only when they had finished telling their story did Jesus respond by telling his story

Cleopas and his companion were given the space to tell their story their way. When they had finished, Jesus took this as his cue to speak. Although his first words in response may seem rude, “how foolish you are,” an analysis of the Greek can help us reach a different conclusion. The Greek word ‘*anoetoi*’ is used here, the nuance of which suggests that instead of calling them stupid, Jesus was commenting that they had come to their conclusion without applying reason. They had been thoughtless in their application of the Scriptures and had demonstrated a lack of faith in the prophecies written there. From this point, they walked alongside him as he patiently taught them his version of events and they listened. Each party had an opportunity to speak and to be heard, which showed that all were valued. In dialogue, as in the rest of life, we all seek reassurance that we matter.

6. They journeyed together

Having met on the Road to Emmaus, I imagine that they had travelled a significant way together as they spoke and listened to each other. They were no longer in the same place they had begun. Not only had they travelled a fair distance on foot, they had also journeyed far in their understanding. Engaging in dialogue had helped them to set their stories within a wider context and to come to a greater understanding of themselves and others.

Dialogue begins when we are willing to step out of our comfort zones, listen compassionately, tell our stories faithfully, and share respect. As we travel through life, we will encounter many people whose lived experience differs greatly from our own. We should approach one another with respect and with hope that we can learn to appreciate our differences. However, there may be times when those differences will be too great for us to find common ground no matter how hard we try. We may find new ways to move forward whether together or apart. We have to decide whether it is worth taking the risk of disappointment or hurt to achieve a safe place to share our stories and potentially, a more positive journey onward.

Jesus travelled with Cleopas and his companion along the road to Emmaus and on their faith journeys. No-one was left untouched by this encounter, as their lives were transformed through dialogue.

Response

- Find a quiet spot where you can sit and appreciate your surroundings. Listen to the birds singing their stories. Listen to the vehicles giving voice to their lives.

Listen to the breeze rustling the leaves as they dance. Notice how difficult it can be to block out the noise of your own thoughts.

- Be challenged when you ask someone, “how was your day?” to follow up with a question that explores why it was a good/bad day for them. Really listen to their answer.

- Be present. Put down your mobile phone when you are having a meal and talk to your companions. Watch a film or a television programme from beginning to end without touching your mobile phone, tablet or laptop.

Prayer

Triune God,
you call us into relationship
but you never told us how hard it could be.
Guide us to be connectors in our fractured communities.
Provide us with the words to tell our stories
and the patience to listen to the stories of others.
Prepare the way for bridges to be built, as we graft together.
Help us to let the little things go,
as we focus on loving, forgiving, inviting and accepting.
Walk with us, Lord Jesus.

Amen.