

## CONVERSATIONS ON THE ROAD

Luke 24:13-35

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Last week Mary Brodbeck came to choose the visual art winners for this year's art festival. I love hearing the jurors' thoughts about the art. Mary told me that she wasn't necessarily looking for art that was technically polished. She was looking for work with heart, something in the art that revealed the artist's feeling. She didn't say it like this, but I got the impression that art for her was a conversation between artist and art lover. You may not realize it at the time but art that moves us makes "the heart burn within," something like what the disciples on the way to Emmaus felt in their conversation with Jesus.

I've been thinking this past week about conversations that stirred me over the years of my faith journey, things that made my heart sing. Fifty years ago, I had a conversation with my Sunday School teacher, Dr. Baker. He loved talking about the Bible and about his faith that centered around a personal relationship with Jesus. Even before Dr. Baker, Bible stories resonated with me, but he encouraged me to begin leading discussions with other young people on the Bible. Once a week for the next three years, we studied the Bible, and each week my heart burned within. But it was never about me, the teacher. It was always about the conversation. It was like Jesus was talking to us through the voices in the room. I still feel like that today.

Wednesday morning, we gather, this year on zoom, to talk about scripture. Maybe it doesn't happen every week, but most weeks we're talking back and forth, not even recognizing the burning in our hearts until someone says something that's like Jesus breaking the bread and we know that Jesus was in the room the whole time.

I'm remembering conversations from my time in Perico, Cuba, talking with people whose lives were so different from my own. It was as if Jesus were saying to me: "This is what hospitality looks like." Faithfulness isn't about how much you have or how articulate you may be. As followers of Jesus we have companions from all over the world, some who find contentment not in the quantity of things, but in the quality of love. Many of our folks who went to Cuba will recall how their hearts burned within them during their time there.

I recall conversations with those who are grieving, how they find comfort in the stories about their loved one. As those stories come out in the memorial service, you can see the eyes light up and the love underneath all that sorrow. In some ways, the funeral is a "breaking of bread" that recalls the love of God from times past for the present time.

These conversations happen not just in times of grief, but in other struggles as well. As we become aware of injustices in which we unwittingly participate. Some of us have talked about systemic racism. We've become more aware of our privilege, the advantages that we have over others who lacked the support and resources that we grew up with. We

need more conversation partners: people of color, people in poverty, people with different gender identities and sexual orientations, people who are different than us. These are the conversations that make our hearts burn within us.

I've been thinking about our upcoming listening project and about our past efforts to hear what people connected to the congregation are thinking about their faith. We've learned so much about what God might be saying us about how we worship, about the concerns we have for the communities in which we live, and about who we welcome among us – one person at a time.

I'm remembering conversations during this pandemic about slowing down, about what really matters, and about we stay connected as a community. Many of you will remember conversations from previous projects. Maybe you recall how your heart burned within you. I'm not suggesting that past or future listeners are just like Jesus, but that is what we are trying to do on our roads to Emmaus – to be like Jesus to one another, to hear the voice of Jesus through one another.

If you're not sure that you're on the list to be listened to or just want to know more, contact one of the pastors or Mary Anderson. You don't have to be a member, just someone on the road looking for a conversation.

We are on our way to Emmaus and Jesus is talking to us and half the time we don't even know it. Walking, walking, walking all the time, struggling with some crisis, thinking that God has abandoned us. But Jesus is talking to us on the road.

But here we are in Emmaus, gathered here together, about to break bread together. We gather around a table where we remember Jesus. Here, is where you recall the times when your heart burned within you. Here is where you recognize the Jesus who has been walking with you on the road, who has been talking with you on the road. What's he been saying? As we break bread, what word does he have for you? Amen