

**Guess Who's Coming for Dinner**  
**Luke 24:13-35**  
**Second Baptist Church, Memphis**  
**February 3, 2008**  
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A new pastor moved into town and went out one day to visit his parishioners. All went well until he came to one house. It was obvious that someone was home, but no one came to the door even after he had knocked several times.

Finally, he took out his card, wrote on the back "Revelation 3:20" and stuck it in the door. The next day after service, as he was counting the offering, he found his card in the collection plate. Below his message was a notation "Genesis 3:10."

Upon opening his Bible to the passage, his face turned red, and he let out a roar of laughter.

Revelation 3:20 reads: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with me.*

Genesis 3:10 reads: *And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked.*

For the month of February we are focusing together on this theme of Sharing the Bread of Life—our calling to hospitality—our calling to serve as hosts, welcoming the stranger, the outsider, the newcomer, into our fellowship and into the kingdom of God.

It's more than just recommitting ourselves to going out on Monday nights for visitation—knocking on doors.

Instead of adding another "program" to our evangelism repertoire, what I hope we will do this month is renew our understanding of evangelism and get in our minds the image of hospitality as a guide for us.

Let's start with a dollar figure: \$492. This is the per capita amount Americans spend each year on fast food. Per capita. A family of four spends \$1,968 a year on fast food. Italians, in contrast, only spend \$8.61 per person.

In 1970, Americans spent about \$6 billion on fast food. In 2004 we spent \$148.6 billion on fast food. Americans now spend more money on fast food than we do on higher education, computers, or new cars.

We spend more on fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos and recorded music – combined.

*[Eric Schlosser, "Fast-Food Nation," Rolling Stone, September 3, 1998, 61 and an August 29, 2007 article on Suite101.com]*

I'd like to recommend that you enjoy some slow food every now and then. Meals are important. Jesus still visits us at mealtime, often through the friends, family and strangers we entertain there.

Have you seen this little poem in someone's kitchen, shellacked on a decorative piece of wood? (Your grandmother may have a copy hanging in her house.). *Christ is the Head of this house, The unseen Guest at every meal, The silent Listener in every*

*conversation. Or this one? O Lord, warm this kitchen with thy love, and light it with thy peace, Amen.*

There's something special about sharing a meal together at the table.

Jesus loved to sit at the table and share a meal with other people. He loved to eat and drink with all kinds of people. And the truth is that Christ can be found today in the ones we break bread with. The dinner table is the Lord's everyday cathedral.

It was Sunday, three days after Jesus was killed and buried, and two of the disciples weren't convinced by what they'd heard from the women that Jesus' tomb was empty—the stone rolled away, so they were going to get out of town for awhile.

They went to Emmaus. I don't know why they went there. As Frederick Buechner once memorably wrote, maybe the only reason they went there is because it was about seven miles away from a situation which had become unbearable.

As they walked, they were so engrossed in their conversation that they hardly noticed the traveler who came up to them.

When Jesus asked them what they were talking about they stopped in their tracks. How could somebody that close to Jerusalem not know what had just happened to Jesus?

So, they gave him an update of what had happened.

I wonder if you asked yourself this question as this story was read earlier. Why didn't these two disciples recognize Jesus?

I'm not sure. But perhaps their grief and disappointment made them oblivious to what was going on around them.

Or maybe it was because Jesus' body after the resurrection was different in some ways from his body before.

Some have said the unbelief formed a barrier.

After these two disciples told their story, Jesus took over. And starting with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in the scriptures about himself.

At this point, they arrived at their destination, Emmaus, so the two disciples invited this stranger to eat with them. The three of them sat down at a table, maybe like this one over here. As they sat around the table, Jesus took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to them.

Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And then he disappeared from their sight. No sooner did they know who he was than he vanished from their sight. As much as they would have given to have him stay there a minute or two more, they could not make him stay.

Frederick Buechner says they couldn't nail him down. And that is how it always is with Jesus. We can never nail him down, not even if the nails we use are real ones and the thing we nail him to is a cross. He comes to us out of nowhere, and our lives are never the same because we recognized him. Or because we did not.

Something happened around that table that caused the disciples to suddenly recognize their friend and their Lord. Jesus didn't

do anything special-- it was just the common practice of blessing and breaking the bread. Jesus joined the disciples for a meal as their companion—which means literally “one with bread.”

The simple act of sitting down around a table is something a lot of people don't find particularly important - but for Christians, the shared meal is a vital aspect of spiritual life.

*The Scriptures speak of three kinds of table fellowship that Jesus keeps with his own: daily fellowship at table, the table fellowship of the Lord's Supper, and the final table fellowship in the kingdom of God. But in all three, the one thing that counts is that “their eyes were opened, and they knew him” [Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 66]*

When we welcome someone into our lives, when we share bread with someone, we always have an unexpected guest—Jesus himself.

*Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also, Christ ... is truly hidden. [C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis: Readings for Meditation and Reflection (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 38.]*

The question, *Who's coming for dinner?* takes on a whole new meaning. What would it change to get in your mind that in some sense it is Christ whom you welcome, with whom you share a meal.

There is a children's movie called *Whistle Down the Wind* starring Hayley Mills as a young girl who, along with two friends, is playing in a country barn. While playing, they stumble across a vagrant sleeping in the straw. *Who are you?* Mills says to him.

The vagrant jerks awake and, seeing the children, mutters, *Jesus Christ*. What he meant as an expletive, the children took literally. They actually believed that this man was Jesus Christ.

So for the rest of the movie, they treated this vagrant with awe, respect, and love.

They brought him food and blankets.

They sat and talked with him.

They told him about their lives.

And over time, their tenderness transformed this escaped convict who had never before been shown such love and mercy.

*[related by Philip Yancey in The Jesus I Never Knew]*

The person who wrote this story intended it as an allegory of what might happen if all of us took literally Jesus' words about his presence in the stranger, in other people.

When we welcome them, we welcome Jesus.

When we serve them, we serve Jesus.

When we invite them over for dinner, we invite Jesus.

A rich American once visited Mother Theresa, and this American could not understand Mother Theresa's fierce commitment to the dregs of humanity there in Calcutta.

Mother Theresa told him, *We are a contemplative order. First we meditate on Jesus, and then we go out and look for him in disguise.*

When I first started preaching, when I was about 22, I told this story. It seems not quite sophisticated enough to me now, but I tell it again anyway.

The letter in the mailbox said:

*Dear Ruth,  
I'm going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon, and I'd like to stop by for a visit.  
Love always,  
Jesus*

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. *I don't have anything to offer.* With that thought, Ruth remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. *Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer.*

*I'll have to run down to the store and buy something for dinner.* She reached for her purse and counted out its contents. Five dollars and forty cents.

*Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least.* She threw on her coat and hurried out the door. A loaf of French bread, a half-pound of sliced turkey, and a carton of milk. . . leaving Ruth with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday.

Nonetheless, she felt good as she headed home, her meager offerings tucked under her arm.

*Hey lady, can you help us lady?* Ruth had been so absorbed in her dinner plans, she hadn't even noticed two figures huddled in the alleyway. A man and a woman, both of them dressed in little more than rags. *Look lady, I ain't got a job, ya know, and my wife and I have been living out here on the street, and, well, now it's getting kinda cold and we're getting kinda hungry and, well, if you could help us, lady, we'd really appreciate it.*

Ruth looked at them both. They were dirty, they smelled bad, and, frankly, she was certain they could get some kind of job if they really wanted to.

*Sir, I'd like to help you, but I'm a poor woman myself. All I have here is a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight, and I was planning on serving that to him.*

*Yeah, well, OK lady. Thanks anyway.* The man put his arms around the woman's shoulders, turned, and headed back into the alley. As she watched them leave, Ruth felt a familiar twinge in her heart.

*Sir, wait!* The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them. *Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure something else out to serve my guest.*

She handed the man the grocery bag. *Thank you lady. Thank you very much.* Ruth could see that the lady was shivering.

*You know, I've got another coat at home. Here, why don't you take this one.* Ruth unbuttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoulders. Then, smiling, she turned and walked

back to the street-- without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest.

Ruth was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit, and she didn't have anything to offer him. She fumbled through her purse for the door key. But as she did, she noticed another envelope in her mailbox.

*That's odd, she thought. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day.* She took the envelope out of the box and opened it.

*Dear Ruth,*

*It was so good to see you again. Thank you for the lovely meal, and thank you, too, for the beautiful coat.*

*Love always,*

*Jesus*

Guess who's coming for dinner.