

Luke 24:13-35

“That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up 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 this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even 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 him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, 34 who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

Has anyone ever heard the story “Stone Soup” or “Nail Soup?”

This story is an old folk-tale, which has been told and re-told with slightly different details in dozens of countries and cultures. It's a fable that focuses on a weary traveler who arrived at a rather small and noticeably poor village with nothing. No food, no money, nothing. All he had was a baseball size stone or nail which-ever version you prefer. The traveler was met with suspicion and unfriendliness everywhere he went. No doors were opened to them. No invitations of hospitality were ever extended.

The traveler then made his way to the center of the village where he built a fire under a large cauldron which was located there. He filled the cauldron with water and lit the fire and waited. One by one villager's came and watched some stood while others sat around the pot wondering what this man was doing. Finally someone asked him what he was doing.

The traveler explained he was making stone soup/nail soup. He told them it is the best tasting soup they have ever had. Someone explained it couldn't be that good because it did not have anything in it except a stone/nail. They said everyone knows great soup has potatoes in it. Someone called out I have some potatoes I'll go get them. Then another said you need

carrots to make a proper soup, to which they then ran home and brought back what carrots they had. Another villager suggested onions. Another villager said they had a big beef bone which would add more flavor to the mixture. As more villagers approached and more ingredients were suggested, the cauldron of “stone soup” or “nail soup” gradually took on the identity of a rich, thick stew — a stew capable of feeding all of those who contributed to its creation and then some. At the end of the story, all of the villagers and the traveler sat together on the commons and enjoy an unexpected and hearty meal together.

“Stone/Nail Soup” is not a story about how to get a “free lunch.” This is a story about the transforming power of hospitality, but reverse hospitality. See it's the weary traveler with empty hands who invited the first villager to join him. It was the stranger who offered hospitality to the inhospitable hosts. “Stone/Nail soup” is the story of a gift of community to a village that was too scared and set in their ways to experience community.

In the first century, Roman culture dictated the customs and decorum of hospitality. Roman banquets, also known as “*symposia*” (definitely NOT the dull lectures we think of when we hear this word symposium) were scenes of

excessive excess, the very definition of “mass consumption.” “*Symposia's*” featured gluttonous amounts of food, course after course of rich delicacies, often lasting for ten hours or more. Flamingo tongues and mullet livers were a few of the delicacies favored by Marcus Gavius Apicius, a noted Roman gourmet who lived at the same time as Jesus.

What is more, the food was just the forerunner for the tidal waves of wine and the “other” entertainment that would follow. The saddest feature of these feasts was the theology behind it. Romans hoped that all of this partying would detour any meddling or punishment that their bored and changeable gods might want to pour down upon the pathetic, mortal human population. The Romans used “bread and circuses” not just to keep the general population happy, but also to keep their unpredictable gods at a distance.

In first century Jewish households dining was just a bit different. Although there were economic differences between the peasant population and the educated elite, the over-arching mandates of the Torah strengthened those differences. The members of the Sanhedrin and the Pharisaic power structure might have had more to spend on what they served, but they

maintained the basics of Jewish faith that were practiced daily in every Jewish household. Unlike the Romans, the feast days within Judaism did not exist to keep God away, but to invite God's presence.

Whether it was a formal "feast day" or the weekly "*Shabbat*," the meal that was shared was intended to invite God's presence as well as the presence of other members of the community. It was the presence of the divine that made these meals sacred and special. With the structures and limits of kosher laws, dining together in a first century Jewish community was always oriented towards the Torah, towards God's special presence at their table, but that also meant that many others would be excluded.

But Jesus broke all these dining rules. Jesus introduced a whole new set of table manners. He ate on fasting days; He ate with tax collectors; He called Zacchaeus out of a tree and invited himself to his home for dinner; He ate at wedding feasts and at sophisticated Pharisaic gatherings; He sipped water at a well out of the bucket of a woman of highly questionable reputation.

With no home of his own, Jesus ate as a guest in someone's home every night of His missionary life. But most "rule-breaking" of all was this: wherever Jesus dined He was the guest...yet He always took on the role of the host.

When Jesus showed up for dinner, the menu changed. Instead of simply good food, those around a table that had invited Jesus received the gift of God's presence and the super-food of faith. It's a gift that still continues at every faithful meal we sit down to today.

In this morning's passage Cleopas and his companion (whom many scholars think may have been his wife Mary, one of the Mary's who stayed with Jesus during his crucifixion) walked along the road to their home village of Emmaus. They were preoccupied thinking about all the dreadful events that had happened in Jerusalem: the crucifixion of their teacher Jesus, the strange disappearance of His body from his tomb.

Suddenly, they are joined by a stranger who seems to have no knowledge of all these tragedies. For Cleopas, it is the equivalent of someone asking you on September 12, 2001 — "What's wrong?" or "Why is everyone in such an uproar?"

EVERYTHING is wrong! Cleopas' whole world has exploded. His whole life as he knew it had changed and this guy is clueless. He cannot believe how clueless this stranger is.

Yet after Cleopas offers his version of the Jerusalem story — the trial, the torture, the crucifixion, the death, the strangely empty tomb — his new companion is surprised only by Cleopas' ignorance of his own family history as he says in verse 25, *“Oh how foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared.”*

Those words warmed the hearts of these Emmaus travelers so much that when their companion acted as though he might head out in another direction, they invited him to stay with them, to join them for a meal, and even overnight. “Stay with us,” they implored.

Jesus accompanied these two disciples, this couple, to their family home in Emmaus and patiently waited for the evening meal. Finally they sat together at table. Then this invited guest stepped over the bounds. Instead of being a good guest and waiting for his “host” to offer the blessing over the

bread and food, this guest grasped the bread and lifted it up and offered the traditional Jewish blessing, “*Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the land.*”

Michael Williams asks us about Thomas' reaction when he saw Jesus' wounds when he said, “*My Lord and my God.*” “Do you say ‘My Lord and my God?’ When you see Christ's wounds wherever they appear in your world do you say ‘*My Lord and my God?*’” So...what IS our reaction and response?

In the Emmaus Road story, when the two disciples, or what we suspect was a couple Cleopas and Mary, saw His wounds, suddenly this family knew who was at their table. “*My Lord and My God.*” When Jesus once again breached “table etiquette” and grasped the bread and blessed it, He was revealed to Cleopas and his family as the risen Christ. Jesus assumed the place of head of the table.

At every meal Jesus ate meals with outcasts, outliers, friends, strangers, and officials Jesus was both guest and host. Jesus' presence turned every table-scape into an altar.

There was always a mystery food on the table wherever Jesus ate: the food of His presence. Every table where Jesus ate was a pot luck meal: but the biggest pot on the table was the gift of His presence, the meal of the very revelation of God.

We commonly imagine the “Last Supper” Jesus presided over to be a Passover Seder, but the fact is that when Jesus walked the earth the Temple was still offering the Passover sacrifices for the Jewish faithful. There was no “Seder supper” for these Temple-era Jews. The “Passover” meal was a feast of the Paschal lamb that had been sacrificed at the Temple — not some memorial meal with bitter herbs, eggs, and matza. It was not until the Temple was destroyed that the home table became the new altar for observant Jews — a way to commemorate the history of Jewish history.

For those who follow Jesus, a new tradition was launched in the Upper Room in Jerusalem with the Last Supper. The unleavened bread and the cup of wine offered to his closest disciples marked the first “Passover” of a new era. This was an invitation to a meal where the Lord would always be present, where a gift of hospitality, the offering of food and drink in the name of *Jesu Christos*, who would transform whatever the meal, whatever time of

year, into a banquet. When Jesus is at table, the best thing on the table is not something you can eat but the presence of God. The very presence of Jesus turns a simple meal into a sumptuous feast.

As Jesus walked unrecognized along the Emmaus Road with his two disciples, He tutored them, He mentored them, He showcased for them personally the story of God throughout the Scriptures. But not until He was invited to dinner and ate with them did they finally recognize Him. As any good guest, Jesus would have waited for His hosts to prepare the food and put it on the table. Yet against the good table manners of any good guest, once they are all seated Jesus takes it upon himself to grasp the bread. Remember, this was not the Sabbath, so it was ordinary, everyday bread, but still worthy of blessing. Jesus assumes to himself the privilege of offering the table blessing for the meal. In doing this one act, Jesus immediately transformed Himself from the late invited “guest” into the “host-in-charge.”

As Jesus reached out and took that daily bread from the plate to break it, His hands would have been exposed and revealed hands tattooed by the open wounds of his crucifixion, yet familiar and known to Cleopas and all His other disciples. We all know the hands of our loved ones. We don't

know their fingerprints but we know their fingers, the tributaries of the veins that trace their skin, the curvature of each digit, the blemishes, scars, and spots that mark the terrain of their hand. When Jesus reached out and picked up that loaf of bread, His hands, His scars or His wounds, revealed who He was to that household of uncomprehending followers. Jesus didn't just bless the bread. Jesus blessed those present with the recognition of God's presence.

It is in sharing a meal where Jesus is present that Jesus once again becomes known to those who would follow Him. It's as He becomes the head of the table that the bread of life is revealed in all its resurrected presence and power. Where is Jesus at your table? Is he present? Is he the life of your table?

Most of us have heard about the Jewish "coming of age" ritual as a bar or bat mitzvah. But it is improper to talk about "having" a bar or bat mitzvah; because you don't "have a bar mitzvah." You become bar mitzvah. You become bat mitzvah. "Mitzvah" means commandment, or blessing. "Bar" means "son of." "Bat" means "daughter of." So to be "bar mitzvah" means to become a "son of the commandment" or "son of the blessing."

To be “bat mitzvah” means to become a “daughter of the commandment” or “daughter of the blessing.” A Jew is bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah. A Christian on the other hand is bar messiah or bat messiah. I am bar messiah; Son of the Risen and Rising Lord; Son of the Blessing.

The Table is our bar messiah, or our bat messiah ritual. The table is where we discover who we are, son/daughter of the blessing, the Bread of Life, the Cup of Salvation. Have you found your Table? Have you invited Jesus to be head of your Table? Have you allowed Jesus to be the life of your Table? Who's really in charge at your table?