

Luke 24:13-35 – Open to others: Hospitality and Invitation

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Imagine for a moment that you and a friend were walking home one day after receiving some sad and distressing news. As you walk along pondering this news and trying to understand what it all means a stranger draws alongside you and strikes up a conversation with you. Hearing your news he begins to talk to you about the Bible and how it relates to the situation you are facing. You are approaching your front door. What do you do? Do you ...

- a) Ask the stranger to come in for a meal and stay the night with you so that you can continue the conversation.
- b) Make your quick excuses, go inside and shut the door with a great sigh of relief.

That's the situation we read about in the well-known passage in Luke 24 about the two people travelling on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

In all probability these two travellers were a married couple – rather than two men as is often, strangely, assumed (and illustrated in the painting by Caravaggio). They were perplexed and distressed about the things that had been going on in Jerusalem over the past few days. Jesus, the one whom they had believed to be the Messiah and in whom they had placed all their hopes, had been crucified by the Romans. Once the Romans had ensured that he was dead they had released his body to be buried in a secure tomb. Now his body had gone missing and rumours were circulating that he had been seen alive. They could not understand what was going on. What did it all mean?

The stranger who drew alongside them as they walked heard their conversations with each other. Then he, the stranger, seems to take control of the conversation. He begins to expound the Scriptures to them, showing that the Messiah *had* to suffer, die and rise again if he was to fulfil God's purpose of establishing his kingdom.

At last they came to their home. What did they do? They invited the stranger in to eat a meal with them and to stay the night in their home.

And then the strangest thing happens. When they have set their meagre provisions on the table and sat down the stranger took on the role of the host and treated *them* as guests. He gave thanks to God and broke their bread before giving it to them.

Then their eyes were opened and they understand at last all that has happened. Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. He is the one whom they had invited in to eat with them and stay with them. He is the one who opened the Scriptures to them and enabled them at last to understand that his death and resurrection fulfilled the purposes of God and that it is by his death and resurrection that he has opened wide the doors into his kingdom.

We are going to leave our couple there as the stranger disappears and they rush back to Jerusalem to tell others of what they have seen and heard.

But note how this story mirrors and reverses that of Genesis chapter three. There the man and the woman, whose eyes have been opened to their own shame, hide from God in their Garden home and when discovered are excluded from his presence. Here the man and the woman have their eyes open to the glorious and gracious purposes of God in Christ and know that the living God is with them in the person of the risen Christ. Through opening their home and inviting a stranger in they have come to understand the open arms of God in Jesus Christ. He is the one who sets the feast and invites them to taste the riches of his grace.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that by showing hospitality to strangers, some have entertained angels without knowing it. Yes, and some have entertained Christ.

Do we have open hearts and open homes for others, ready to welcome them in that they might find Christ present with us? Are we an open church, ready to receive all who will come? We need to be an open and welcoming people because that is the character of the God we have come to know, love and serve in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus once told a story in which he said that the kingdom of heaven is like a great wedding banquet. The lord of the banquet told his servants to go out and invite all they could find to come in because he wanted his banquet to be full. "Go out", he said, "and compel them to come in."

Jesus is the Lord of the feast and his arms are open to all. He is the one who calls us to invite and even urge people of all sorts to come in. We have a welcoming God who calls us to be a welcoming people; a people with hearts open to him and to others no matter what their background or level of understanding.

This is beautifully and movingly expressed in a song by Stuart Townend, of which the chorus is:

*Come to the feast,
There is room at the table.
Come let us meet in this place
With the King of all kindness
Who welcomes us in
With the wonder of love,
And the power of grace,
The wonder of the love,
And the power of grace.*

The good news of God's love, kindness and generosity is good news for all. Jesus was ready to receive all who would come to him when he was ministering on earth and he is ready still to receive all through the embrace of his people. And he urges us to invite people – people of all sorts and backgrounds – to come in; to come and discover the riches of God's grace in Christ.

Charles Wesley expressed this longing in these wonderful words concerning the Lord Jesus:

O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace.
The arms of love that welcome me
Would all the world embrace.

How could you invite others to come and learn of Christ? Invite them into your homes for a cup of tea and a chat or for a meal and conversation. You too may discover that Christ is there as the Lord of the feast. Invite them to Alpha or to Open Church or to come with you on a Sunday that they might discover the wonder of Christ's love and the power of his grace.

Christ, the Lord of the feast, goes before us calling others to come in. He calls us to be open to him and then to be open to all whom he may draw to himself. Are we ready for what Christ may do through us?

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