

“Take the Time to Eat with Him”

Luke 24:13-35

Despite the recent history of food preparation, some of us Fathers really appreciate a mom or wife who still knows how to cook a good, old fashioned meal. A little history on this Father's Day. Back in 1879, Heinz produced the first bottle of catsup and marketed it with an ad that said: "For the blessed relief of mother and other women of the household." In 1953, just a year before the Golden Arches went up; a Swanson food dietician named Betty Cronin created the "TV dinner". This was at a time when meals took on average two hours to prepare. TV dinners hit the shelves with the promise of providing relief to mothers "burdened with baby-boom offspring." What once took two hours now has been "shrink-wrapped to a tidy 15 minutes."

Today in the age of microwaves and fast-food, the issue is no longer how long it takes to prepare a meal, but whether or not we will even have a sit down around the table family meal at all. As we slowly but surely eliminate the family meal, what else are we eliminating?

A stranger suddenly appears on the road beside us and he asks to hear our story. This stranger doesn't claim to be God. He doesn't dazzle us with his charisma. We hardly notice him. He just asks to listen to our story. "What has been happening with you?" He walks beside us and he listens. And we pour out our heart and soul.

As we walk with our eyes fixed on the ground in front of us, we tell this stranger about what has been happening to us. We are feeling really guilty. Our teenager's grades have dropped and we don't understand why. We discovered our spouse is having an affair and we're wondering, "What's wrong with me?" We have not been able to say, "I love you" to our

brother for years even though that is what we really want to say. We have let our best friend down; we stood by and even denied we knew him, while his enemies nailed him to a cross.

We are feeling really guilty. As this stranger walks beside us, he listens to our story as we pour out our heart and soul. We are so broken inside that we can only see the dirt in front of us; we can only see our guilt and our sin. We tell him our story of dying inside; our story of crucifixion and death.

The stranger listens to us patiently. Then he asks us a question. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

Yes! "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Yes, it was necessary.

We do not see a, Joel Osteen, charismatic, magnetic, and persuasive. We do not see the glorious appearance of the Virgin Mary in a grill cheese sandwich. Rather, we see a human being, like you and me, beaten down, tears in his eyes, bleeding from the physical abuse, dying on an ugly wooden cross.

His best friends denied they knew him, one betrayed him, and he cries out in pain, "My God, my God, why have even you forsaken me?" He is lonely and afraid. He dies. And we die with him.

Three days later the stranger asks us, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Yes! Somehow we know the answer is "Yes!" But we still don't understand why the suffering is necessary in order to get to the glory. We still think we can get to the glory by ourselves. We still think we find and see Jesus on our own. We still think we can make it through this life on our own. We still think we can walk this road by

ourselves. We still think we can make it through the pain and the denial and the divorces and the suicides on our own. We still think we are in control. We still think Jesus is dead and we are on our own. We still cannot see Jesus.

Finally, we decide to go home. We draw near to the village that we call home. It's been a long walk and yet the stranger seems to want to go on. He wants to keep walking. Our feet hurt. Our stomachs are empty. We feel emotionally and physically drained from the confessing of our pain; from the telling of our story. We wish this stranger would stay with us awhile longer. It has felt good to have someone walk with us and listen to us. It's getting dark. Maybe, he would spend the night as our guest.

"Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with us. Just a stranger. Just a man who had walked with us and listened to us. A man who found us.

"When he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them."

Finally, we raised our eyes from the ground we had been staring at all day. Finally, we are raised up from the death, the guilt, and the pain we had been sharing as this stranger had walked along the road with us. He had listened to our stories of resentment, guilt, and denial and he still came with us into our house. He came to us on the road of pain. With all of our searching and our desire to see Jesus, he decides when to come into our home and into our heart. He decided to adopt Amanda into His family in holy baptism this night. Jesus sits down with us at the table, takes the bread, blesses and breaks it and gives it to us.

He has known our pain and has died for us. Now he knows the glory of the resurrection and gives it to us. Finally, we raise our eyes from the ground we've been staring at and our eyes are opened. We see Jesus. And just as quickly he vanishes from our sight.

We no longer see Jesus but our hearts burn within us, knowing Christ suffered as we suffer, and that he entered into his glory giving us the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. When we receive these gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, our hearts burn within us as we begin life anew.

Now we can forgive as we have been forgiven. Our teenagers, our spouses, our employers, our parents; we can even forgive ourselves. We can love ourselves. We become empowered and called to go and listen to other people's stories and pain as Jesus has listened to our story and pain on the road home. We become the stranger on the road who listens and who makes Jesus known in the breaking of the bread.

Welcome the stranger who walks with you and listens. See Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Then go and be the stranger for one another. Listen to one another. Break the bread for one another. When Jesus decides to come to you, probably when you least expect him, open your eyes long enough to see him. Take the time to eat with him.

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus loved to eat and drink with his family and friends. He enjoyed the wedding feast at Cana. He fed 5,000. He ate with tax collectors like Zaccheus and other sinners. He sat at the table regularly with his disciples.

Once, he was asked by the Pharisees why his disciples were eating and drinking, and not fasting and praying like the followers of John the Baptist. Jesus answered, "You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them."

He spent his final hours eating with his disciples, the Last Supper.

Like the first disciples, we can eat and drink with joy because our bridegroom is with us. The resurrected Lord offers us his peace and guidance if we will only acknowledge his presence. The challenge for us is to slow down enough to make a connection with Christ and with one another.

Will we follow Jesus' example to spend some time walking this summer to care for our physical being? Will we follow Jesus' example to spend time talking and listening to care for our emotional well-being? Will we follow Jesus' example to break bread together to care for our spiritual well-being? Do we have that kind of balance in our life?

Will it be fast food or slow food with Jesus as our guest?

We miss a lot when we skip supper, whether it is here at the Lord's table, or in our homes at the Lord's table. When we miss a meal with our companions, our family and friends, we also miss the one who brings the bread, our resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This summer follow the road to Emmaus. Invite Jesus to walk with you and live as a new creation in Christ.

May the peace of God . . .