

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: The Risen Jesus

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Text: Luke 24:13-35

Mane nobiscum Domine, quoniam advesperascit. For centuries these words were spoken by faithful monks as the sun set on another day of worship, prayer, and mundane duties. At the end of each and every day they raised to God their twilight plea: *Stay with us Lord, for the evening falls.*ⁱ A 19th century hymn lifts to God the same prayer:

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;

*The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!*ⁱⁱ

Stay with us, abide with us, be near to us, Lord – these are the evening prayers of the faithful, first uttered in childhood at bedsides the world over:

Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep...

Our prayer is that as the light fades and the darkness grows and weariness overtakes us and we are most vulnerable in sleep the Lord would be near to us to guard us, watch over us, care for us, keep us. *Mane nobiscum domine.* These reverent words are rooted in the words spoken by those two disciples who walked with Jesus on the Emmaus Road that Easter day as they came near their village at sunset – *Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.*

When they first met on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus they were strangers –

two disciples grieving the loss of their hopes and dreams in the crucifixion of the prophet they hoped might be the messiah,

and the messiah in whom their hopes and dreams had been vested, two followers close enough to the inner circle of the twelve to know of the report of the women at the empty tomb that morning

and the one who had left the tomb empty, two men, or perhaps a man and a woman, caught up in the tragic events of the last three days

and the victim of those events who seemed to know nothing about what had happened.

Strangers they were, one to another, for the disciples did not recognize Jesus as they walked and talked with him along that seven mile stretch of road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. It was more than grief that blinded them to the identity of the risen Jesus; the same savior was not recognized by Mary until he pronounced her name at the tomb, and he would not be recognized by these disciples until they sat at table with him in their own home. Their eyes were blind to his identity until he took bread and blessed and broke it with them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. *Mane nobiscum domine – Stay with us, Lord.* But he vanished from their sight.

Not only to faithful saints but also to doubting disciples does the risen Christ appear, not only to Mary at the tomb but also to disappointed disciples on the Emmaus Road – those who had stopped believing, those who had hoped Jesus might be the messiah but found their hopes dashed, those who found resurrection words too good to believe, those whom he called foolish and slow of heart, those perhaps like us. These images of *road* and *table* are significant in the story of our faith – symbolic of that journey of faith upon which we all travel and that table at which we are invited to sit with the risen Lord and know his presence with us. Even with slow disciples like us, Jesus is willingly, lovingly, faithfully present, walking with us on our journey through life, opening to us new understandings of this world in which we live, revealing God’s purpose for us in life and God’s promises for us in death.

Each week in our Prayer for Illumination we affirm Christ’s presence in our midst when we ask for the Holy Spirit to inspire our hearing of the words we call Scripture. At this holy table we recall his promise to be with us to the end of the age. We experience his presence each time we find the words of Scripture connecting with our lives in surprising ways – sometimes opening our eyes, sometimes comforting our troubled souls, sometimes upsetting our comfortable way of life, sometimes stomping all over our toes. Each week the question that hangs in the air is the question my dad claimed was at the heart of worship: what is God saying to us this day? It may not be the same message for each of us, for we are in different places on any given day, on different journeys, at different points in our lives and faith – some firmly grounded, some questioning, some deeply disappointed

like those disciples on the Emmaus Road. Christ comes to us where we are, and walks life's road with us day after day. Often we don't recognize him in our midst until after the fact. We call it coincidence or luck, but when we recognize Jesus in our midst we know that coincidence is God's way of working anonymously and luck bears the fingerprints of the hands of God. Where then do we find the risen Jesus?

In her book *Searching for Sunday*, Rachel Held Evans suggests that millennials are deeply engaged in that search. She writes:

Millennials aren't looking for a hipper Christianity. We're looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity. Like every generation before ours and every generation after, we're looking for Jesus – the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places he's always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these. No coffee shops or fog machines required.ⁱⁱⁱ

Her words echo that of this Emmaus Road encounter. Jesus is found not just in some holy space in holy worship or in some ecstatic moment when angels sing, but in the reality of day to day living – at work, at home, at school, on the road to Emmaus. Those two disciples who walked with him on that road never expected to encounter him. They thought him dead and gone and did not recognize him until he broke the bread at the table in their home. Then their eyes were opened, and they saw the world in a different light, in resurrection light. In recognizing Jesus they found a new perspective upon the events of the past three days and the past few hours as they had walked with him, and they found new hope for the future, for in recognizing him they discovered the truth of the empty tomb – He is risen! In the breaking of bread their world changed, for in the breaking of bread they recognized their risen Lord.

In October 2004 Pope John Paul II inaugurated the Roman Catholic Church's Year of the Eucharist with an apostolic letter entitled *Mane Nobiscum Domine*. Writing of his choice of that theme, John Paul II says:

The image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus can serve as a fitting guide for a year when the Church will be particularly engaged in living out the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Amid our questions and difficulties, and even our bitter disappointments, the divine

Wayfarer continues to walk at our side, opening to us the Scriptures and leading us to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God...Amid the shadows of the passing day and the darkness that clouded their spirit, the Wayfarer brought a ray of light which kindled their hope and led their hearts to yearn for the fullness of light.

What John Paul II implies is what Luke wants all of us who hear this Easter story to understand: we too are on a journey, a journey full of questions and doubts and disappointments, a journey full of information gleaned from others – from gospel writers, our ancestors in faith, generations of Sunday School teachers and preachers good and bad – a journey full of uncertainty about the future and an ongoing search to understand the past. We all are on a journey of faith that seeks assurance and hope with which to face life and death. Along the way, the risen Christ walks beside us – often unknown, unacknowledged, unrecognized, unappreciated, but always present – nearer than we might imagine.

When we recognize the risen Christ in our lives, *if* we recognize him, then the world changes; our lives change. We know that we are never alone and long for him to be with us always – granting us comfort, strength, guidance, protection, and peace. *Mane Nobiscum Domine. Stay with us Lord* becomes our plea – to have his comforting presence near at hand. But – Christ also demands of us greater faithfulness, challenges us to change our lives and comfortable lifestyles, tells us to take up our cross daily and follow him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. At such times, we may prefer that he go there alone while we go home, wagging our tails behind us. Stay with us Lord, but don't ask *us* to stay with *you*. Stay with us where it is safe, but do not ask us to go to the unsafe places where you go – among the poor, the outcast, the troubled, the unclean, the criminal, the persecutors. Just wait here, Lord – wait here with us.

We want Jesus to walk with us, but as his disciples we need to walk with him. He walks with us even when we resist following him or fail to recognize him, even when we forget him or abandon him. Through thick and thin he is with us, at our sides, but he also goes to those unsafe places among the outcasts, and continues to ask us, implore us, urge us to go where he goes, to walk with him, to stay with him and be his disciples on

the way. *Mane nobiscum domine – Stay with us, Lord.* That is our prayer.
You stay with me, he says. That is our challenge. Amen

ⁱ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., ed., The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1991, p.398

ⁱⁱ “Abide With Me”, *The Presbyterian Hymnal*: No.543, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990

ⁱⁱⁱ Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, Nelson Books:2015, p.xiv