

Instructions:

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



Series: Come to the Table

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shared meals with others. In a world where there is an upsurge of hate and division, and a growing uncertainty about what the future holds. God calls us, as followers of Jesus Christ, to make space for all of God's children at the table. As we sit at the table together, we can learn more about each other and get to know the God who created us all even better.

Message description:

There is power in sharing a meal. This is something Jesus knew very well. In fact, in the gospel of Luke, eating is one of the most characteristic things Jesus does. Because Jesus knew that there was real power at the table. To meet, to bless, to learn from each other, to unite, to heal, maybe even to forgive. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus shows up for two disciples when they are feeling very defeated and discouraged. He talks with them, shares scripture with them, but they do not recognize him. It is not until he blesses and breaks bread with them later, something that they have seen him do a lot, that they realize who Jesus is. The one who hosts them at this table is the same one who was crucified, but now lives. And that makes all the difference.

Key Scriptures

Luke 24:13-35

Additional sources for independent study:

- *This Holy Mystery*, a theology of communion in the UMC (pdf): <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/this-holy-mystery-a-united-methodist-understanding-of-holy-communion>
- The Open Table in the UMC: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/an-open-table-how-united-methodists-understand-communion>
- *An Altar in the World* by Barbara Brown Taylor
- *Grace for the Future*, a podcast hosted by Bishop Leonard Fairley on UMC Communion liturgy: <https://graceforthefuture.com/>

Questions Related to This Week's Message:

1. What emotions are stirred up when someone invites you to share a meal with them?
2. What was the last really good meal you shared with someone? What is the quality of the food, company, or both?
3. In her teaching, Rachel shared a quotation from Frederick Buechner in which he described "Emmaus" as the place we go to escape when life is overwhelming. It could be a shopping, a bar, church. What is your "Emmaus"? Or, where do you go to escape when feeling discouraged or disappointed? Have you ever found Jesus there?
4. Share about a time someone shared a meal with you and you experienced the love and grace of God through their hospitality.

Going Deeper:

Read Luke 24:13-35

"What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" - In her commentary, Michal Beth Dinkler discusses how this question of Jesus to the disciples is worth contemplating.

"What Cleopas and his companion are discussing is the news, specifically, political news. Jesus has just been crucified, and in the Roman Empire, crucifixion was deeply political. Like many today, Cleopas and his companion have lost hope in the face of this political news; he declares in the past tense, "We had hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel" (24:21). They have heard that Jesus' tomb is empty (24:22-23), but they do not believe it. The Emmaus road story reminds us that it is directly into a dire political climate—and the hopelessness that tragic political news can engender—that Jesus himself comes along..."

"What if the disciples cannot recognize Jesus because their opinions are already fully formed? Like all humans, their assumptions shape what they talk about, and what they talk about shapes what they see. Cleopas assumes: 1) that Jesus is clueless, and 2) that his cluelessness makes him a stranger. And not just a stranger, an outsider. One who does not belong."

Cleopas *assumes* by Jesus' question that he is an outsider, a foreigner, someone who doesn't understand the events that have just transpired. The danger of his assumption is that he risks missing Jesus and everything the risen Christ embodies: hope, new life, the promise that suffering and death are not the end of the story.

It is easy to surround ourselves with people who think, live, vote, and act the same way we do. It is also easy to jump to conclusions and to label others whom we think are different from us- outsiders, those who do not belong.

- Where do you see this happening in our world today?
- What do Christians risk by drawing such assumptions of others? Do you think we risk missing Jesus at work? Why or why not?
- How is the Church called to operate differently than our world and political climate?

Spend a few moments reflecting on the question of Jesus in this passage: **"What are you discussing?"**

- Do the things we discuss amongst ourselves (and the assumptions we make when we talk) lead us toward Jesus? Toward wholeness? Away from bitterness?
- Conversely: what are we not discussing? To what and to whom are we not paying attention, and in our neglect or ignorance, devaluing other travelers on this shared journey?

Read Luke 14:7-11

- Think about the last time you went to a big party or a wedding. Why were you invited? Did you feel welcomed? Where did you sit? Were there those in attendance who might have felt excluded?
- What do you think it means to “pick the place of honor at the table” today (opportunities where we promote self over others)? What does that look like today?
- Have you ever taken liberties to get someone’s attention? How are both this and “picking the place of honor” in contrast to the kingdom of God?
- What societal problems could begin to be healed simply by sharing meals with people different than us?

Next Steps: Consider closing in a time of prayer, reflection, and confession.

To serve others and give generously, we must start with a spirit of humility.

Challenge: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your desire to be liked, accepted, and even admired. Confess where you have allowed these desires that distracted you from seeing Jesus or meeting the needs of others. Commit yourself to serving even if others don’t notice you.