

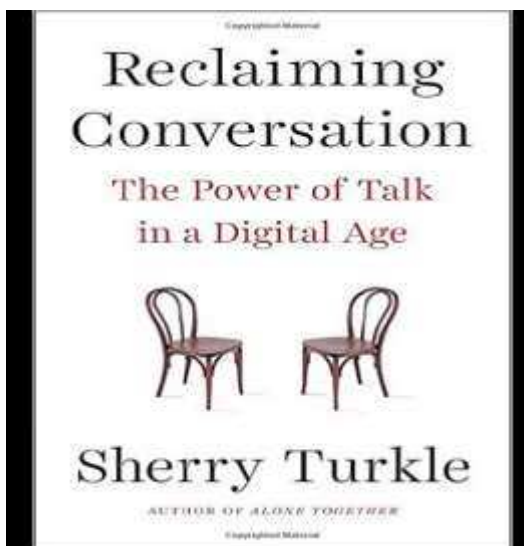


The Emmaus Principle

Vienna Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. E. Stanley Ott
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Glenda said something last week that perfectly sets up what we are going to talk about this morning: “We are invited to elevate community by cultivating intentional spiritual friendships with others. We’re not just becoming like Christ; we are becoming like Christ *together*. We really are better together than we are alone.” She is so right! Jesus clearly cared about friendship. At a pivotal moment in his ministry, he looked at his disciples and simply said, “I have called you friends.” Our God is all about relationship, all about friendship. So this morning, we look at what it means to open our lives to new friendships by thinking about the concept of hospitality. To quote Glenda again, “Hospitality is making room for love.”



We live in a day in which it appears that the room we make for love is shrinking, especially room and love for new people in our personal lives. With the busyness of our lives along with our growing tendency to communicate through computers and cell phones, it is easy for our friendship circles to freeze in size, even to shrink and disappear. Sherry Turkle has written a fascinating book, Reclaiming Conversation. As she puts it, “We live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet, we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection.” So I have 1500 Facebook friends of whom I actually know ten! Well, I do know more than ten, but Facebook is much more about connection than real conversation despite the fact that some extended dialog can occur there. Turkle speaks of a 40 percent decline in measures of empathy among college students in just the last ten years. She speaks of how the very presence of a turned off cell phone on a table changes what people talk about. She

speaks of how we pay one another “continuous partial attention.”

I was in a meeting myself recently and spent some time looking at apps on my cell phone. Just how present was I to the others in that meeting? Turkle speaks of the “illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship,” which perfectly described me in that meeting. I find her very convicting. If hospitality is making room for love, it means thinking through how we live our lives. Are we really making room for love or closing off room for love or only creating the illusion of making room for love?

Our biblical text this morning is the marvelous story of something that happened on Easter Sunday just after the resurrection of Jesus. Two of the followers of Jesus were walking from Jerusalem on the seven-mile journey to their home in the small village of Emmaus. They were talking about the stir of their recent days with the crucifixion of Jesus and the report that morning that some of the women had gone to the tomb early and had seen a vision of angels saying Jesus was alive. As they were talking, Jesus came up alongside and began to walk with them but he didn't allow them to recognize him. He explained to these two friends how what we call the Old Testament speaks of the Messiah. As they arrived at their village and were turning off the road, Jesus made as if he was going to keep on going down the road. I love the way Luke puts this, “So they urged him strongly.” So they really leaned on Jesus saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” As you know they serve Jesus supper and as he breaks the bread they recognize him and he disappears. Then, they rush back to the other disciples in Jerusalem.

While this story has a lot to say about Jesus and his resurrection, I love the way the two friends practice classic

hospitality. They open their homes and lives to a stranger. They made room for love and love came to them. When you open your life to love, you will find love comes to you. One of the reasons we so encourage you to join one of the many wonderful groups, Bible studies and ministry teams here at VPC is that in the very act of joining such a group you open your life to love.

Jesus spoke to the church in the town of Loadicia saying, “Listen, I stand at the door—the door of your life—and I knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me.” In other words, Jesus is asking you to practice hospitality with him, to make room in your heart for him. If you open your heart to him you will find love, just as the two friends on the road to Emmaus opened their hearts to Jesus and found their hearts burning within them.

The word in the New Testament translated “hospitality” literally means “lover of strangers.” Sometimes we use the word today to simply mean being a good host and welcoming people into our homes. Certainly if you invite your closest friends to your home that is being hospitable. However, hospitality as in opening our lives to new people has always been one of the classic practices of God’s people. For example, Abraham saw three strangers approaching his tent in the heat of the day. He ran to them and said, “Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree” (Genesis 18:3). The Book of Romans tells us to practice hospitality and the Book of Hebrews says, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). Nina Graves pointed out to me that that verse appears in every email Gerri Webb sends out! It’s a great word.

There is a wonderful word in the New Testament that I have commented on every now and then, the word *hilaros*. In our English Bibles it is typically translated as “cheerful,” as in God loves a cheerful giver. It’s just that *hilaros* is the root of our word hilarious or hilarity. The opposite of *hilaros* is to withhold cheer, to hold back hilarity. So when it comes to giving of our money we speak of God loving a *hilaros* giver, someone who actually loves giving all they can give. Christian *hilaros* applies to far more than the giving of money. It applies to our overall generosity of life. If you are eagerly open to welcoming new people into your life, there is a flowing sense of *hilaros* hospitality.



Some years ago, a friend of mine, Steve Ebling, and I were to teach at a summer institute being held on the campus of beautiful Hanover

College in southern Indiana. We checked into the registration lobby and were assigned to stay in a room on the third floor of one of the college dormitories. So we hauled our luggage and materials up three flights of stairs and as we opened the door into the hallway we were greeted by the sounds of a lot of girls laughing and giggling. It turned out they had put us in the middle of a floor of 8th grade girls who there for summer camp. We beat a hasty retreat and returning to the registration lobby we were told that that was the only room available and that we could take it or leave it.

Well, taking it wasn’t an option so we just stood there with what I imagine must have been a bit of a dumbfounded, “now what?” look on our faces. A pleasant older gentleman approached us and introduced himself as David Mair. “I

couldn't help but over hear you," he said. "You seem to need a place to stay. Would you two like to stay at our home tonight?" Notice he made that decision in two seconds, had never seen us before and hadn't taken the time to call his wife. We accepted his invitation, of course, and when we arrived at his home and met his wife, we understood. The two of them shared an immensely warm, Christian faith and in their view, their home (not all picked-up for guests) was our home, their food (not bought for guests) was our food, their time was our time. They had the spirit of hilarious hospitality. They had people eyes. *People eyes* are the eyes of Jesus that see people the way they really are, the needs they have along with a willingness to help.

Today, we so easily confuse friendliness and hospitality. Friendly asks the questions, "Hi, how are you?" So you bump into me at Target and say, "How are you Stan? How's Ann Marie? How are the kids, the grandkids and your zucchini plants? See you!" That's friendly. Hospitality asks an entirely different question than, "How are you?" Hospitality asks, "Would you come into my life?" That is exactly what David Mair did when he invited us into their home. He was saying, "Come into our lives." In fact, inviting a person into your life doesn't necessarily involve your home. "I'm going to get a cup of coffee at Café Amouri, would you join me?" "We are going to see the movie *Ben Hur*, please come with us. Hospitality invites others to come into your life. Here are a few ways to do that.

1. Open your self to Jesus

First, open your self to Jesus. Be like the two friends on the road to Emmaus. When Jesus walked with them, they invited him into their lives. So Jesus knocks on the door of your life and all you have to do is open the door and he will bring his joy into your life.

1. Open your self to Jesus
2. Open your heart to someone new

Second, make room for love by opening your heart to someone new. Of course, we all may think we are open to love in the spirit of hilaros when in fact our lives may be

closed. I remember a party we had in our backyard and someone new to the area came. I took her to a group of six people standing in a tight, little circle, all talking. I said, "Excuse me," and two of the six people backed up like a little door opening to the group. I introduced the new person and when I finished, but before I could say another word, the two people who had backed up walked back to seal off the circle and their conversation resumed with me and the guest standing on the outside looking in. Now understand, I knew everyone of those six people very well and knew them to be wonderful people. They were just so into each other they didn't even realize they had lost their people eyes in that moment and had not made room for the love of a new person. Sometimes we get caught up with our best buddies and are literally blind to those on the outside.

Sometimes, we may be tempted to think we are like Lego blocks with the idea that just as a Lego block has a limited number of prongs, typically eight or so, that in our busy lives we can only handle a limited number of friendships. Actually, you are not like a Lego block. You are more like Velcro with countless prongs. Our Lord made you for relationship, made you for friendship so that your friends of the road and of the heart will encourage your heart and you will encourage theirs. So make the decision that you will make room for love and be open to the new person.

- 1. Open your self to Jesus**
- 2. Open your heart to someone new**
- 3. Open your home to someone new**

First, open your self to Jesus; second, open your heart to someone new; and third, open your home to someone new.

Dick Halverson,

the former Chaplain of the US Senate suggested a simple but a powerful practice. You, or if you live with others in your home then you and the others in your home, go out front and stand outside the door of your home. Then walk around it—around the house, around the apartment or townhouse building—and end up back in front of your front door. Then pray a simple prayer out loud. Something like this, “Lord, Jesus, we open our hearts to you, offering you all that we own. We open our home to you. You be the host. You bring the guests and let our home be a hospitality center in this neighborhood and in our church.” As Dick likes to say, “Do that and God will bless you incredibly.”

Finally, open your life to someone new. I would suggest two powerful ways to do this. The first is to join a group here at VPC. The people in the group will encourage your heart and you will encourage theirs. Second, practice the concept of The Emmaus Meal. It gets its name from the wonderful story we looked at earlier. Two friends walking down a road are joined by someone they don't know but they invite that new person into their lives. So the idea is that you get a buddy of yours with you and the two of you – two singles, two couples, two sets of friends invite a third party to join you. Instead of the two of you being people blind like that of the six people at the party I described, the two of you deliberately invite a third person or persons to join you.

I have talked about hospitality and opening your life to new people to a great many groups over the years and I find people nodding their heads and saying, “Yes, I like that. I need to make room for love. I want to include new people in my life,” but when push comes to shove, people tend to not follow through. Why not? Because it is so much easier for you and for me to invite a person we already know to join us, have a cup of coffee with us, share a meal with us, go to a sports event or whatever we like to do with people. We are simply more comfortable with people we know. It’s that simple. However, the Emmaus Meal is a way of outsmarting our own tendency to avoid new people. By saying to a buddy, someone you are already comfortable with, “Lets ask that person or this person to join us for a meal, a cup of coffee, for some event at VPC,” what you are doing is making room for love among all three or more of you. The Emmaus Principle actually works.

So I encourage you to do four things beginning right now. Open your self to Jesus and life with him. Open your heart to others with the hilaros, hilarious joy of Jesus that opens and gives to others. Open your home to someone new. Pray for God’s blessings on your home and its open door. And finally, open your life to someone new. Join a fellowship group here at VPC and practice the Emmaus Meal. I encourage you right now to think of a friend that you will invite to share an Emmaus Meal with a third party within the next week. May our Lord fill you with love as you make room for love.

- 1. Open your self to Jesus**
- 2. Open your heart to someone new**
- 3. Open your home to someone new**
- 4. Open your life to someone new**