

THE GUEST
THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER
APRIL 26, 2020
THE OSSINING SISTER PARISHES
The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Mayer

Here is a story from when I was perhaps 7 or 8 years old. I'm going to tell it just as I remember it: Our telephone rang one evening, and after a brief exchange, my father hung up the phone in a state of excitement and urgency. Just a few minutes later, our doorbell rang. "Who is it?" I asked my mother. "It's his navigator!" she answered. My parents opened the door, and in stepped a man whom I remember wearing a leather bomber jacket and dark trousers. I remember the clear air of deference both my parents had towards him; it was as if the authority in the house had shifted from my parents to this man. He was our guest, but at once became a kind of host as well.

His visit was brief. I was introduced as the oldest child and only son and shook the man's hand. After an exchange of hearty good wishes and some sharing of memories, our visitor left. I still remember the slightly breathless feeling I had when the door closed behind him and it was just our family again in the house. Only then did my parents give me a full explanation of who our visitor was: he had been the navigator of the B-17 crew in which my father had served as radio operator during World War II. As the navigator, his rank was higher than my father's. Apparently, he lived in another part of the country, was somehow in our neighborhood, and had called to see if he might stop by for a brief reunion. It seemed that my father had not seen him since the end of the war more than fifteen years earlier, and to my knowledge we never saw him again. But the visit, as I remember it, was a thrilling one, for me and I think for my father and mother, too.

Perhaps you can see what brings this story to mind. Our gospel story today – the story of the events on the Emmaus Road – is of course one of the most famous stories in the New Testament and is unique to Luke's gospel. The story reflects Luke's full immersion in the Hellenistic culture of his day. "In the Greek and Roman worlds, gods suddenly appear and disappear, often after brief conversations with humans" (New Cambridge Commentary on Luke, p. 657). When Jesus first appears and is not recognized, Luke's audience would have seen the parallel. But this story moves in a different direction, towards what Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, called a recognition scene – "the identity of the stranger in disguise is revealed" (New Cambridge Commentary, p. 663). It is revealed after the remarkable moment in which Jesus, who is technically the guest at table with the two travelers – they invited him to stay with them – becomes the host – he blesses, breaks and distributes the bread. Then they recognize him.

It's so very like that moment in my childhood story when the dynamic shifted and the navigator became the host in our home. It is exactly the dynamic of the relationship each of us has with Jesus. Once we come to faith in Jesus and recognize him as Lord, we invite him to be our host, to sit at the head of our tables, to be, indeed, the navigator of our lives. It is the shift that changes everything.

During these days when we are unable to share the Eucharist together, we have a unique opportunity to remember that Jesus' place at the head of our tables continues unchanged. He is present not only at our altars, but in each of our homes and each of our hearts. I pray that God may give us grace to grow in the truth of this while we are sheltered in place, that we may return to sharing Eucharist together with a deeper sense that we know Jesus each time we gather in love with others, wherever we are.