

**“Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner”**

**Matthew 9:9-13**

**March 30, 2025**

The Woodside Church

Scott Burgess

This is God’s word.

The Calling of Matthew

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10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:9-13

The word of the Lord

In 2008 I took my first mission trip to the Dominican Republic. I followed up with three more, in 2010, 2012, and 2013. In each of the trips there were Woodside members I knew, some I recognized, and there were always some complete strangers to me. We had senior citizens join us, and we even had a 4-year-old join us one year. Actually, Peter Ricards was 4 and a quarter at the time. Something he made very clear. Bruce and Judy Jones had a policy which addressed the issue of comradery. On every bus trip, and at every meal, we were strongly encouraged to sit next to someone different. Whether it was a half hour bus ride to or from the work site, or a time to break bread, sitting with somebody different allowed us to better know everyone on the trip. It wasn’t a way to separate us from friends we already had, but a way to make it a more inclusive group in total. Without their policy, it would have been easy for me to spend the 10-day trip interacting mostly with people I already knew and felt comfortable with.

We all act that way, don’t we? Wherever we are - work, school, neighborhood, leisure time – we tend to mingle with those we already know. Even here at Woodside. I’ll bet right now, most of you are sitting with family, or friends you have made in the past. So I am going to ask everyone to do something different today. If you are able, stand up, look around the room, and find someone you have never had a conversation with. Walk over to that person, introduce yourself, and sit down with them. Uncover the plate on your table and break bread with them. While doing

so, ask a simple question of them such as, “What brought you to Woodside?”, or “Do you live close by?” We’re going to give you 7 minutes now. I’ll give you a two-minute warning.

Well, I hope you enjoyed that exercise, and I’m sure you realize there was a purpose behind it. We are at the halfway point of the “Friends for God” sermon series, learning how we can Bless others. But before we move ahead, let’s quickly review the first two weeks.

In week 1 Doug started with B, as in – Begin with Prayer. While beginning with prayer is a smart way to start anything, it is crucial when you are considering making Friends for God.

Last week was L, for Listen. Listening is a skill which takes practice to learn and can take years to master. But how can you create friendships if we are not listening to those we are forming, or maintaining relationships with?

Today we are focusing on the “E” in BLESS – Eat. You might be wondering, “What does eating have to do with ministry?” Which leads me to wondering, “Do you not know Woodside at all?” So much which happens here in this building has food involved in one way or another. Advent Dinner, Ash Wednesday soup night, the Pancake Breakfast on Easter Sunday, the ALPHA Course and the Brunch served for Commitment Sunday in October. Many of the ministry events which happen here revolve around food. Code Blue, Young at Heart, the Quarterly Recovery Service and Luncheon, and of course the Dinner Ministry. We bring food outside the Woodside walls as well. T.A.S.K. in Trenton, Cast your Cares in Kensington, and the Recovery Café in Port Richmond to name a few. One Sunday as I left the Vineyard I walked in on a conversation where a friend was asking, “How does he manage to outdo the previous Sunday every week?” I agreed and responded I thought Doug had done another great job. He looked at me and said, “Yeah, Doug does share great messages. But I was talking about Tom Fowler.”

Sharing food is a great way to build relationships. Worshipping God, having prayer time, and hearing the weekly sermon are important parts of the Sunday Worship Service. But fellowship time is important as well. I often hear people talking about the service itself, which is nice. But seeing brothers and sisters talking because they enjoy each other’s company is an important activity as well. The stronger the relationship, the more likely it is to grow. And building those relationships is a beautiful way to grow the Church. Each one of us is important, and it is important we work together.

<sup>12</sup> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by <sup>[a]</sup> one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27

Throughout most of history, eating has been considered an important cultural activity. It is a way of building stronger bonds among family and friends. Time together around the dinner table is still recognized as an important family activity. When I was growing up, dinner time was a way to discuss the things going on in our lives. For the last four years, before they moved into their own home, my daughter, son-in-law, and grandkids were living with us. Most Saturday and Sunday nights included family dinner time together. We talked about school, work, church and ministry. We shared what we were doing with our friends and co-workers. We planned weekends and vacations and sometimes discussed local or national events.

Jesus must have been a believer in the power of the meal. To quote Doug, “Jesus ate his way through the New Testament.”

It is said in Luke’s gospel alone Jesus eats 10 meals. Of the parables of Jesus, food is mentioned or involved in 18 of them. Jesus ate with his disciples, and he ate with Pharisees and other religious leaders. Sure, he ate with friends and students – such as Lazarus, Mary and Martha. But he also made time to eat with outcasts. Let’s go back to today’s scripture passage from Matthew chapter 9

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On the surface it seems so obvious. Jesus appears to be saying he is eating with the tax collectors and the others with them, because they are the sinners. They are “sick” so he wants to teach them about God and his kingdom. Obviously, the Pharisees are righteous, and do not need his healing. Anybody buying that? There was a time when I believed this is what the scripture is saying. But it obviously isn’t what the Bible teaches.

#### Righteousness Through Faith

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in[a] Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:21-24

All of us need Jesus. The only righteousness we have comes through our faith in him. I said earlier Jesus broke bread with his disciples. At other times he ate with Lazarus, Mary and Martha - among other friends. It is also important to note he also ate with Pharisees and other religious leaders at times. This is a place where we need to be more vigilant about our shortcomings. I mentioned the mistake I made previously in thinking Jesus was suggesting the Pharisees must have been righteous, and didn’t need to look to him. A thought which might be even more dangerous is the opposite. We sometimes take the view the Pharisees were so self-righteous Jesus would have nothing to do with them. In other words, we run the risk of judging others and deciding who is worthy of eating with Jesus. It isn’t for us to decide who Jesus should break bread with.

All right. We can see why Jesus wants to have a meal with us. How can we make this a part of our lives?

**Family** – Make the time for a more social dining experience. When at home, turn off the TV and have dinner conversations. Talk to your kids. And kids, talk with your parents. Share your experiences. Studies show the benefits of such time together. Based on decades of research, Dr. Anne Fishel, phd, and the Family Dinner Project emphasize that the family meal is not only essential for physical health and well-being, the family dinner is beneficial to the cognitive and social development of children and can lead to meaningful improvements in the mental health of children and their parents. *“When gathering to share a meal with loved ones, food is rarely the most important part of the ritual.”*

On the other hand, the food can be the tool to bring everybody together.

This shouldn't be restricted to the weekly family dinner. Some of us need to do a better job with our significant others – me included. I often find myself eating dinner at my desk as I try to catch up on our company work. But since the kids moved out, I've also seen us sit down in front of the TV eating our dinner, rather than the two of us sitting, eating, and talking. In other words, wasting our time on the television when we should take the opportunity to strengthen our relationship.

**Friends** – Do you go out with friends? Most of us do at various times. But in addition to kids, sports, work, and other conversation, don't hide your faith, or shrink from conversation about it. A couple weeks ago Doug talked about the difference between a Blessor and a Converter. The resulting difference between a Blessor and a Converter with friends probably has the same type of results. Being a friend who blesses others is probably more valuable than one who focuses on conversion. Another reason why Woodside brings the art of eating to so many events is it is so much easier to invite someone to a good meal. Don't think your friend will accept an invite to an Easter morning Celebration Service? Invite him or her to a pancake breakfast, and sunrise service.

**Strangers** – While this might seem more difficult than the first two examples, it doesn't have to be. First of all, even family and friends start out as strangers. And in God's eyes, we are all equal. It is the meal which helps break the ice. I'm going to share a few simple suggestions.

1. Remember how we started today's service, looking around and finding someone you don't know to speak with. Over the next few months, when you're enjoying some goodies in the lobby after service, strike up a conversation with somebody you don't know. No matter how shy you, or the other person is, you already have Woodside and Christ in common. So you instantly have something you can talk about together. If you see somebody who looks like they might be new to Woodside, make a special effort to meet them. You might be the only opportunity to show that new person what makes Woodside so special.

2. As we head into spring and summer, that means BBQ season will be starting soon. It doesn't take a lot of effort to grill up a few more hamburgers or hot dogs. So why not invite a neighbor over for a Saturday night grilling. Get to know them and let them know who you are. And while we shouldn't force it, if church, bible study, pre-school, or mission work comes up talk about it.

3. At Work or School – Sit with somebody you don't know or invite them to sit with you. Inviting somebody to share a meal with you is just such a simple way to get to know them. Let the conversation carry naturally. If you try to force anything, it probably won't work as well.

I've noticed that in networking. You meet somebody at a chamber of commerce event, or some other meeting. The recommendation is the next step should be setting up a one-to-one meeting – to get to know the person better. The one to ones which I find work the best, are when we have coffee or lunch, and most of the talk isn't around business. Sure. There are times when you meet up with somebody specifically for a business event, or transaction. But when you are trying to see if there is synergy in a business relationship, it is more about how your businesses and your personalities mesh.

**Ministry** - I spoke earlier about ministry. Ministry any place, but specifically at Woodside. We do offer quite a lot of options where people can help serve others. In the lobby you can find a printout of the various ministries and missions Woodside participates. Find one which interests you and learn how you can be a part of that.

I've known a guy named Matt for around 15 years. I first met him during some recovery events. I knew he had been struggling with addiction when I first met him. He had been to prison a couple of times and just couldn't seem to break those chains. But as time went on, he began to show signs of revival. He attended more and more of the Conquering Life Prison and Recovery events. After a few years he began helping lead meetings. He eventually met a nice young woman and started dating. He is now married, with four kids, and owns a successful local franchise company. One day we were talking about his recovery journey. He shared how important Bob Sofronski and CLPRM was to his walk. But then he said something which surprised me. He told me the Woodside Quarterly Recovery Worship Service and Luncheons were a big part of his recovery. I asked why, and this is what he told me. "The first time I attended the luncheon; I thought the food was incredible. So, the next quarter I returned, and enjoyed it again. I kept coming, not because of the Worship, or the message, but because I wanted the meal. But I found that the more often I came, I received a little more of what Jesus is offering. In the end, it was the Word of God which meant more to me than the meal Woodside provided. For that, I am grateful"

It isn't always important why people come. What is important is how they leave.

Please pray with me.