

Stumbling in to eat

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. --Romans 14:13

Read: Romans 14:13-19

Reflect: In Joyce Carol Oates' *I am no one you know* is the story of a vibrant volunteer firefighter who dies rescuing people from a burning home. His heroism is small comfort to his grieving children, who stumble severely on the block of why their popular, productive young father died in place of those white trash Barndollars, careless enough to burn a cigarette in bed. Days of tears later, the children sneak up to the ramshackle house where the people are living temporarily. The boy carries a loaded shotgun. Is he grief-crazy enough to kill?

Hiding in the long grass, the siblings get found out. To their chagrin, the disreputable family seizes the chance to thank the offspring of their dead savior by inviting them to supper. Sincerely grateful, but socially inept, the family shares their meatloaf, a brownish lumpy glob crusted with dried ketchup. The angry, embarrassed adolescents do what they'd never do at home: eat extra onions in the meatloaf in a slovenly kitchen, feed a whining dog from the table. "There's a strong smell of scorched food here...and cigarette smoke, and mildew of old farmhouses. Halfway through the meal Mrs. Barndollar gives a little cry like a hurt bird saying, 'Oh, hey! We forgot,' making us put down our forks and bow our heads while she says in a drunk singsong voice, 'Bless us O Lord and these our gifts which we are about to accept from your bounty amen.'"

In the face of such bumbling hospitality, what happens to judging who is deserving? Amidst hearty good wishes, the boy will have to double back on foot to retrieve the shotgun concealed in the grass...

[Respond: God, I find it easy to judge who should be worthy of the life you give. Let your love hem me in and crowd out the judgment in me. Amen. ]