

Emily Dickinson and Søren Kierkegaard joke about considering the lilies

Who I'd invite to my writers' dinner party

by [Kathleen Norris](#) in the [May 10, 2017](#) issue

For my party: Emily Dickinson and Søren Kierkegaard, who were contemporaries for 25 years. He was 17 when she was born in 1830. When his greatest works were published, she was a student at Mary Lyon's seminary. When he died in 1855 she was 25 and becoming a recluse. He'd no doubt enjoy her observation of a self-important preacher: "what confusion would cover the innocent Jesus to meet so enabled a man." And in conversation they'd put their encyclopedic and intimate knowledge of scripture to good use. "Consider the lilies is the only commandment I ever obeyed": if anything could make Kierkegaard laugh, that might. And surely he'd have a few words for Miss Dickinson about Abraham and Isaac.

But who to join the party? Thérèse of Lisieux, whose heartfelt prayer for unbelievers makes her a thoroughly modern saint? Or perhaps Oscar Wilde, who shared with Dickinson and Kierkegaard a deep love of scripture and a talent for playing with it. What leaven he would add to the evening with his observation that the Bible begins with a man and a woman in a garden and ends in revelations.