In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

We are invited to a banquet! You and me – each and every one of us! We are invited to a wedding feast – a great party! It is a lavish celebration – a feast of fat things with well-aged wines, as described long ago by the prophet Isaiah.

We are not invited because we are rich neighbors who can make a campaign contribution. We are not invited because we are political allies or because we are strategically important or because our presence will somehow be advantageous for our host. We are not invited because we are beautiful or famous athletes or rock stars or anything like that! We are not even invited because we are relatives – kinsman – whether close or distant; nor because we are especially close friends of the one who is our host.

No, we are invited because we are the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind. We are urged to come from the highways and byways, the streets and the alleyways. We are warmly welcomed even though we are akin to the outcasts and sinners that our Lord Jesus was criticized for associating with.

Look around you here this morning at the wonderful variety of people that are gathered here! I truly believe that one of the blessings of this congregation is that we are so rich in our diversity! We are like a crazy quilt made up of all kinds of different fabrics and colors and textures, all shapes and sizes, and all stitched together with colorful fancy stitches – all put together to make something complex and beautiful. We are pleasing to the eye – especially to the eyes of our Lord Jesus who keenly observes us even as he watches over us.

When Jesus was invited to dine at the home of the Pharisee, “they were watching him.” Our Gospel story takes place on the Sabbath – and it is placed in Luke’s gospel in the context of Sabbath events. Last week we heard about Jesus’ healing a woman bent over for 18 years on the Sabbath. The missing verses in today’s reading tell about another healing on the Sabbath – Jesus heals a man with dropsy. Jesus knows that they are watching him and judging his conduct. Is he breaking the Sabbath laws? After all the Pharisees were the experts on those laws! It was their responsibility to interpret the laws and determine what constituted breaking them, and so they are watching Jesus...
like a hawk! Hoping, I guess, to condemn him for disobeying God’s commandment regarding keeping the Sabbath holy. The Pharisees consider themselves above Jesus in these matters and they are looking to find fault in him and thereby discredit him.

What the Pharisees fail to understand is that Jesus is the law-giver! Your Senior Pastor talked about this last week, and guess what! I agree with him! Jesus knows the laws of God far better than the Pharisees do because he is the one who gave them to Moses! Now I know you might say, but Pastor, Jesus wasn’t around in Moses’ day! Ah, but he was! The writer of Hebrews knew that! “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever,” he says. And the beginning of John’s gospel proclaims,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...”

The Word of God given to Moses on Mount Sinai in the form of the Ten Commandments – that Word was the same Word who became flesh and even now dwells among us and invites us to join him at the banquet table this very day. So those Pharisees were in over their heads! They were dealing with the One who not only knew the law of God better – they were dealing with the Word of God himself!

So, they were observing Jesus. However, Jesus was watching them! He watched how they chose their seats – seems there was a pecking order. He noticed how some deliberately chose places of honor. Jesus uses this as an opportunity to warn them that God sees things differently and that one day there will be a great reversal! The exalted will be humbled and the humbled, exalted. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Remember Mary’s Magnificat?

“He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty...”

When we come to this banquet, this reversal has already begun to take place. At the altar of the Church we can find rich and poor, powerful and lowly, the blind, the maimed, the lame, outcasts and sinners – all side by side, elbow to elbow – as equals at the banquet table of the Lord. In this way the gathered
people of God here in this place become a glimpse, a foretaste of the great feast that is to come – the feast that is promised by the One who Hosts us even now, our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

We are not to be like those Pharisees – discriminating between this one and that one... observing with an eye for finding fault. Who is without fault after all? Only Jesus – he is the only one. And yet he is the paradigm of humility for us – he is perfect humility for he is the one who, as the song in Philippians exclaims:

   Though he was in the form of God,  
   Did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
       but emptied himself,  
       taking the form of a slave,  
       being born in human likeness.  
   And being found in human form,  
       he humbled himself  
       and became obedient to the point of death—  
       even death on the cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

How can we describe this humility of Jesus? How can we imitate it? Perhaps the best way to think of it is through Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, a prayer, which I believe, sums up his entire life. “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Hebrews reminds us that God has promised this great promise: “I will never fail you nor forsake you.” The passage continues:

   Hence we can confidently say,  
   “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
   What can man do to me?”

Humility comes from a deep trust in the Lord – a trust that no matter what happens to me – no matter what challenges I face or troubles I encounter in this life – the Lord will not fail me nor forsake me. It is this utter confidence in God’s grace and mercy and steadfast love that can enable us to let go as Jesus did – let go of our pride, our self-centered will and desires, and pray with him, “not my will, but thine be done.”

And it seems to be God’s will that we all be invited to this feast! That we all gather at this amazingly diverse table – the rich, the poor, the young and the old, the hard of hearing, the blind, the lame, the feeble, the strong, people of every race and background – the crazy quilt that we are! Nothing is more
beautiful in God’s eyes than His people gathered together in love, sharing this holy meal, in humble obedience to His gracious invitation.

This is the foretaste of the feast to come – this is the marriage feast of the Lamb! Blessed are those who are invited to this feast, including you and me! Blessed are those who are invited into the presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ – to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.