A few weeks ago, a friend of mine called me up and asked if I would be interested in joining him to go to the Cyclones game out at Coney Island. And I said, “Sure Bob, let me check my calendar and get back to you!” You see, Bob and I have been baseball buddies and he is a die-heart Brooklyn Cyclones fan and a season-ticket holder for many years. He had invited me to games in the past whenever there were extra tickets available. Not knowing that this time, it was different and special. We’re not sitting in the regular grandstand seats, but instead we’re sitting up in the luxury suite. Wow!!! This was something that I was dreaming of someday I get to go sit up there and be treated like a VIP.

 It turned out to be a great night of good food, good friends and baseball…and the Cyclones won in extra inning, btw. We even got a personal visit from the mascot Sandy the seagull who came into our private suite and I got to take a couple of selfies with him. I felt like though I was in a dream while sitting in the luxury suite. It made me feel important and elevated my status above everyone else…at least for one special night.

 In the passage that we just read from Luke, Jesus also received a special invitation to have dinner at the home of a Pharisee leader. Every eye was on Jesus wondering what he might do or say next that might spark another controversy, because this also happened on the Sabbath day. This looked like a trap coming setting up for Jesus fall into, wouldn’t you say?

 You see, the Pharisees were the “experts” of the law, so they knew what’s permissible to do on the Sabbath and what’s not. But don’t you think Jesus knew that also? These Pharisee leaders were both curious and concerned about how Jesus interpreted various issues such as who was to be welcomed at the table and what constituted “work” on the Sabbath.[[1]](#footnote-1)  They were vigilantly plotting their next step to trap Jesus in his own words or through his own actions.

 As Jesus was about to be seated for dinner, he noticed that many of the invited guests were trying to get to the best seats at the table…usually they’re the ones closest to the host near the center of a long or U-shaped table. Where one sits represents one’s status and importance. The closer you are to the middle, the higher the honor. Likewise, if you’re sitting near the ends of the table, the less important you are. Jesus seized this opportunity to tell a parable about a wedding banquet and where one should sit if invited to a special occasion. He was alluding to what the Kingdom of God may look like one day, especially among those who are foreigners and strangers, and those not feeling welcomed and belonged around us.

So, who’s in and who’s out? Who gets to be invited to be seated at the VIP section? Do we sit in the luxury suite high above the rest of the crowd and behind home or do we sit by the bleachers all the way out in the outfield?

 Jesus went on to teach that instead of sitting at the honor guest’s seats, avoid the embarrassment of being asked to move to “the other” tables later on, sit in the “lower” and less honorable place first and if you get “upgraded” by the host, you would feel more honorable and distinguished.

 But if you look into this parable in a deeper level, this is more than about who gets to sit where. It’s about how we treat and relate to one another, especially those who may not be on our “A” list? Metaphorically Jesus was referring the wedding banquet to the Heavenly feast that He has prepared for us, where he himself is the main host and we are ALL his invited guests, including those who are marginalized, looking in from the outside, the poor, those with special needs and are physically challenged. They TOO have a place around this heavenly wedding banquet table.

 The Gospel of Luke, as you know, was written intended for a Gentile audience and other non-believers. They were considered the “outsiders” by the chosen elite Jews. So this radical idea of inviting “outsiders” to be seated at the same table appeared revolutionary. It was no longer about who your ancestors were that qualifies your invitation to the table but what YOU believe in your heart, that sets the course of one’s salvation.

 This Heavenly banquet is big enough for anyone who accepts the Lord’s invitation and it was **personally delivered by Christ’s opened and an outstretched arm. As the host, He had paid this banquet in full already, so all of the guests would have to do is to simply show up and enjoy the feast and the celebration.**

 I remember when I was in my 2nd year at the Princeton Seminary in 2004, we celebrated the inauguration of a new President – Dr. Iain Torrance. As one of the student drivers for the Seminary, I often got to drive the President and many of the honored guests of the Seminary to and from the airport. Because of this personal relationship that I had developed with the new President, I also received a special invitation from him to attend the inauguration banquet, an event that was extended to those by invitation only. I was thrilled and surprised, to say the least, when I received this Inaugural banquet invitation in my mailbox. I debated for a long time whether I would go or not…because on one hand, I was happy to be invited, but on the other hand, I didn’t really want to go because that meant I would need to dress up for the occasion. And besides, I’m not sure I would know anybody else there, other than some of the faculty members and staff. I didn’t want to be stuck sitting among people whom I don’t know and have a dreadful evening altogether. But at the end, I did decide to go, ONLY because the president himself personally invited me to go. I felt honored and special to be invited, as only a handful of students were invited to go.

 As I was trying my best to be engaging with the crowd that evening, one of the ladies who might have been the wife of one of the Trustees, asked me, ***“How did YOU get invited?”*** Her comment (or question) kind of caught me off-guard and I wasn’t quite sure how best to respond to her, without coming across as impolite. Actually deep inside I felt her comment was kind of rude. What do you mean? ***“How did YOU get invited?”*** So I had to explain myself how I got invited because I was one of the President’s student drivers. I felt horrible for the rest of that evening because of her condescending remark suggesting that I didn’t really belong there. I felt that my dream was realized and shattered on the same night, when I was invited to the Presidential banquet but only to be told that I did not belong there.

 A couple of weeks ago, I received an invitation to be a part of the sub-committee among a few leaders within our Presbytery, to address the issue of race, racism, power & privilege, and white supremacy, not only within our society, but more importantly within our Presbytery along the various practices of how we do things and how we foster our relationship with one another. Some people THINK that we are preaching to the choir, that these issues do not exist in one of the most diverse Presbyteries in our denomination. It’s important that we come to realize that we are not perfect people, and that we can always strive to fulfill God’s vision in God’s kingdom.

 How do we relate to one another matter? How are decisions being made matter? Who made them? Whose voices haven’t we heard from and valued? Well, in our upcoming Presbytery meeting at the end of this month, we will be addressing some of these hard core issues head-on, as we strive to fulfill God’s kin-dom in becoming better neighbors in relating to one another, in a more leveled playing field. We strive to “*humble the exalted, and exalt the humbled.*”

 Through the parable that we read today, Jesus invites us to rethink about our places around the table and in our society, re-imagine new ways of being in relation to those with whom we share a meal.[[2]](#footnote-2)

 In a moment, we will once again participate in a sneak preview of God’s vision and kin-dom to come. This is not any ordinary meal but a spiritual feast of thanksgiving of what the Kingdom of God may look like. All those who profess their faith in Jesus Christ are invited to come to this table of welcome and embrace, where Christ is the only host. This is a table for the sinners, and not for the saints. And we have all undeservingly come, in response to Christ’s extended invitation. “*People will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat together in the Kingdom of God.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

 **This table is not a place where we demonstrate our status or level of piety, but rather it is a place where we come to realize the fullness of God’s unconditional grace, as undeserving as we may be, we are accepted by Christ, so let us also accept one another.** This is the place where *those who are exalted shall be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted [[4]](#footnote-4),* as all of us eat from the same bread and drink from the same cup, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

 As the letter to the Hebrews reminded us of what it means to be in community with one another and with those around us, even those whom we may disagree with, those who have hurt us in the past with insensitive or inappropriate remarks, or have betrayed us by their actions. “*Let mutual love continue.* *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

 As we come before the LORD’s table, let us lay aside our personal prides and privileges and check them at the door as we come. Let the humbled be exalted and the exalted be humbled. So come and be fed, for all those who are ready! Come. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Caldwell Elizabeth F. *Connections Year C, Volume 3 p.281* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Caldwell Elizabeth F. *Connections Year C, Volume 3 p.282* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Luke 13:29* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 14:11 and 14:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Hebrews 13:2* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)