My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray. Our Lord God of our grateful hearts, minds, Spirits, and souls, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts always be acceptable in your sight, our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

The Pharisees, normally the foils in the bible as the ones who are out to trap Jesus into this and that’s about flouting God’s laws, here are the “good guys” warning Jesus of Herod’s plot against him. Jesus often has harsh words for Pharisees, so we wonder why a leader of the Pharisees would invite him to dinner. Jesus has a growing reputation as a prophet, and that might be the reason. Also, Luke tells us that “they were watching him closely,” so it is clear that they hope that Jesus will make a mistake that they can exploit.

We might also ask why Jesus would accept such an invitation. He is obviously not intimidated by those in power, and he extends his ministry to include them. We heard last week how the leader of the synagogue was so caught up in his own power trip and status that he could not receive God’s grace, and yet, that grace has always been available to him. It is not Jesus who withdraws from those who not living to their intended purpose, but the ego-driven person who values the world over the kingdom of God that withdraws from Jesus, and hence also our God Creator and Spirit Sustainer.

Leaders, of all people, must be very careful. They are watched. Our scripture tells us that, right? Every leader is subject to scrutiny, and Jesus is a leader. His followers look to him for direction, and his enemies probe him for weakness. As diligent as his enemies might be, they can find nothing other than the false charges that will lead to his crucifixion.

So the guests seemed to be milling around, and people are awkward in finding their seats, and it leads Jesus into a parable about table manners. From the time of Sarah and Abraham’s hospitality to three strangers who turned out to be God, hospitality was a central tenet of faith. Eating together was central to staying alive by filling both hunger for food and hunger for community.

But I think we can all agree that eating together is still one of the most complicated of human relationships. From our earliest days in the school cafeteria, there are unwritten rules as to who can sit at what table. In my family, in my childhood, we’d gather for Thanksgiving and the adults are in the formal dining room with the best crystal and china and the kids eat in the kitchen with the Corelle.

At weddings we are so concerned about seats and guests that we have entire plans and little cards to tell folks where they are expected to be seated, with the implication being that the closer one is to the bride and groom, the more intimate the relationship between the happy couple and the people on the seating chart. It gets really complicated really fast.

The best seats are close to the action. The boss sits up front with his top lieutenants. VIPs are invited to get up close and personal at sporting events and rock concerts. Or maybe the most expensive seats are in a private box, walled off in a climate controlled room, where not only are the best views available, but the food there is catered, delicious, and the abundance is something that those of us in the bleacher seats can only dream about as the peanut guy throws us a bag of a sawbuck.

Let’s admit it right now: we like the best seats. But the appeal goes beyond the view or sitting closer. Sitting in the best seat near the host makes us feel superior, and our fine seats trumpet our superior status to ordinary folks. And Jesus gives us some simple guidance. I hope you noticed that in verse 7, it says Jesus spoke in a parable. Whenever our Gospel says that, we’re now talking about how things work in the Kingdom of God. So listen up, because the Kingdom of God, as we know, is right here, right now, with all of us in this room each and every day of our lives. Amen? Alright.

Jesus asks us not to look to our own egos to elevate our importance. In God’s kingdom, it’s service beyond the borders of our own skin that counts. It is in service to others that we are valued. And so by saying that we should go sit at the lowest place should not make us feel humiliated. What it does indicate is that there are others who can eat on the fine china and judge one another. I’ll take the Corelle and we’ll not worry about the social pretenses, we’ll enjoy being together.

I’m going to leave you with these final thoughts because we’ll need to mull over this simple message. And it’s simple to say, but hard to believe. But here goes.

Humility is not putting ourselves down to be worthless or denying our abilities or values as a person. Humility is knowing our worth and from whence it comes. It’s a freedom of thinking about ourselves in that all is from, through, and returned to God. We don’t waste a lot of time on promoting our own importance. All are equal in God’s eyes, so let’s get on with it.

But humility also doesn’t mean putting others down. We do the Queen Elizabeth thing: do not comment or criticize. Doing so tries to lift ourselves up at the cost of others. True humility lifts others up in love. Stroking our ego by inviting important folks or our friends strokes our ego. But it takes true humility to invite folks who no one notices—the outcast, poor, underprivileged.

The hardest thing Greenlanders will do is to find those around us who are not like us. Only then will we begin to understand the meaning of the invitation to the Table. God help us all in that quest.

Amen.