September 1st, 2019 

Luke 14:1, 7-14 Pastor Jenny Lee, PhD.

 Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

“Walking with God Humbly”

What do you think that the most important event is in the church?

 When I talked with one of our church members, I heard that her granddaughter, who is five years old, told her, a potluck is the most important event in the church. So, she was wondering why her granddaughter thinks that a potluck is the most important in the church. The five years old girl said, “because eating together is very important.” I am amazed by the idea of how she thought like that.

 Meals are essential in the past as well as in the current society. In society, for people all matter where one eats, with whom one eats, whether one washed or praying before eating, and where one sat to eat because it is determined one’s social position. In a Korean language, family named *Sickgu*, which means “eating together.”

 I was born and grew up in a big Confucian family. Korean Confucianism supports discrimination between males and females, not only in a family but also in society. When it came to mealtimes, women, including my mother, ate in a different place from where the men ate their meals. My brothers ate with male adults, but my sisters, including me, ate with female adults. I experienced my mother not having a comfortable place to eat. She could have a meal in the corner of the kitchen after everybody else finished their meal because she was expected to serve the family during the meal. The Confucian culture supported my grandfather and father to exclude my mother and females as family members. They did not eat meals together at the same table.

 In the text, Jesus was invited for a meal from the leader of the Pharisee on the Sabbath. As you remember, Jesus used to eat with the sinners, who was tax collectors, prostitutes, or the poor (Mark 2:13-17). As the text begins “on one occasion,” it is an occasion that Jesus was invited from the leader of Pharisees. Pharisees invited Jesus for a meal because they want to know Jesus is their side or not. At that time, eating together was, of course, a significant social occasion. A guest was accepted as an equal, and Jesus might understandably have been watched closely to see whether he would follow the Jewish rules. That’s why they invited Jesus on Sabbath day.

Pharisees were devoutly committed to keeping God’s law in every area, to the smallest details of life. They were the people who were to hold their identities as keeping their religious law and regulations. If they did not follow the rule of Sabbath, they regard that it is against God.

 Jesus knew their intention, but he accepted their invitation. He taught them there; love is prior than the law. Furthermore, Jesus taught them two things in the text: One is for guests; the other is for the host. First, for guests who chose the places of honor to sit, Jesus suggested to select the lowest location, and then they may move up to the higher site by the host. And, for the host who invited the rich neighbors, Jesus said, “when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (14:13-14).” Those people were excluded by the society.

 Today, eating together is also a significant social event. When we invite people for our luncheon or dinner, we need to be careful. Jesus’s teaching did not mean that you should invite only the poor, the sick, and the powerless, but he meant to open our social mindset. Pharisees thought they are in the higher position and honored by God, and then they avoid being together with those who are the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind. Pharisees thought that they are the chosen people by God and that the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind are sinners, who are cursed by God. However, Jesus taught them to invite the sinners for a banquet which means treat them equally with themselves, and Jesus added, “for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (14:14)." We should think who are excluded by society nowadays.

 We have a potluck in our church. It is a significant event in our church. The potluck may be the first step to open mind and open the door of the church. The table of potluck does not have a higher place and lower place. The potluck invites not only those who could bring foods, but also those who could not prepare for foods to carry, and then we share meals with all the people who are there. That is, Jesus taught us.

 At the first church, the people devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship. Acts 2:46-47, “every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, and enjoying the favor of all the people.” The first Christians devoted to gather and eat together. Eating together means that we are equal in the grace and love of God. Inviting people for a meal means to open mind, and to walk with God humbly.

 Go back to my story. Until my grandfather and father converted to Christianity, my mother and my sisters could not eat meals at the same table with the male family members. After my grandfather and my father converted to Christianity, they encouraged me to be a leader and to take over the family affairs. They moved my place up to the male’s table. However, my mother and sisters still stayed at a separated table. I suggested my grandfather and my father eat together with our whole family member at the same table, and then they accepted me. So, we ate meals together. Finally, we became a real family.

 John Wesley says, “How freely does God love the world! While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were dead in sin, God spared not his own Son but delivered Him up for us all. And how freely with him does he give us all things! Verily, free grace is all in all! (John Wesley, “Free Grace”). That’s the amazing grace of God!

 As Christians, we should never our neighbors be isolated, and we should never judge anyone. It is the way we walk with God humbly.

 Let us walk with God humbly day by day!

Thanks be to God, Amen!