

Lord, thank you for your provision of this place in which we can come and feel warm and feel safe and commune with you and commune with one another. We are grateful. Much better word. Grateful. Help us now. Lead us now. You are the pastor of this church. We pray that you would lead us in your word. You would lead us in song. You would lead us in prayer, Lord. As you would have it done, we would learn what you would have us learn. See what you would have us see. In the mighty name of Jesus, the Christ of God, we pray. Amen. Please remain standing for the opening word, which is Psalm 131. Lord, my heart is not proud. My eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. Instead I have calmed and quieted myself like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's note. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the Lord now and always. Last week we spoke about the interactions with Jesus and the Pharisees and Jesus and his disciples and the message was that you sort of, for lack of a better way of saying it, build upon your repentance. You just don't get an emotional high and say, "I invite Jesus into my heart," and then that's it. We're told throughout scripture, like the parable of the fig tree and Romans 12, just off the top of my head, that we are to grow and to be transformed. That the old person, that we sacrifice, Romans 12, we sacrifice the old person and we're born anew. That should look and sound differently than you did before and differently from the world. A lot of Luke, and particularly from this point on, is really about opening the eyes of the blind. It's not that he hits you in the face with that or should I say, Jesus simply says, "Look, you are spiritually blind and I must open your eyes." There's story after story after story dealing with every person in every aspect of society from the highest to the lowest and everybody in between talking about opening your spiritual eyes, being transformed and growing. We set the cornerstone of all of that preaching last week when we spoke of repentance. Nothing happens before you actually sacrifice the old self. And now you're nurtured, you're guarded by the word of God, by the spirit of God, and you grow and you become the disciple of Christ, the child of God that he knows you are, knows you can be. So Jesus is speaking again in 14, you see him speaking again to the Pharisees, speaking of humility and he's speaking, there's a lot of things there about the Sabbath and all of that, but basically what he is saying in 13 when he speaks to the Pharisees, 14 when he asks the Pharisees, "Is it okay to heal?" He's trying to open their spiritual eyes. That's what I meant about the highest of the high. And then he'll talk about the person who has the most humble lowest seat at the table and everybody in between. He's speaking to us by speaking into their culture at the time. There's a sign up there, he talked about it before in the Mennonite church, it says that God is no respecter of persons. Now that might be a more harsh way of saying it, but it's true. There's no amount of money or power or status that I can acquire that makes me any more valuable in God's eyes than anyone else. And so this message is just going to be preached by Jesus over and over and over again. So let's take a look at Luke 14 beginning with verse 7. Look at the beginning of Luke 14. We talked about the Pharisees last week when they got on him. Now he's with the Pharisees in the beginning of this chapter and he asks them a question. In Luke 13 they were more than happy to shoot off their mouths. In Luke 14, because he's already humbled them. They're like, "I'm not going to answer that." So check that out. And then he says in Luke 7, right before 14 verse 7, when Jesus noted that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table. This is the dinner at the Pharisee's house where the first episode takes place. He gave them this advice. When you are invited to a wedding feast, we've heard that before, haven't we? Right? The wedding feast. Don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, "Give this person your seat." Then you will be embarrassed and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table. Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, "Friend, we have a better place for you." Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Now the same old way. He just said, somebody, and then he just talks about somebody better than you coming to the banquet. That's not the point of the parable. The point of the parable is the humility, the

humility of the Christian. The idea and Paul teaches it over and over and over again. Luke chapter 14 beginning with verse 15. Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus claimed, "What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the kingdom of God." Jesus replied with this story, "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, "Come, the banquet is ready." But they all began making excuses. One said, "I have just bought a field. I must inspect it. Please excuse me." Another said, "I have just bought five pairs of oxen. I want to try them out. Please excuse me." Another said, "I now have a wife, so I can't come." The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious. He said, "Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." After the servant had done this, he reported, "There is no place where the house will be full. For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet." A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison. Your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money. And then everyone would laugh at you. They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it.' Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of ten thousand could defeat the twenty thousand soldiers marching against him? And if he can't, he will send delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own. Salt is good for seasoning, but if it loses its flavor, how do you make it salty? Flavorless salt is good neither for the soil nor for the manure plow. It is thrown away. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand. In this teaching, we hear the parable of the barren fig tree. In this teaching, we hear how Jesus addresses the Pharisees. In this teaching, we hear that a person should consider what it means to be a Christian and the responsibilities we have not only to the Lord but just as we have witnessed to each other spiritually, physically. Whatever we may need, we find in the kingdom of God by the power of God. All of our spiritual needs are emotional contentment, if you will, and our physical needs. There should never be an individual in the kingdom, let alone in a local congregation that goes without it. Yet, we are taught that the first will be last and the last will be first. We are taught to approach all of that power with great humility, not feeling like we deserve that because we have chosen to sacrifice our old lives, but on our knees in worship and humility, saying thank you Lord for the gift that you have given. I would like to share this knowledge. I want to share this gift with everyone. In this teaching, you also see that idea that we first discussed, repentance without any fruit of the Spirit is questionable. When the Lord's Holy Spirit enters your body, fruit of that Spirit will be produced. You hear the people that were invited to the banquet. They were invited, "Come, now. I can't make it. I can't live like a Christian." We've got a lot of excuses, all of those things, and Jesus says, "Okay, let's open it up to everybody. Let's open it up to everybody, young and old, rich and poor, those with status and those with none. Let's open it up with everybody. Let's give them the free gift of this banquet and see what they do with it." So you see what I said in the beginning. The teachings throughout these chapters are about opening the eyes of the blind, opening the hearts of those whose hearts are hardened, and it's about the transformative power of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. We are not to remain the same. We should look and sound differently once we are filled with God's Holy Spirit. And again, that is no respecter of person, young and old, rich and poor, great status or little status, according to society anyway. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. And the beauty of all of that is that it not only holds true for the church now and the Church of God when we look around and we see those folks that we run in congregation with, it goes for a Christian that may be halfway around the world right now, who is a devoted Christian that speaks a different language and lives in a different country. Guess what? She's my sister. That's cool. He's my brother. That's really cool. And we may meet for a half an hour

on an airplane somewhere, but we will have a lot to talk about because we're brother and sister.