

WHICH WAY ARE YOU TURNED?

How's your Latin? Can you read these words - *incurvatus in se*? Do you know what they mean? *Incurvatus* - means curved or turned. *In* - means in. *Se* - means self. *Incurvatus in se* means "turned in on yourself." That's what we want to talk about this morning, because that is what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel reading.

He tells the story about a farmer. "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'"

This is a story about a good man. He is a good farmer. A hard worker. Responsible. There is no hint of graft or theft; there is no mistreatment of workers or any criminal act. Sun, soil, and rain join to make this man wealthy. He is prudent. He plans for his retirement. He is a good steward of his money and property. He seems to be a model citizen.

So why does God call him a fool?

Why? It wasn't because he was wealthy. It wasn't because he was successful. It wasn't because he planned for the future. God called him a fool because God could see into his heart. And what did God see? *Incurvatus in se!* This man was turned in on himself. The truth is - when your whole life is focused on yourself, you cannot be focused on God. And when you are not focused on God, your life is all out of whack, no matter how good things are going.

I learned a lot these past three months and one of the things the Lord showed me was that as a church we have become turned in on ourselves. It seems we have lost our zeal for the mission of God. We have lost sight of the fact that we exist to serve those who are not part of this congregation - the people in this community and the surrounding area, people in this country and around the world, people who do not yet know and trust Jesus as their Savior, people who are hurting. I wonder: If First Lutheran suddenly disappeared, would we be missed?

And I have to confess I am part of the problem. I struggle with this as much as anyone. These Latin words - *incurvatus in se* - speak the truth about my life. Is this the truth about your life? Is this the truth about this congregation?

If it is, then we must hear what God says. He says, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you!" This is what God says to all who store up treasures for themselves and are not rich toward God. This very night your life is demanded of you. You will die. You will be cut off from God. The soul that sins shall die, the Bible teaches.

But this is not the last word. Jesus does not want you to die. Jesus does not want you to be lost and cut off from God. So he stepped forward and offered his life for you and me! Isn't that amazing! He gave his life for you. He was even willing to suffer and die on the cross for you.

You see, Jesus does not want *incurvatus in se* to be the last word for you or for me. So he turns toward us. He turns his life toward you and me so that he might turn us toward God!

That's what happened with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a successful businessman, although he had made his money in rather unscrupulous ways. One day Jesus came to Jericho, the city where Zacchaeus lived. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus and he wanted to see this man who was getting so much press. Since he was a short guy, he climbed a tree so that he could get a good look at him. Much to his surprise, when Jesus came by, he stopped right at that very tree, looked up, and said, "Zacchaeus, come down. I want to stay at your house today." Zacchaeus was excited! He jumped down from that tree and took him to his house. He was so overwhelmed at how Jesus accepted him and loved him and even forgave him that he decided to give half of his money to the poor. Jesus turned his life around!

Is it scary to loosen your grip on yourself? Is it scary to turn toward God? Is it scary to open up to others and take up the mission of God? Yea, it is scary!

So listen to Jesus! This is his promise to you. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:25-33)

You are of immense value to God! You really are! You can let go. You can turn towards God. God will take care of you.