



MAY 24, 2020

LOVE FIRST, FIRST LOVE

WEEK DEVOTIONAL BASED ON SUNDAY'S WORSHIP SERVICE

JOIN US FOR WORSHIP SUNDAYS 9:00AM AT
WWW.FIRSTLUTHERAN-BARRON.ORG OR ON THE RADIO 97.7FM

Acts 1:6-14

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Incurvatus in se

Paul the Apostle wrote of this condition in the Epistle to the Romans 7:15, 7:18-19:

"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. ... For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

It was perhaps Augustine of Hippo who first coined the phrase incurvatus in se. Martin Luther expounded on this in his Lectures on Romans and described this state as:

"Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them (as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites), or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake."

This was later extended by Karl Barth to include other sins beyond pride.[1] It is also believed that, even though people are justified by Jesus dying on the Cross, they still possess a propensity to sin against God because of this condition (i.e. simul justus et peccator).

PRAYER OF THE DAY

We give thanks to you almighty God that your son Jesus humbled himself and came to live among. He humbled himself and gave his life for us. The corona virus has turned up inward on ourselves to focus on only what we want. Forgive us. By the power of your Holy Spirit turns us from our self-centered ways and turn us outward to love you and to love our neighbor. In Jesus' name we pray, AMEN.

REFLECTION

BASED ON BISHOP LAURIE SKOW-ANDERSON'S SERMON

The COVID 19 Pandemic has affected all of us in different ways. My heart especially goes out the high school seniors who lost the last few months with their classmates and teachers and whose plans for graduation celebrations has been cancelled or postponed.

I remember when I graduated from high school in May a long time ago. I spent the summer working and getting ready to go to college. I was a scared college freshman maybe more than most. I was terrified of failing. I was a farm kid, never been to the big city, the oldest child, the first in my family to go to college, and I picked a college 300 miles from home. The first few weeks at college I was just completely focused on not getting lost, finding my way to class on time and doing homework and not failing. Walking to class every day, I took the same sidewalk between the dorms and library commons to the classroom building. The sidewalks were usually filled with students coming and going from class. I kept my head down and purposefully walked to class. I was determined not to be late and not to fail. Did I mention I was really afraid of failing?

One day I was walking back to my dorm from the library along my usual route and I noticed a leaf falling. I was surprised by the leaf and looked up and was equally surprised to see I was standing under an enormous tree. In all those weeks of walking to class with my head down, I had never seen the tree. Even though I had walked past it dozens of times in those first few weeks of college, I was too intent, so inwardly focused on myself, and too afraid to look up and notice the amazing tree. In some ways this is a stupid story. The fact that I didn't notice a tree isn't important, but what the story is really about is being self-absorbed and self-centered caring only about myself, my success, my needs and not noticing the whole world around me. I was turned in on myself, or as one of my teachers said, I was navel gazing. Theologians call this self-centeredness, a form of pride, the original sin or in Latin *incurvatus en se*, curved in on oneself.

In the three years that Jesus' disciples follow him. They were like self-conscious freshman, thinking about their own needs and survival. Jockeying for position, James and John asked Jesus, "Which one of us will sit at your right and your left hand in glory?"

Friends, think about it for a minute. Where do we spend most of our time looking? At the ground? At our navels? At ourselves? Martin Luther said, in his lectures on Romans, "Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself [that what motivates us is this sin that] wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.

Where do we spend most of our time looking? At the ground? At our feet? At ourselves? Our navels? Are we curved in on ourselves?

Where are we looking? Here we are now, all thinking about how our lives have been impacted by COVID-19. Are we looking up to heaven and out for our neighbor? Or turned in, curved in on ourselves?

Next Sunday, we celebrate Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit is the breathe of life. The Holy Spirit is the wind of God's creative fire that warms us and opens us up. We uncurl. We are born anew through the waters of baptism and stretch out the fetal position, We are released from the navel gazing position. We look up to the heavens, and as we straighten we look up at the tree of life. We see the resurrected Jesus and experience his transforming love. We look up to the heavens and see beyond ourselves and see the hurts and needs of this world. We see our purpose in God's mission and we are able to go and be witnesses for Jesus to the ends of the earth, which may be, these days, the end of the block, the other end of an email, to Malawi, Africa or the food pantry cross town. Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth."

Today, let the Holy Spirit turn you outward to look up to the heavens. What do you see beyond, beyond yourself? Today, look up to the heavens. Make an attempt to pray beyond your wants and needs and see the needs of your neighbors. This next week, take a prayer walk. Look up past the tree tops, through the cross, to the heavens. Take a prayer walk around your neighborhood and pray for all the homes and business you pass. Pray for the people who live and work there. Pray that the Holy Spirit will show you how you can be a witness to Jesus' love to the ends of the earth.