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**C: Pentecost 8 / Lectionary 18 / Proper 13
Luke 12:13-21**

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“The Abundant Life Outside of Bubbles”

We just heard Jesus’ parable of the rich fool, and while Jesus tells it to illustrate greed,
the way he tells it gets to an even more foundational sin than that of greed:
i.e., the original sin that becomes quickly apparent as he tells the story of the rich man....

“He thought to himself, ‘What should I do for I have no place....

Then he said, ‘I will do.... I will pull down.... I will build.... I will store....

I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods....’”

“He said to himself...I... I... I... I... I... I... I will say to my soul, Soul...”

That original, foundational sin that Jesus illustrates here is something known in Latin as “incurvatus in se”
or in English as the state of being turned in on oneself.

Saint Augustine was perhaps the first to coin the phrase in The City of God,
one of the cornerstone books in Western thought,

Luther significantly expanded the concept in his Commentary on the Book of Romans, and
Karl Barth further expounded on it in his Church Dogmatics.

Going back to Adam’s and Eve’s choosing to satisfy their own desire

for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil over choosing to obey God and not eat of it,
our natural human tendency has always been to curve in on ourselves.

And even more disturbing than the tendency to do so is that the tendency is so deeply imbedded in us
that we are most of the time completely unaware of it.

Take, for example, “a parent who discovers that her desire for her children to flourish and succeed
is hopelessly and mired in her own needs and insecurities,

or the man who thinks of himself as a loving and dutiful family member

but whose first guilty thought upon hearing of an elderly relative’s illness

is about what he might stand to inherit,

or the martyr in T.S. Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral, who finds that, deep down,

his willingness to by die for his faith is little more than a dramatic act of self-congratulation,
an effort to prove his own piety to God and to others.

First and foremost, then, the statement that the heart is ‘curved in on itself’

is a sobering assessment of the unconscious self-interest...that lurks underneath so much human love.”

We all suffer individually from the sin of incurvatus in se. But we also suffer from it collectively.

So before I go any further, I’d like us to do a little exercise.

I’ve handed out a sheet of paper that has 20 circles on it. Those circles represent the circles in which we move.

So there might be a Family of Origin circle if your parents or siblings are still alive;

and there might be an Immediate Family circle if you have a partner and perhaps children & grandchildren;

and there might be an Extended Family with aunts, uncles, cousins, and perhaps in-laws.

Then for those of you here, there’s your Salem circle.

And for some of you perhaps your 3160 Park Avenue circle that includes Ephraim & CPC and CHURCH.

For me there’s my Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport circle

and my Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater circle and my Community of Practice circle.

There’s my Genesis Gospel Café circle and my Southern CT Conference and New England Synod

and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America circles.

You get the idea, so go ahead and fill in all of your circles.

You might have fewer than 20 so maybe won’t fill them all,

or you might have more than 20 in which case simply draw more.

[time to fill in circles]

Now I could have had you simply list those groups of which you are a part,
but there's a reason I had you put them in circles.
For now you can see very clearly the curved lines which form the bubbles in which we live,
the lines that delineate who is inside & who is outside of each bubble, the lines that separate us from others.

In describing human nature as being incurvatus in se,
Luther was especially concerned for the way this principle plays out in religious life:
the ways that we think we are humbly serving God in prayer for and service to others,
but in actual fact we are trying to prove something to God,
or to perform our 'Christian identity' in the eyes of our neighbors.
Or sometimes it's just that we are completely unaware that we are even in a bubble.

I had an interesting experience this week at the city-wide vacation Bible Camp.
I directed Vacation Bible Schools for probably more than 20 yrs in the various congregations in which I served.
It was a great program of Christian education of the congregation, and I often said that if I had to choose
between 40 weeks of Sunday School and 1 week of Vacation Bible School,
I would choose the 1 week of Vacation Bible School because it was so much more impactful.

But while I was sitting at the closing of the city-wide program on Wednesday,
I suddenly realized how little impact all of those Bible schools had had
versus how much impact this city-wide one was having.
Because my congregation and I had been living inside of our church bubble
we had only been thinking about educating our own children.
But thanks to the way The Luis Palau Association has brought together over 150 congregations
across racial and ethnic and denominational lines,
together with social service agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and government resources,
this Vacation Bible Camp, sponsored by 4 different faith-based educational organizations
and supported by many different congregations,
was bringing the good news of God's love made known in Jesus Christ
through the power of the Spirit, free to 100 children, half of whom had no church affiliation.

The danger of that original, foundational sin of incurvatus in se
lies not only in our being curved in on ourselves both individually and within each of our bubbles,
but in the way we are often completely unaware of the bubbles that separate us from others.

For a congregation to feed the hungry is not a bad thing per se,
but planning and developing and running a feeding program from within a bubble
and only reaching out of the bubble to drop food to those outside the bubble
is like throwing a life preserver from a boat to a drowning person –
but taking the person out of the water to bring them into the boat.
If that congregation, however, steps out of its own bubble and works with those outside of it,
particularly those who are hungry,
then its work will be exponentially more appreciated, effective and impactful.

Incurvatus in se.
We are in bondage to this sin of being curved in on ourselves,
driven to live in the safety and security of bubbles with others who are like us
with little awareness or understanding or appreciation of those outside our bubbles
who are different from us.
But while our bubbles give us a sense of safety and security, it is not what God desires.

The rich fool in our parable lived in a bubble all by himself,
and so his decision about how to use his time, talent, and treasure
was completely and totally selfish, and God took his life because of it.
How much better it would have been if the man had consulted God?

Jesus said that the greatest command is that we love God with all of our heart & soul & mind & strength
and that the second is just like it – that we love our neighbors as ourselves.
What that means is that it is not enough to have good intentions, or even to do good works, because our
good intentions and our good works are always limited and distorted
by that original and foundational sin of incurvatus in se.

We can do two things, however, that will please God:
First, we can ask God what God would like us to do.
Second, we can become more aware of our bubbles,
of those who are in them with us, and those who are not in them.

I'd like to urge us all to take our sheet of bubbles home with us and reflect on it this week.
Do we have people in our bubbles of different ages, different races, different cultures,
different socioeconomic classes, different educational levels,
different physical and mental abilities, different gender and sexual orientations?
If our bubbles are homogenous, then we need to think about how we are like the rich fool
and how we might find more diversity in our own lives.

We should reflect on how we might make a bubble more diverse,
or on how we might combine with a bubble whose members are different from us,
or how we can create a new bubble
or how we can get multiple bubbles working together.
As the city-wide Vacation Bible Camp this week demonstrated,
the more we step out of our bubbles and work with people from other bubbles,
the greater impact we can have on God's world.

None of us wants to be like the rich fool, and yet we are all like him to a greater or lesser degree,
for we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.
But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus came
to break the chains that bind us, to tear down walls we've built to separate us from others,
and to pop the bubbles that we've created, all so that we might have life and have it abundantly.

I'm here today to witness to the fact that the way Jesus gives us abundant life
is by calling us to step out of our old bubbles as he breaks down those bubble walls that divide us.
I'm here today to witness to the fact that it is as we step out of our bubbles
that God can transform our hearts and minds.
I'm here today to witness to the fact that the more we work with those outside of our bubble
the more God can do to multiply our impact.

May all of us, individually and as members and friends of this congregation,
step out of our bubbles so that we may experience what happens
when God sets us free from those walls that have curved in on us –
freedom, grace, & joy beyond measure – abundant life that we can't wait to share! Amen

