

# As We Are: Intoxicated by Self

## October 1, 2023

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

**Pastor John Scott**

We are continuing our series called *As We Are*. Today is week four, and we are going to talk about one of your favorite subjects in the whole world: *Yourself*. So, we have been talking about what the world as we want it to be looks like, and this is what we see around us and what we see in ourselves: *I am limitless; I am in control; I decide what is good*. But what we really know, who we really are, and what the world really is is that *it has limits*, that *we are not in control* of everything; and today, especially, we are going to talk about number three, about that at our core—we truly are people who are *broken*.

Our most favorite word in English is possibly “Me”. We really do enjoy talking about ourselves. If you end up going to a party and nobody asks you about yourself, it feels strange. You do not get to say anything.

Maybe you are not like that. Maybe you understand that when you turn that “m” upside down, you get “we”. *Turn your ‘me’ into ‘we’*, and that is what we hope to teach our kids, that is what we hope that we do, and I bet we do that quite a bit. We consider the “we” much more than the “me”. For example, when I must do things at home that I really do not enjoy doing. You know those chores, the things you must do to keep your household running that you just do not really enjoy. You know, I go about those thinking, “I am going to do them because they need to get done,” and then I move to the “we” where I am like, “Well, my family needs this. They need me to get these things done so that everything works the way it is, so everybody can get where they need to go.” But then invariably I end up turning it back to “me” once I get tired, once I get fatigued, once I hit a roadblock or an obstacle, and I think, “Gosh, I really do not like doing this.” What is it for you guys? Dishes, laundry,

mowing the lawn? For me, it is putting together furniture—getting everything together, putting together furniture, and following those directions—those directions, really? Who makes these directions? You end up with too many pieces of one, things are scratched, and I always go back to “me” by the end. I think this is not worth my time.

You see, no matter what we are doing, we invariably take our thoughts back to ourselves. Even at church today, I bet on the ride here, sitting down in the pews today, getting the kids situated in Sunday school, some of the thoughts turned inwardly. And this is just who we are. This is part of what it means to be human in a fallen world. We live in this way. In Latin, there is a phrase, *Incurvatus in se*, which means, “Turned inward onto oneself.” This is how we live. Turned inward upon ourselves. Martin Luther brought this out in some of his works repeatedly. He said this is just who we are as humans. We are always thinking about ourselves. Our default posture is navel-gazing. No matter what is happening outside of ourselves or in our world, we end up turning it inwards. This has implications for the way that we see the people around us, the way we view the world, and the way that we have expectations of others.

If in the end, everything really is about me, then, well, how much do we truly care about being kind and compassionate? About giving up ourselves for others? You see, a lot is going on here. In this book that we have been following through called *Low Anthropology*, David Zahl says this: *Human beings are egocentric*. Same kind of idea. *Curbed in on ourselves*. Crucially, being egocentric is not a neutral trait. In other words, it is not just nothing. There is value to it. Is it good or is it bad to be curved in on ourselves? Does it cause us to do good things or bad things when we think only of ourselves? Who decides what is good? I do not know. It seems like today we have many options to answer this question. Maybe we ourselves get to decide what is good. Maybe the

way that we look at the world, the way that we see how things are going, the way that we understand our relationships with others, the way the character traits that we enjoy and like, maybe that is what truly is good.

Do we get to decide this? In a world where we are all curved in on ourselves, and we are all focused on me more than anything else, then the answer is absolutely “Yes, I get to decide what is good for me. I get to decide what is good for the world.” My expectations need to be met by others because that is what is good.”

Now, let’s talk a little bit about things that are preferences. Let’s talk about art. I enjoy art, and here at our National Gallery of Art, you can go see Paul Gauguin’s *Self-Portrait*. It is fascinating because he was a post-Impressionist painter. He was trying to tell the Impressionists they did not know what good art was, which— anybody Impressionist fans? I think we have a lot, right? Impressionism is pretty fantastic. But Paul said, “Look, no, it is something else. Let me paint myself the way that I see myself.” And look what he did. He put a halo on himself. That is pretty fantastic. If you were painting a self-portrait, would you do that? If you were painting a portrait of your spouse, would you do that? Kids? Your pastor? He’s got a halo. And what do you see next to him? There are some fruits, and around his hand is a serpent. At the very beginning of all things, this temptation to be like God cropped up its ugly head. And Adam and Eve gave into it, and when they ate that fruit of which they were not supposed to, they got rid of that halo. They got rid of that perfection, and sin crept into their lives. And from that point onward, this is what we call original sin.

Now, it is part of our lives. And that original sin keeps pointing us inward. It points our eyes, our hearts, and our minds toward ourselves. So much so that eventually we believe, we start to believe, and we tell other people that we believe, that truth is found within, that goodness is found within every person, when in reality, it is quite the opposite.

I am not here to debate art with you. I am not here to debate whether this is good art or not. Because that is not the type of good that we are talking about. We can have differences and enjoy different types of music, art, sports, and all that stuff. That is not under question today. Instead, what is under question is how we understand what is good. And if we are turned in on ourselves, and if sin is a part of our life that we just cannot get away from, then can we honestly say that we get to determine what is good? Can we truly make that happen?

Jesus comes to us today like He did His disciples, and He wants to refocus our eyes. He says, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:12-13). Notice who’s active in all this. Notice what is happening? Where are the directions? Is this all about pointing inward or is it about pointing elsewhere?

He goes on. He says, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you”* (John 15:16) And this may seem like a very selfish kind of verse because if we just ask the Father whatever we want, He’ll give it to us in Jesus. Because it is all about me. It is all about what I want. But we have already seen that is not the case at all. And in context, that is not what this verse is saying. What Jesus is trying to do is He’s trying to refocus ourselves, to pull us out from ourselves, to see Him, and to see the people around us. He’s pulling us upward and outward. He has chosen us, not so that we would get everything we want from a God who is like a vending machine, just push the right buttons and you get the right things out, but instead He focuses us on Himself, a God who gave Himself up, who emptied Himself, who went to the cross, just for us, so that our fruit will be seen in the lives of others.

You realize this, the bearing of fruit in the scripture is not about what comes from you, it is about what you see in others. It is about how God is working through you to bring His goodness, His peace, His love, His hope, and His joy, in the lives of the people that He puts you with. So that, all these things Jesus says He's commanded you, so that, what will happen? Is it so that you will truly believe in yourself more deeply? Is it so that you will truly understand maybe a better system of philosophy so that you can determine what is good and help other people? See your system as being the good system? I do not think that is it at all. He says specifically, "I am commanding all of these things to you so that you will love each other" (v. 17). And this love is not just something that just kind of you think about. It is not like that. It is not surface level. This is the love Jesus puts directly with His sacrifice. He says this is an emptying of oneself. Complete emptying, so that if you were to turn inward on yourself, what would you find?

All these things are for the purpose of loving each other. When we realize that sin has caused us to curve inward on ourselves, when we understand that that is a problem, that we cannot get away from it as hard as we try, we must refocus on Jesus Himself. He is the one who gives us the grace, the Spirit, to turn outward, to see Him as being the King and the one who commands and to see the ones around us as the people to whom we are called. No longer does "me" have the same meaning. Instead of "me" being all about me and everything about me, "me" turns into a "What can I do to help?" "What can I do to serve?" "What can I do because Jesus loves me so much to love the people around us?" No more do you wonder who you are, but now you know who you are. As I said earlier, Jesus went to the cross to show us what it means to love, but then on Easter, He rose again from the dead. And He gave you His life. He gave you His life to be lived today throughout all of eternity. And so, what He says to you is when you turn inward, because of Jesus, no longer do you see what you want to see. Instead, you see who He says

that you are. He calls you His son, His daughter. He calls you to be His. He calls you to be the heir to His kingdom. He calls you to be the one through whom the Spirit will work love, peace, and joy in this world. That is who you are. That is who He says that you have become. However, we often fall short of this. We see this more clearly in other people, but we see it in ourselves as well.

Would you say this with me? *I am broken*. I am broken. It is when we realize that we are broken, that this tendency to turn inward on ourselves will not get us where we want to go, that we can see how good the grace of Jesus is. Paul saw this, the one who was broken, so broken. He saw this and wrote this for us. “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:19-20a). Now, when you turn inward, what do you see? As one who has been loved and redeemed by Jesus, what do you see? You see Christ. You see Christ. And what does Jesus call you to be and to do? Go out and love the people around you. This is who we are. When we focus on ourselves, we do not see the world truly. We do not see it as we truly are. Jesus calls us to refocus on Him, and Him alone. Nothing else can show us what is good. Nothing else can show us what is true. Nothing else will help us achieve the things that we feel that we are called to achieve. It is only through Christ alone. Jesus sees our selfishness and our “curved inward”, and He responds by giving us Himself. When we focus on Him, when we see His goodness as being the standard for all, when we see that we are redefined, when we look at ourselves by who He is, when we know that even in our brokenness, and Jesus gave Himself for us and calls us His own, we are encouraged. That through the power of His Spirit, we are able to live as we are, limited, not in control, broken, but we are able to live for Him, doing the things of His kingdom, working through the power of His Spirit, to do the good things that He has called us to do. No

longer do we need to look inward to find the power to do all this. Instead, we look to Jesus alone.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to take this idea of looking at ourselves and the world as we are, and we are going to talk about this in ways that make sense within your lives today. We are going to make it make sense when it comes to forgiveness, when it comes to looking at grace, and many other ways over the next few weeks.

So please, think about these things as we ponder the ways that we are. Struggle with them a bit. Remember, though, that you are His. He calls you by name. He loves you. Calls you to see Him as well.

Let's close in prayer. *Heavenly Father, we thank You for being with us today, for allowing us to focus on Your Word, for allowing us to see that even though we are broken, even though we desire the ability to determine what is good, Lord, you come to us, and you forgive us. You call us your own, and you make us new. By the power of your Spirit, we ask, Lord, that you would allow us to see ourselves, as Paul says, that no longer do we live for ourselves, but we know that we live for Christ alone. In all of this, we pray, Lord, that you would be with us. Guard our hearts and our minds and our souls as we seek to love those around us. With your great love we pray it all in Jesus' name. Amen.*