

## THE MIND OF GOD

Isaiah 55:8-9; Arno Norman Funeral; July 814, 2023

When I would visit Arno and he would look at me, I would look into his eyes and wonder, “What’s on your mind, Arno? What are you thinking about?” I could see questioning in his eyes. “Do I know you? What are you doing here?” Arno was a big man who needed to be convinced that something needed to be done. When he didn’t understand what was going on around him or why people were trying to get him to do something, he could become less than cooperative, though I never saw him be anything but gentle.

As we saw the disease of dementia progress, other questions might have come to mind: “What was God thinking allowing this disease to slowly, but surely, rob Arno of his abilities? What was on God’s mind?” As Christians, we trust that God is working together for good for those who love Him, according to His plan, but I’m sure than none of us would have thought to make a plan such as this.

With this in mind, I chose our Old Testament Reading from Isaiah 55 where God comes right out and states that His way of thinking is not like ours.

**For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are My ways higher than your ways  
and My thoughts than your thoughts.**

Though God does say that His thoughts and ways are **“as the heavens are higher than the earth”** and way above anything we can think or do, this does not mean that His ways and thoughts are unknowable.

Isaiah tells us that it is the **unrighteous man** in his thoughts, the one without faith in God, who cannot discern the mind of God. Arno was a righteous man and knew the mind of God, which is set on showing **compassion** to us. The mind of God is revealed to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus that God demonstrates that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. God’s thoughts are way beyond anything we could think up, for it is God’s way to have compassion on us in Jesus.

Who but God could think of becoming man in Jesus Christ to take on Himself our sin and the results of sin, including dementia leading to death? People often question if specific illnesses and tragedies are God punishing them or their loved ones for certain sins. In no way am I claiming that about Arno's suffering. Why some people and not others are struck with certain things are known only in the mind of God and are hidden from us. We know the underlying cause of all suffering: our own sin and the sin of others. But most importantly, we know God's solution for our sin and the sin of others: to place it on His Son Jesus Christ. It is the mind of God in Christ to save us from those things that condemn us to death, the things we have no power to stop or overcome.

While we might feel frustrated and helpless at watching a loved one lose one thing after another not being able to stop it from happening, it must be much worse for the one losing those things. Does God realize what is happening to us? Remember how Jesus was nailed to the cross while knowing that His death was coming soon. While Jesus suffered, some people came up and mocked Him: **"He saved others; He cannot save Himself"** (Mk 15:31). It was the mind of God for His Son to lose all strength and ability and even His life for our sake. Jesus gave up all He had in order to save us.

I have heard people say that remaining alive is pointless when they can't do anything anymore. Their strength, health, and abilities are all gone and they think continuing to live is worthless. They question: "Why can't I just die? Why won't God just take me now?" And those watching a loved one go through this might ask the same questions. Why does the suffering have to drag on? What's the point? What is God thinking?

Especially when we have reached the limit of our endurance to care for loved ones who are suffering, or when we are suffering, and we start to think that there is no point to suffering, we need to look to Jesus and His suffering and death on the cross. Was that suffering pointless? Jesus was no sinner and did not deserve what He was getting. What good did it do for a perfectly sinless and innocent man to die in such a way? It did Jesus no good to suffer and die that way, but it saved us who also suffer and die. Jesus suffered and died for us. We know the mind of God.

For many years Arno was a farmer, something I have no personal experience with. As a non-farmer, I am always astounded when I hear how much it costs to buy seeds to plant, which are not sold by the bushel, bag or pound, but by the individual seed! And what does the farmer do with that seed? He puts it in the ground knowing that once he does that, the seed has lost all its value unless it sprouts, grows, matures, and produces grain that is brought in at the harvest.

Jesus referred to that happening in farming and compared it to His death and resurrection and connected that to the death and resurrection of Christians who follow Him in faith. From John 12, our Gospel Reading, we heard Jesus say: **The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.** It was Jesus' glory to be lifted up on the cross, suffer, die and be buried. What good was that? Jesus went on: **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

Jesus is that grain of wheat that was planted in the earth at His death in order to sprout and grow at His resurrection to bear the fruit of Christians who die to sin with Him and rise to live with Him forever. Arno is one of them, one of us. The seed of God's Word in Christ was planted in Arno and grew up to faith in Jesus and lives. Even though Arno's body has died, Jesus promises that all who believe in Him will share in His resurrection. **Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also.** We will hear those words again as we stand by Arno's grave in a little while.

The mind of God was to forgive Arno's sins in Jesus and bring him through his suffering and death to grant him eternal life. God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. Thank God for that! Amen.