

What would people say if they could hear what you were thinking? What if they knew all or even some of the thoughts that go through your mind? At one time or another, we've all had thoughts of selfishness, anger, greed, desire; thoughts of trying to make ourselves look better than others, sinful thoughts that would make us ashamed of ourselves if anyone else knew just what we were thinking. If people knew what was really going on inside of your mind, what would they think about you? What would **God** think of you?

Bo Giertz in his book, The Hammer of God, writes about a pastor in Seden who came face-to-face with those exact questions one morning many years ago. It was early Sunday morning before Divine Service when Pastor Fridfeldt was given the urgent call to go at once to the home of a man named Frans, who lay in his bed dying.

Now Frans was known in the congregation as a godly, soft-spoken man. And when he did speak it was always with mature understanding about spiritual things. As the pastor made his way to Frans' home, he thought that his ministering to the dying man would not be especially difficult. After all, he knew that Frans was a faithful Christian. No doubt he would be well prepared for his journey into eternity. When the pastor arrived at his home he found that Frans was indeed very sick and close to death. When he tried to talk to Frans, there was no sign of recognition. Occasionally the old man would mumble something, but for the most part he was unresponsive. Frans' daughter was there at the bedside with her father. She told the pastor that when she arrived, she had asked her dying father if he was thinking about Jesus. He answered, "I can't think any longer, Lena, but I know that Jesus is thinking of me." The daughter cried. The pastor sat in silence. He thought that the truth that Jesus is thinking of the sick one would be like a comforting pillow on which to rest one's head when death is near.

Just then something startled Pastor Fridfeldt. Lena, the daughter heard it, too. The dying man was speaking, speaking plainly and clearly. But Frans was not speaking of Jesus. Rather he was speaking vulgarities. He was speaking about things he had done when he had been in the military. In his dying hallucinations Frans began talking in a rough and crude manner. Once he even touched on religious matters saying in a clear, proud voice, "She does not pray as much as I."

The pastor couldn't help thinking how we're all alike deep down inside. We all have the same pride, the same jealousy, the same sinful, unloving heart. The pastor began to wonder how it would go for Frans. As long as he was

conscious, the dying man seemed to have faith, but beneath the thin shell of his conscious faith this dark evil still dwelt within the heart.

In the next moment the pastor was gripped with a terrifying thought. What if **he** were to have a stroke someday and be lying in his bed delirious? What words might come out of his mouth? Improper rhymes he had learned as a boy? Coarse and terrible stories that he had told as a high school youth? What about his conceitedness and his ever-present eagerness to keep up appearance and make a good name for himself. All of these things filled up his soul. So what if all of this should come bursting forth out of him in **his** dying moments, when he was surrounded by family and friends? What anguish would that bring to his loved ones? How would it go with **his** soul? Wouldn't all the congregation members who ever heard him preach think that his Christianity was nothing but a sham hypocrisy?

And really, what **was** it other than that? Here he was supposed to bring comfort to this dying man, and he realized that he was as full of sin. The only difference was that he still had possession of his full senses, and in the interest of his good reputation, he must cover up tightly all the sinfulness within. As for the Frans, the lid had fallen off, and everything lay bare. The thoughts of his heart and mind that he had been able to hide were now being made known.

Soon the old man took a series of deep breaths. His chin had fallen and his mouth hung wide open. Then... everything was still. Frans was dead. Then with a look of anguish on her face Lena asked the pastor, "Do you believe my father died a blessed death?" That question pierced Pastor Fridfelt's heart like a spear. What should he say? He had wanted to ask the same thing himself.

"God is very good," was his evasive reply. Pastor Fridfelt tried to make his voice as reassuring as possible. Then he looked back at the clock and felt a rush of panic. In 30 minutes it would be time for church! It was Transfiguration Day and yet he felt as far away from the Mount of Transfiguration as anyone could. He ought to be thinking of his sermon, but he could not get his mind off of the dead man.

Death, he thought, could be so strange, even for a Christian. So much of the old sinful nature could be left in a man. If such a man **could** be saved, on what grounds would it be? His faith? But that, as they had seen, was gone at the same moment his consciousness was clouded; and underneath it all lay sin, like rotted wood underneath the floor covering. That evil nature was there to the very end.

What about himself? Didn't he have the exact same corrupted nature as Frans? Wasn't the only difference that at this moment, his will and thought had

stretched a thin coating of faith across the darkness of his sin? As long as this thin, trembling layer of faith remained, he was a believing soul. What if that thin shell should be broken and shattered? What if hardening of the arteries should set in, and he should be unable to direct his will and speech?

It was with those thoughts of anxiety and doubt that Pastor Fridfeldt entered the Sanctuary on that Transfiguration Sunday. He felt like a man walking to the execution chamber. He just couldn't clear his mind of the dark gloomy thoughts of his own sinfulness and death.

A little later as he read the Gospel lesson for Transfiguration Sunday to the congregation, it began to be made clear for him: "And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. <sup>2</sup> And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." <sup>5</sup> He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." <sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." <sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." (Matthew 17:1-8)

"They saw no one but **Jesus only.**" That was it! Those words hit home! The pastor finally realized that he had not been looking to Jesus, but rather at his own sinful life. He had taken account of his sins and failures, but he had lost sight of Jesus. He had been directing all of his attention onto himself rather than onto Christ. That failure to look to *Christ* had been his undoing.

Then, with new-found clarity, Pastor Fridfeldt spoke these words to the congregation: "It is a blessed thing when the faithful soul in prayer fixes his uplifted eyes on Jesus and Jesus only. It is blessed when he does not look around him to lay hold of his own scattered thoughts, nor behind him at Satan who threatens him with the thought that his prayers are of no use, nor within himself at his own laziness and lack of devotion. Instead, he looks to Jesus who sits at the right hand of God and goes to God on his behalf. When faith is working in a person, it helps the person to stop looking at himself and see nothing but Jesus and Jesus only and what God has done for us through Jesus' suffering and death."

“In the same way, when God looks at you and me He does not see our sins. Instead He sees His own dear Son who stretched out His arms on the cross to make payment for the sins of the whole world.” The pastor realized that this then was the solution: *sin always remaining, yet always atoned for*. As Pastor Fridfelt preached this he realized that yes there was salvation for the Frans and there was also salvation for himself. He pictured a large cross rising heavenward and overshadowing the whole community. The cross is an eternally valid and binding sacrifice, strong enough to cancel out God’s fierce judgment. It is a merciful love, stretching out its arms to evil hearts in which sin is still in motion.

Jesus and only Jesus was and is the answer. Dear friends in Christ it’s just the same for you and me here this morning as it was in this story from over 100 years ago. The same Jesus is the One, who once we have been brought to faith, works in our hearts through His Word and Sacraments, little by little, day by day, to transform our hearts and lives to live for Him. It’s not found in our own self-disciplined, pious attempts to be holy in God’s sight and to put on a good image for others. Rather it is found in believing in the transforming power of Jesus and Jesus only.

Jesus and Jesus only-- He is the foundation of our faith. When your eyes are opened to see the state of your sins and the condemnation that you deserve, God wants **you** to see **nothing else**, to **believe** nothing else, to **build your hope** on nothing else other than Jesus and **Jesus only**. With Him you are safe, now and always. Amen!