

Behold with Eyes and Ears the Transfiguration of our Lord

God's grace, mercy and peace are yours through Jesus, you Glorious Lord and Savior, Amen.

About a week ago, there was a sporting event on TV; some big game being held in CA. For certain folks it was a mountain-top moment, it didn't get any higher or better. News reporters were everywhere; Vegas got its two-cents in; but the super stress was on the marketing departments. After all, the real reasons to watch are the commercials. And when you consider that just 1 single second of commercial airtime costs an average of \$300,000 per second - those had better be the most memorable, most impactful, dare-I-say-it – the most life changing seconds ever. From the crazy and bazaar... to retro throw-back... to the ones that tug at your heart – those commercials did all they could to hold your attention. BEHOLD! Look at us. BEHOLD! Listen to what we have to say. BEHOLD! Your life will be better if you buy... What was kind of funny is that I asked our staff on Tuesday what their favorite Superbowl commercial was... there was a long pause... umm... that one that ahh... I guess those commercials weren't as impactful as was hoped.

In our Gospel lesson for this Transfiguration Sunday, the Almighty God really wanted to get the attention of Jesus' disciples Peter, James and John. He didn't spend millions per minute; he just had Jesus lead them on an afternoon hike up a high mountain. This wasn't than a sight-seeing tour or decompression trip, God had very important things for these three to BEHOLD... and not just with their eyes, also with their ears. While this event was truly a blessing for Jesus, it also served to prepare the disciple for the months to come. In truth – it was a blessing to them for the rest of their days.

Jesus invites us on that same journey today, climbing up to this blessed solitary place to BEHOLD *with our Eyes* our Savior in his Transfigured glory, and to BEHOLD *with our Ears* the Words of our Savior God – who is preparing to accomplish the Salvation of the World. And, just as it served the disciples, so we too are served by our Savior for the rest of our days, as we remember these mountain top moments.

BEHOLD! – It's one of those words that we don't use too often. “Behold! I am going to do the dishes. Behold! I just received a text on my phone.” Nevertheless BEHOLD! is a real attention-getter word. Stop! Look up! Listen! Advertising specialists use this all the time. They might not say “Behold!” but the instant you see Clydesdale horses, you know... or when you see big white fluffy polar bears, BEHOLD! you're thirsting the refreshing taste of the one and only - Coca Cola! Of course, now I did something I shouldn't have, because your mind is elsewhere... thinking about which commercial you liked best... thinking about when church is over and you can stop at the store and pick up... We had a professor in college that often said we had that attention span of gerbils... I never owned a gerbil, but I gathered that it wasn't a complement.

Being gerbil-minded or becoming easily distracted isn't itself sinful... but how often doesn't Satan or our own sinful heart use this against us – to distract us from what's most important? We're having our quiet devotion time reading our Bible – and DING – instantly I've got to answer that text, and then just scroll for a little while. You're deep in prayer and ... did I forgot to switch the laundry?? It's Sunday morning, you're sitting in church and _____ any myriad of things can draw your heart astray from the very life-giving Word of God. The real danger comes when we let those voices drown out our Savior's voice... and instead we allow our selfish hearts linger upon the worldly... the materialistic... the ungodly... missing what our Lord has for us.

Peter, James and John had the privilege of a lifetime, far beyond Superbowl tickets on the 50 yard line. They had a front row seat to Jesus in his full glory! In Luke's account we hear that at this time - *Peter and his companions were very sleepy!* It's almost unthinkable how one could let sleepiness overtake them as Jesus is speaking with Moses and Elijah... who would ever dose off when hearing the Word of God??? BEHOLD, Peter! Behold with your eyes... Moses and Elijah, alive and well. Consider what this means! There is life after death; the goal of your faith is real! Here's living proof! Peter, BEHOLD! ...pay close attention with your ears because there's an insanely important conversation happening: “*They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.*” (Luke 9:31)

The subject of their talk was the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the greatest and highest theme in heaven and on earth, talked over by dwellers in heaven before dwellers on earth with Him who was to accomplish the redemption of man. Truly this is something to BEHOLD with eyes fully open and ears fully alert.

God's gracious game-plan of Salvation was being diagramed and detailed before their very eyes! Yes Jesus would suffer horribly; yes he would endure the worst punishment imaginable - the cross, upon which he would die for the sins of the world. And Yes, after 3 days, Jesus would rise in glory and ascend to his Throne on High as King of kings and Lord of Lords! All sin atoned. The Price paid in Full. Heaven's gate open to all who believe. Eternal, everlasting, glory. Behold this Good News!

But behold... Peter, walking up from his sleepiness and drowsiness, missing the majesty of this moment, opens his mouth and inserts his foot. "Three tents, Lord! Let's have three shelters!" Mark's Gospel records this analysis, "*He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.*" Because they were not paying attention, neither seeing with their eyes nor listening with their ears, and because they were sinners in the presence of the Holy God – fear and terror overcame them.

Yet here is our God, with another BEHOLD – in fact in the Greek – this word appears twice in verse 5, (though it's not seen in the NIV translation) ⁵ *While he was still speaking, BEHOLD a bright cloud enveloped them, and BEHOLD a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* God graciously halts his confused conversing, for BEHOLD – a cloud, a bright cloud, envelopes. Their voices fell silent; their ears were open. BEHOLD – God the Father gives one of the best 4-part sermons ever composed. Let's listen with our ears.

Part 1) This is My Son! These words take us back to Jesus' baptism, and back to Psalm 2. It's a wondrous miracle: God the Father... creator of all things, God the Son, in the flesh... redeemer of mankind, present before them.

Part 2) Whom I Love! – This is that highest love – agape – unconditional, selfless, perfect love. Between God the Father and God the Son we have on display exactly what perfect agape love sounds like, looks like, acts like... a love on the cross for all to see and for all to hear – that it is finished!

Part 3) With Him I am Well-Pleased! There were many who were not pleased with Jesus. Those massive crowds who had been following him recently heard Jesus speak of suffering and death, as did his disciples. We're told that many fell away, and even his own disciples were not pleased with this foolish talk. What mattered above all, is that God the Father has given his full stamp of approval upon every second of Jesus' life – from his taking on human flesh, to his teaching and preaching... to his upcoming journey to Jerusalem – God was well pleased. And finally...

Part 4) Listen to Him! This one really hits home – and it needed to, just as it needs to for us. More than anything, now is the time for listening. Now is the time for grasping what our Savior is saying and doing. Now is the time to be silent and pay close attention to the Wondrous Love that is on display!

The disciples reacted the way any sinner would react in the presence of the holy God – they fell face down on the ground, in fear. And it's at this point our eyes BEHOLD the amazing love of our Savior who saw his dear disciples in fear. Filled with compassion, filled with love, Jesus came to them. He personally touched them; He spoke these reassuring words, "Get up. Don't be afraid." And what did their eyes behold? Matthew puts it so perfectly, "***When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.***"

Isn't that our heart's greatest desire? That we would see Jesus. That one day we will open our eyes and see only our Savior. No more devilish distractions beaoning... no more shameful worldly temptations alluring... no more self-center desires calling... just eyes and ears and hearts and minds focused on Jesus. That day is coming – which is all the more reason why it is so good for us to be here, not just today, but every Sunday. Here we see his glory. Here we hear his promises as we sing his praises. Here we experience his personal touch in Word and in Sacrament. Here, Jesus puts his name on us through the waters of baptism. Here Jesus gives us body and blood. Here Jesus says to us, "Go in peace, my child, your sins are forgiven."

As we now go down from this mountain, as we enter the season of Lent – continue to reflect upon these mountaintop moments. Keep on "listening to him" each day with personal and family devotions. Continue to gather regularly as a family of believers; the opportunities are numerous, both on Sundays and throughout the week. Each one of these gives us the opportunity to BEHOLD Jesus – seeing the eternal Glory of God and hearing his precious promises, reminding us of the glory that is ours through faith in Jesus. Amen.