

Seeing Change(?)

You've often heard me wonder aloud how different things would be if people could actually behold with their own eyes the fully glorified Christ standing in their midst, personally absolving them of their sins, preaching the sermon, administering Holy Communion, and baptizing even the littlest of children. Man... if only people could see the full glory of God present and at work in all these ordinary and unassuming means and places. If only they could see Jesus. ***That would change 'em!*** Well... I'm standing before you today, admitting that I'm wrong. Such seeing would most likely not change them.

The reason I say this is because this is exactly what we see happening at the Transfiguration (and in the days and weeks to follow). Here atop this mountain God is essentially "pulling back the veil" and revealing to His disciples who this Jesus really and truly is—***the Almighty Lord and Savior in the flesh***. Keep in mind that it was only a mere eight days before this miraculous Transfiguration that St. Peter ***rebukes*** Jesus when Jesus begins to tell them that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be killed and on the third day rise again (the very 'exodus' plan of salvation that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about at the Transfiguration). "*Not on my watch, Jesus! This will never happen as long as I have something to say about it!*" Imagine: Peter believes that Jesus is Lord, and yet is ***hell-bent*** on making sure that the Lord doesn't do the very thing He was sent to do. (And—yes—I say this very purposefully. "*Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me. You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*" Peter was truly hell-bent on "saving" Jesus.)

This is why God pulls back the veil on the divinity of Christ on that mountaintop. God wants these men to see and to know that Jesus has God's favor and is, in fact, ***fully God***. And as Almighty God in-the-flesh, all that is about to go down in the days and weeks to come is all part of His good and gracious will. It's all a very necessary part of His plan for our salvation. He is showing these yahoos that ***He's in absolute control. He knows what He's doing.*** "*This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!*"

And yet...we know how this turns out, don't we? The disciples see with their own eyes this miraculous display of divine power and glory and Life, and yet they aren't gathered around that Good Friday cross praising God for their salvation as the sacrifice for all their sin is being lifted up and put on full display. No. They're in hiding. They've seen all they needed to see, and they're terrified. They've hit the ejection seat. ***They're in full self-preservation mode, fleeing into self-imposed quarantine in order to save their own hides.*** Even the great St. Peter has tried, not once but three times, to save his own hide, denying that he even knew Jesus. Of course, we don't even have to look that far out to see how the disciples

already fail in the command to listen to Jesus. St. Peter is still shaking out the cobwebs on the Transfiguration mount when he tells Jesus that he and the boys will construct three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so that they can stay put. Peter is too busy talking, *dictating his plans for God*, to actually listen to what Jesus has said and will say. “*My kingdom is not of this world....*”

Now, we know the rest of the story, don't we? We know and understand the *absolute necessity* of Christ's suffering and death. Knowing what we know, we would have no problem in telling Peter to just “shut up!” But...not so fast. It's easy for us to think that something as powerful as the miraculous transfiguration display of Christ would shut you up and cause you to pay attention and listen, but that's not always the case with God's people. Remember: The Israelites actually *wanted* Moses to veil up. **They preferred to not see.** The glow of his face—the glory of God reflecting off him like the moon reflects the glorious rays of the sun—scared them. They didn't want to behold that glory. *And why?* It's actually pretty simple when you think about it. It's easier to hear/dismiss things from just another guy—especially things you don't like—than it is to hear/dismiss these same things from the Lord Himself. With the veil up, it's just Moses speaking, right? There's no glow. There's nothing to fear. However... with the glory of the Lord shining forth and in your face, things necessarily have to change, which is why Moses was unveiled when he spoke the Word of the Lord to them. He wasn't giving his opinions. He was simply relaying and reflecting the glory of God. God was really and truly shining in their dark midst... and that's what was so scary to the people.

Let's be honest: It's the same way with us. Look around. Look to the font. Look to the altar. Look to the pulpit, lectern, and rail. **Here is the Lord.** Now, do we behold the *full* glory of God? No. I'd like to imagine how different our worship would be if people actually beheld Christ Himself, in all His glory, administering the bread and wine and saying, “*Take and eat; take and drink; this IS My body and My blood,*” but like I said at the beginning, I don't think such seeing would actually change people. *People only see what they want to see (or prefer to not see).* Even if we take Jesus out of the equation (which should **NEVER** be the case), if we could actually see our departed loved ones at the heavenly side of our Lord's feast table, would we not drop everything and flock to be in their presence at every opportunity given us? But we don't. We don't see any of this, do we? Oftentimes it's because we don't want to see such things, for seeing such things would mean that things would have to change. Don't get me wrong: **This IS exactly what Christ says it is. This is 100% Jesus!** This isn't a mere symbol, nor is it a miniscule fraction or tidbit of Christ. It's 100% Christ! However...it's *veiled*, isn't it? Christ veils Himself and His glory in, with, and under the ordinary elements of Word, Water, Bread, and Wine.

And that's where the problems arise. We don't see Christ. We see only the veil. We see only ordinary elements. We see only ordinary men speaking and

administering these ordinary elements in rather ordinary and unspectacular ways. The heavens don't rend. No heavenly cloud. No booming voice from heaven. No radiated glory. **None of that.** Honestly, though: *Would we really want all that?* After all, it's much easier to keep doing what we want to do when the veil is up. It's whole lot easier to justify our sin when the veil is up and things seem so ordinary and humdrum. We would *never* blow off Jesus, but...it's not so difficult to blow off church, is it? A common problem facing God's people right now in these dark days of COVID: YouTube is just as good, right? In fact, Virtual Jesus is better/safer (we reason)! No worries about masks and germs when you're home all alone, quarantined away behind locked doors. (Where have we heard that before...?) It's not so difficult to blow off Christ's means of grace when all we *choose* to see is the ordinary elements. It's a whole lot easier to justify the sin of blowing off our Lord when it's not so obvious that our Lord is right here...for us.

But rather than continue down this road, let us focus our attention on the cross of Christ. This is where/how God works repentant, life-saving, life-giving change. Fix your eyes on that which is absolutely *unveiled and unvarnished*. God doesn't hide a thing here! Here is God's full wrath against sin, on full display, for all the world to see. Here is God's incomprehensible love for us sinners, on full display, for all the world to see. Here is God's only-begotten Son, nailed to a cross, blood and water pouring forth from His side, all for us. Look and *LISTEN* to what He declares from this mountaintop: *"It is finished!"*

Our heavenly Father's Word rings just as true for us as it did for those men on that mountaintop so long ago. *Listen to Him!* It is finished. Listen to Him, for it is this mountaintop victory that He brings to us in, with, and under His veiled elements of Word, Water, Bread and Wine. And that's just it: I can't make you see/recognize your almighty God and Lord in, with, and under these veiled elements. Only God can, which He does through the working of His Holy Spirit, who creates and sustains faith through the *HEARING* of His Word. *Remember: It wasn't until Pentecost that Peter and the boys were finally able to "see" the necessity of Christ's suffering and death... and rejoice and proclaim without fear.

Listen to Him. What do you hear? *"Do you not know that all of us who are baptized are baptized into His death and resurrection?"* His victory is our victory; the *cruciform, side-pierced victory* that He brings to us and bestows upon us through the washing of water with the Word. Even in the midst of all the sorrow and despair and sickness and fear, we are the victors. Don't trust your eyes. Trust your ears. Listen to Him. *"Take and eat; take and drink; this IS My body and blood, for the forgiveness of all your sin. As often as you do this, remember what I have said."* Listen to Him, for it is through the listening of faith that the Holy Spirit opens our eyes of faith to see and recognize and hold fast to our Lord and Savior in our very midst; our Immanuel.

Folks: There's nothing more I can say that hasn't already been said. ***Here is Christ. Listen to Him.*** Listen to all that He says to you, for He says and does these things because He loves you, ***and here's the proof, on full display, for all the world to see.*** By God's grace, may you hear and may you see, and may you flee to Him, hold fast to Him, and be at peace, even as you suffer and bear your crosses, ever holding fast in faith to all that you have heard and seen and received from the Lord Himself. **AMEN**