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Lent: Behold! Behold! Behold!

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Lent: Behold! Behold! Behold!

Abstract

"How, today, will we behold the Lamb of God and make way for him to take away the sin of the world, to reframe and heal how we see one another?"

Posting about the meaning of the word "behold" in Scripture from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/lent-behold-behold-behold/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

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 inallthings.org/lent-behold-behold-behold/

Leah Zuidema

This is post #7 of 8 in the series “*Lenten Reflections*”

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. John 19: 25-27, NKJV

The word *behold* is not one that we often use. If you are looking for amusement, trying working it into your conversations today. What might you ask others to “Behold!”? Somehow, our everyday actions don’t seem worthy of this word. “Behold, I picked up a gallon of milk on the way home” just doesn’t seem to work.

Perhaps *behold* sounds to you like a word of biblical proportions. It is true that the word was used often in older Bible translations: a quick search at BibleGateway.com shows that *behold* appears 1,298 times in the original King James version (published in the early 1600s), and 1,242 times in the 1599 Geneva Bible. But *behold* is used less and less in contemporary translations. In the New King James version, *behold* is used only about half as often—586 times. And in translations that more closely echo contemporary English, the word is a rarity, appearing only 27 times in the New Revised Standard Version, once in the New International Version, and not at all in The Message.

Reading across translations lets us notice different turns of phrase—and may shed light on things in the text that we might not otherwise notice. That is the case in today’s passage: although the word *behold* does not appear in the NIV translation, in the NKJV, it is used two times in the seven English words recording the meaning of what Jesus said in this moment. This repetition draws our attention: “*Woman, behold your son!*” Then He said to the disciple, “*Behold your mother!*”

Perhaps we’ve lost something with the disappearance of the word *behold* from our Scripture translations and its corresponding erasure from our culture. Do we really know how to behold? How to stop still, to cease all else, to give our full attention and searching gaze to what is before us? In our multi-tasking, fast-paced world, we are in the habit of looking everywhere at once—with the result that nothing (and no one) truly has our deep and undivided attention. We are so captivated (that is, held captive – [Colossians 2:8](#)) by new ideas, activities, and social connections that we forget to stop and behold.

But in today’s passage, we are asked *to behold*. As we read these verses from John 19, we cannot help but stop and behold Jesus; his agony on the cross is so vivid that we cannot look away. We also behold the little group of followers there. And yet Jesus asks us to see even more. For the scene repainted in John 19:25-27 is more than it might appear from the dialogue recorded in the NIV (“Woman, here is your son”; “Here is your mother”). In the NIV translation, we hear Jesus naming a new, familial relationship between his mother and the disciple that he loved. Yet the weight of his words sinks even deeper through the older language: “Behold your son! Behold your mother!”

By commanding them to behold one another, Jesus directed Mary and John to see one another in a new

light—the light of the cross. We should hear this “sermon at the Cross” (as Bruner puts it in [his commentary](#) on the gospel of John) in the context of [John 1:29](#), where John the Baptist preached, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus’ ministry was, and is, all about taking away sin and offering healing in its place. When he asked Mary and John to behold one another, he was continuing his restorative ministry, healing them by peeling away the figurative scales from their eyes, working in them just as powerfully as his physical healing of the blind. He asked Mary and John to see one another as his family—to recognize, as it were, each other’s membership in the family of God. When they obeyed, it changed their lives in a radical way: *“And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.”*

How, today, will we behold the Lamb of God and make way for him to take away the sin of the world, to reframe and heal how we see one another? Who are the people around us, the people who are part of our everyday lives, who Jesus wants us to stop and look at as family? In the words of [Galatians 6: 1-10](#), what radical changes will happen when we reach out to one another as members of the family of believers?