

Creative & Interactive Designs for Learning

The Art of Beholding

By Dr. Dick Hardel

Biblical Background

In the New Testament, the word “Behold” (Greek: various forms of the verb “o ra’ o”) over 200 times within 14 books of the New Testament. Most often it is used in the telling of God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, it is not always translated as “Behold.” Sometimes it is weakly translated as “See, “ or “Look,” or “Here is.”

But the emphasis and meaning of the word has much more depth, strength, and direction. Beholding is more than letting something catch one’s eye, but also to catch one’s heart. To behold is to experience, to witness, and to perceive emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

In John 1: 28, when John writes the story of John the Baptist meeting Jesus, he is unfolding a process of understanding the story of God’s plan of salvation with heart, eyes and life. “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” This is more than “take a look,” or “see,” or “here is.” Beholding is an aggressive act of looking at a person, an event, creation, from many angles and always in new light. You want to know about God’s plan of salvation? Then keep your hearts, minds, eyes, and lives fixed on this Jesus. He is the new light of the world. Behold Jesus from every angle of the story of God’s plan of salvation—his birth, his early years, his ministry, his miracles, his healing, his compassion, his love for the people on the fringes of community, his teaching, his relationship with the Father, his relationship with his disciples, and, most importantly, his suffering and death on the cross and his resurrection and ascension. Jesus frames the picture of a God who so loved the world. To see the picture of God’s plan of salvation, “Behold the Lamb of God!”

People Who Have Influenced My Work on the Art of Beholding

The Holy Spirit has and continues to use many people in my life to shape my faith and my teaching of the faith. Three wonderful saints of God whom God used most directly in my thinking about Beholding are: Dr. Walter Bartling, professor of NT Greek at Concordia Senior College (then at Ft. Wayne, IN) and Concordia Seminary, St. Louis; Reinhold Pieper Marxhausen, professor of Art at Concordia University, Seward, NE; and Dr. Herb Brokering, professor, author, mentor, and close personal friend. All of them rest now with Jesus in the certain hope of the Resurrection.

Dr. Bartling taught me the power and depth of a New Testament Greek word. I loved studying the Old and New Testaments of Scripture. But more than that I learned from him about the humanity of Jesus, the Christ. I never had any problem with the divinity of Jesus, but always wondered about the humanity and the importance in God’s plan of salvation. With Dr. Bartling I explored the humanity of Jesus and the depth of the relation of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Jesus is the center of the Christian faith. “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

From Professor Marxhausen I learned to behold art that daily surrounded me in creation, in people, and in events. He not only taught his students how to draw, paint, sculpt, etc.; he taught them how to behold and engaged them in beholding. When he led a chapel worship service, it was an event and the chapel was filled with joy as well as with people. I was not a student of his, only a friend, who would occasionally spend 3-4 days with him to learn more about beholding. His students have more stories than I do, as he taught through experiential learning activities, the drama of texture, color, shadows, lines, sound, objects, and light. He

taught his students to frame a picture they wanted to remember or create. The framing is important to beholding. After beholding an object reflecting the light or shadow caused by the sun, I remember Marxhausen saying to me, "Love it. It will only be visible for a few more moments. I think God loves changing things with light." Yes, God loves changing the world with the Light of the world. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Marxhausen produced some great films ("*A Time To See*" is one and *Do You See What I See?* Is another) that might be on DVDs now and available from Concordia University, Seward NE.

Herb Brokering took me in a different direction in beholding as I studied Scripture. Instead of studying Scripture to open up more understanding of Scripture, I learned with Herb to study Scripture for the Holy Spirit to open up more of me to God's Word. "God works in the prepositions," he said, "and those prepositions are what the Holy Spirit uses to connect to you." The prepositions connect us to God—in, into, around, over, with, through, under, with, by, of, etc. One must get "into" a parable of Jesus and behold from the parable to gain growth and understanding. One of many books written by Herb that is all about this process is "*I" Opener*, Concordia Publishing House, 1974 (out of print for many years). A more recent book reflecting Herb's style with parables is *Tag, You're It!* by Herb, Penne Sewall, and myself. There are a few copies still available at www.faihtwellmt.com .

Designs Created by Dick Hardel for Experiencing Beholding

1. Parable Box

I give each person/ student an imaginary Parable Box. Each student discovers his/her own large box. Using mime, the students set the boundaries of their boxes. They discover a door to enter inside the box. They enter inside their boxes and check out the boundaries inside their boxes. From the inside the boxes the students discover different size windows, mirrors, and peep holes through which they can see creation, events, and people in a different light or angle—a different viewpoint from the inside out. The students behold each other from the various windows and openings in their Parable Boxes. They exit their boxes and put them away. Then they discuss what they saw. This prepares them for a mini-lecture on the theology of the parable box.

Mini-Lecture (Taken from Session 24 of *Welcome To The Sawdust Circle Part 2* by Dick Hardel, pages 70-71)

The box is very much like the many parables that Jesus told. Jesus kept providing a new vision of the Kingdom of God. The key to this new vision was always his presence. "The Kingdom of God is like this...The Kingdom of heaven is like this..." The real question behind all the parables of Jesus is, "Who is this Jesus?" People will never have the new vision of the Kingdom, if they fail to enter into a relationship with this Jesus. They might have ears, but will not hear, or might have eyes, yet not see. Jesus is the door through which one enters each parable. Once inside the parable a person can see herself and others in a new light. You don't just see them; you behold them. Beholding is an aggressive act of looking and experiencing a new vision of events, people, and actions from a variety of angles and from a new light. "The Kingdom of heaven is like *this!*" "*This*" is a relational now word. Jesus did not say, "The Kingdom of God is like *that*." The Kingdom of heaven has to do with us now. A Christ Clown [Christian] is a beholder. The clown [Christian] beholds everything from inside a relationship with Jesus Christ. "The Kingdom of heaven is like this."

2. Beholding through the Cross

After viewing a film (DVD) of Marxhausen, I give each person a small card with a cross punched out of it. They are to use the card with the cross punched out like a lens of a camera. I usually give them 10-20 minutes to do some beholding through the cross of Jesus. The cross becomes the framework for everything they decide to behold. By moving the card and cross closer or further away from their eyes they can change the view, the texture, the color, the shadow, the light. They can give a totally different meaning to an object, letter, person, or sign. The participants are instructed to be aggressive in beholding people and objects from different angles without any biases. I often have sent them into the naves, chancels, and worship centers to do beholding. I ask them to find one picture, framed by the cross of Jesus, which has become a new vision for them. When the time allotted is up, I ask the participants to come together and share their visions from their beholding. Other times I have asked them to write 10 questions about what they have beheld and share the vision and the questions.

3. Kaleidoscopes and Teleidoscopes

I give the participants in the class that I am teaching on beholding some different types of Kaleidoscopes and Teleidoscopes. I ask them to spend at least five minutes moving to different light areas and look through their "scopes."

Next, I ask them to share what was fun or unique about what they beheld.

Then I ask them if they know the difference between a kaleidoscope and a teleidoscope. Most do not. So I share some things I learned from Herb Brokering and others:

The word *kaleidoscope* has its origin from two Greek words meaning *form* and *beautiful*. A kaleidoscope is an instrument containing loose bits of colored glass between two plates. Mirrors are placed so that changes of position of the bits of glass are reflected in endless varieties of patterns. There is a constant changing scene.

A *teleidoscope* is quite different from a *kaleidoscope*. On the outside they appear similar, but the inside is different and thus the beholding is different. There are no bits of glass in a teleidoscope. Rather the mirrors are places so that they reflect the outside world, the grass, the trees, the sky, the clothing, the colors of creation, or the people. Beholding is really about teleidoscoping. Beholding sees the constant changing form of anything in sight.

What a great gift it is to reflect and to make new formations of information. We are always reconfiguring information, seeing something in a new way. This relieves boredom. What amazing varieties of ways there are to see, hear, taste, touch, and think about what surrounds us each day. It allows us to re-view things again in new and beautiful forms. When the new forms are surprising, amazing, and wonderful, then we behold. Re-newal is another type of beholding.

Beholding is about Openness!

Realize where you are. See around you. Notice what is near. Listen, think, feel, as though you are in this place now for the first time. It is new. Do it for several minutes. Connect new dots to make a new picture. Notice familiar things in a new way, and new things as though they are old. Be open to what is immediately around you.

Beholding is Inquisitive!

Realize how curious you are. Approach something in sight with a very curious and inquisitive mood. Ask all sorts of questions about it. Why is it here? Who put it here? Where has it been? What feelings are connected to it? How is it useful? Can it bring persons together, etc.?

Beholding is Human!

Realizing you are intelligent, you are able to make sense out of life. We are to word our world, make sense of it. No human will tolerate complete confusion or meaninglessness. We even try to make sense out of nonsense. In calling it that, we give our world a word. We name and title and sign what is going on. We do this to our feelings and our thoughts. We use all of our senses to do this. So beholding is sensible.

Beholding is Sacred!

Realize that life is sacred. It is sacred as we approach it that way. In the middle of our beholding, the Holy Spirit is at work in strengthening our faith. Insight, imagination, and beholding are where faith takes place. John, the Apostle, sat on an island and looked over his lifetime. He felt and thought through all things old and new. He saw a new heaven and a new earth. His awareness for truth was so great he wrote about the new Jerusalem and the promise of the Lord. "Behold, I make all things new (Rev. 5: 21).

Beholding is internal

Because we have a relational God, three in one Trinity, God wants a relational people. We find meaning in personal ways. We have many different styles of finding meaning. We read theology books from old theologians long before we were born and we read theology books from very young theologians. Old theologians were not old hat in their writings; often they are new wind. Jesus told parables to stir up this internal world of beholding. He told stories in such a way that they were left to say what it meant. The metaphors of parables and similes are beholding language. It stirs up the outside and the inside. It is a most important language of the church.

More on Beholding

1. Think of a parable as beholding in nature. It is a way to open understanding to see the big picture.
2. A parable is a pointer to reality. Behold what is universally true.
3. It calls on us to be open, beholding without our biases.
4. We behold from our feelings and all of our senses.
5. Beholding opens up memories, creates mental images, and unlocks deep feelings.
6. Some of the parables we behold are full pictures, which can be done, acted out, or painted.
7. Beholding the parables one finds the power of Jesus' words.
8. Jesus stirred up people with his parables to "Behold the Lamb of God."
9. In beholding parables one finds beauty in the story and a new form.
10. A parable is a picture story that one can behold from many sides.
11. Beholding is like looking through a prism.
12. We behold servant stories in parables.
13. Beholding parables makes one honest, and hears someone else be honest.

14. When we behold Jesus in the parables, we find a necessary form of speech when it is too painful to say the truth in any other way.
15. Beholding within parables, one finds wisdom and truth.
16. Beholding in parables is necessary to read between the lines.

Note to Reader: The brief biblical background and the designs are mine. The information on beholding and parables I have learned and gleaned from older material for youth leadership training written by Herb Brokering and others from The Board of Youth Ministry of the LC-MS. It is used with permission.

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