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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifepodcast.com](http://www.newlifepodcast.com). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 9, verses 28 through 36. Please stand if you are able.

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Now about eight days after these sayings, he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep.

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But when they became fully awake, they saw his glory in the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said. As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.

01:52

And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. The Gospel of the Lord.

02:05

Pictures can be powerful things. Images, iconic images, beautiful images can provoke emotions. They can inspire us. They can build a deep well of feeling within us.

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The image of Tiananmen Square and the protester that stood before the tanks is certainly one of those images. Iwo Jima with the Marines raising the American flag is one of those iconic images that may stir something within us. The Statue of Liberty welcoming those seeking freedom and

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an opportunity as they sail into New York Harbor certainly evokes inspiration for some. This is a picture, iconic picture that you can see, it's in the MoMA in New York. It's colloquially called the Dust Bowl Lady. You can see on her face the hardness, the care, the anxiety of life at the height of the Great Depression.

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You may not have ever seen this image, but this is a picture of St. Ambrose telling Theodosius, the emperor Theodosius, that he cannot enter the church because he had put him under church discipline for an atrocity that he had committed as emperor. This image evokes lots of things for us.

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But one of the things it evokes is the separate nature of God's kingdom and how all of us are subject to it. I love this image. This image is of Harriet Tubman and the story of Harriet Tubman, a local hero, is inspiring to many of us. As she returned back to the eastern shore of Maryland many times and brought people, enslaved people to freedom up here in upstate New York.

04:12

And this image of her invokes those feelings of pride and also of duty to serve those who are experiencing oppression and injustice.

04:27

One of the things I like to do on a clear night without any moon is to go outside and look at the stars. At the top of South Hill where we live, we have a pretty good view of the stars. And on a clear night with no moon or maybe a little bit of a moon, you can see very clearly the Milky Way. And I love to look at that. It's an inspiring, beautiful image of the creation. I have an app on my phone where I can chart the stars and I've started trying to learn where the various stars and constellations are.

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inspiration. Images can do this for us. They can inspire us, they can give us emotions, they can maybe provoke a certain sense of duty or feeling. One of the common functions of images like this are for soldiers who are off at battle, off at war. Commonly they will have pictures of their home and of their family. They look at these pictures often in order to spur them on to continue.

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and to remain safe and get through the battle and to return home. One of the things that these sorts of images show us is that we need inspiring images. We need a vision to sustain us. Why do we need these sorts of things is because we live in a fallen world. We live in a world full of pain and sorrow, harkening back to the Dust Bowl picture. We live in a world of suffering and of loss.

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We live in a world where there's fear and there's shame. We live in a world where there's a sickness and uncertainty. I don't think I have to prove this point, but one of the points that we see in the text today is that we need a vision to inspire us. We need a vision to inspire us. We could use an inspiring image to sustain us through our time in this world together.

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such a vision. We have a vision that is intended to sustain Jesus, to sustain the disciples, and to sustain us. We look today at Luke chapter 9 beginning in verse 28. And if we look just before this in chapter 9, we see that a vision is needed. Some inspiring image is needed.

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In verse 21, Jesus foretells his death. He tells the disciples that he is going to suffer many things in verse 22 and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day raised. Jesus needs an image to sustain him. He then follows that by saying, and it's not just me who needs this image, this vision to sustain us. You need it too, disciples, because he says,

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is going to follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life would lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will save it." So you need this as well, disciples. You need this as well. And right after we, right after this story that we read today of the transfiguration, we find that Jesus is beginning a journey. If you look at Luke chapter 9 and...

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You can look at the text in your bulletin or if you want to see the bigger context that I'm alluding to, you can pull up the Bible however you access it. But in Luke chapter 9 verse 51 divides the book of Luke into two parts. And from verse 51 of chapter 9, Jesus is journeying to the cross. And the remaining of the gospel of Luke is about his journey to the cross. It says in verse 51,

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to go to Jerusalem.

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From that point on, he is journeying to the cross. He is journeying to his suffering and death. This is what this story functions as. You may have heard this story before. You may not have heard this story before. But it's kind of an interesting story. A story of Christ's glory being revealed. But why is it there? Why is it in this text? Why do three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, tell this story? And John...

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alludes to it. In fact we see in Peter, we read this text from 2 Peter chapter 1, that it deeply impacted Peter. He's always talking about his experience on the mountain. John begins his gospel with, the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. This moment impacted Peter and John immensely. Why is it in the Bible? It's a good story.

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It shows the glory of God, it shows the divinity of Christ, perhaps. But how does it function in the story? It functions to serve as a vision to sustain for the road ahead. Jesus needs this image to sustain Him. He needs the word of His Father to sustain Him. The disciples need this vision to sustain them because they are going to follow Christ as well. They are going to journey to the cross with Him as well. It's both John and Peter who are with Jesus.

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at the cross. Although they had two drastically different responses to it, but they were there. After Jesus' death and resurrection, all the disciples who were with Jesus are going to need a vision to sustain them on their road, their journey through suffering, and many of them death. So this is how the story functions. We need a vision to sustain us, and the first point today is that Jesus gives us this vision now. We have...

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a vision to sustain us in the here and now. Jesus provides, God provides for us, a vision to sustain us now. The Christian life can often be seen as looking forward, looking forward, looking forward, hoping for what is to come. But we need something now. We can't just live on hope alone, although we are told that we are to live on hope. We're humans.

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God recognizes that and so he gives us something to sustain us now. In the midst of this story, he gives the disciples, Peter, James and John, a vision to sustain them. He gives Jesus this experience where he discusses with Moses and Elijah his upcoming Exodus.

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The text here says that his departure, literally the Greek word is Exodus, his journey to the cross. He speaks with Moses and Elijah and what do Moses and Elijah have in common? They both went up Mount Sinai.

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They both sojourned on Mount Sinai and they both saw God on Mount Sinai. And here they are on Mount Sinai, not exactly geographically, but a type of it. They're on a mountain and they are conversing with God Almighty incarnate in Jesus Christ. And he hears the voice of God on the cloud which assures him that he belongs to his Father. You are my beloved, my chosen one. This is to sustain Christ on his road to the cross.

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Christ is fully human. The scripture says that He experienced and suffered everything that we have experienced and suffered except without sin. Christ and His humanity needed this experience to sustain Him, and it does. But it also sustains the disciples, and it does it in the here and now. Let's just read a little bit of what we see. It says, Peter, James, and John went up the mountain to pray.

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with Jesus as Jesus was praying the appearance of his face was altered and his clothing became dazzling white like a lightning bolt. Mark says that it was that his clothing was brighter than any craftsman could bleach it that's how Mark puts it

12:42

And behold two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory, not their normal earthly appearance, but their glorified bodies, and spoke of his Exodus, which he was about to accomplish. Now it says, Peter and those who were with them were heavy with sleep. Why were they heavy with sleep? Because they were experiencing the glory of God. And the concept of glory in Hebrew, Chabod, it's weightiness. Holiness is weightiness. Glory is weightiness. It presses down.

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I don't know if you've ever, you probably have had some kind of moment, an existential moment where you experienced maybe a holy moment or a moment of an awesome moment and it kind of feels weighty. I don't know how to explain it but I've had moments like this, it's almost like you're being pressed down, experiencing something of great grandeur, maybe an experience of God.

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But this holiness, this glory, it almost, it's weighty on them and it makes them drowsy and they fall asleep. So this experience is there to sustain them in the here and now. In the here and now. And it does sustain them throughout the rest of their lives as we saw in 2 Peter. As Peter talks about, he talks about his experience in 2 Peter chapter 1. How...

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They saw Him in the majestic glory. How John refers to it in the beginning of his gospel, that they saw Him in His glory. And so the first point is this, is God gives us something in the here and now to sustain us. What does He give us? Well, the first thing He gives us is He gives us an image, a picture of Himself in His body and blood. This is part of what the Lord's Supper is. The bread and the wine are gospel images where we can see visually

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the truth of the gospel of Christ and the beauty of Christ, the beauty of His mercy. And certainly that itself is an image that will sustain us when we know that He gave His body, He gave His blood, and He gives us His body and blood as food to sustain us. But the other thing that we have in this experience when we gather together week after week is that we enter into heaven. This is what the church has taught for

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two thousand years and it's why in a few moments we will say these words together lift up your hearts we lift them up to the Lord and after that we will say holy holy holy is the Lord God of hosts why do we say that every week we say that every week because at that point of service we acknowledge that we are entering into the courts of heaven not with the eyes of our flesh but with the eyes of faith as Paul says do not look to what you see but look to the unseen

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And so the church even from the second century had these words in the liturgy because we believe we enter into heaven. We can't see it with our eyes, but we believe it by faith. That we enter into heaven and we have an experience with the Almighty. And as we gather together week by week, this is intended to sustain us. An experience of God, an experience of each other is intended to sustain us. His ministry to us in word and sacrament is His gift to you.

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to be a vision to sustain you.

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But apart from that, God does do things that are maybe more tangible and practical than just the theological and the ecclesiastical.

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He gives us experiences, He gives us moments where prayers are answered. You've heard me talk about this before, but I've encouraged you in the past to set up your Ebenezers. What is an Ebenezer? It's a stone of remembrance. In the Bible they set up an Ebenezer. Joshua sets up an Ebenezer, actually Samuel sets up an Ebenezer to remind the people of God's promise. And what we do when we set up Ebenezers in our life is we remember God's

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We remember the good things that He does for us. You can probably, if you try hard, I'm sure you can think of an answered prayer or something that you prayed for, that you longed for, that happened for you. And what we're encouraged to do is to remember those things, to set up something, I mean, it could be literal, but I'm talking about a mental bookmark, to remember those times. And part of what we do as believers in Christ, as brothers and sisters, is remind each other.

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of those Ebenezers, remind each other of that truth that God has worked in our lives. He has been present with us in the here and now. He has showed up. He has shown us His glory. Maybe not in a very overt way like He did to Peter, James, and John, but in a way that we really believed in that moment that He did. We really believed in that moment that He did. You know, this is something that...

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psychotherapy, secular psychotherapy is recognized. The most powerful forms of therapy, you've heard me talk about this before, cognitive behavioral therapy or cognitive processing therapy, are essentially setting up Ebenezers. Reminding yourself of something that is true and real that can counteract the self-talk, the deceptive self-talk, that you put yourself down. It can counteract the lies that you tell yourself, it can counteract anxieties. You remind yourself of something is real and that is true, and this is what this image is

18:02

for the disciples and that's what it is for us. And one of the things we can do is we can help each other. We can remind each other of those times in our life. Husbands and wives, when your spouse is struggling, remind them of those Ebenezer's. Friends remind each other of God's faithfulness. This is what the body of Christ is to do for each other. Parents,

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Remind your children. Children remind your parents. Friends remind your friends. Members of Christ's body remind each other of God's faithfulness. I recently had an Ebenezer like this and hopefully you had it too. I've shared with you, I've shared with you over the past year that last April and May were one of the lowest parts of my life. You know, we were having very, very,

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serious financial trouble as a congregation. And in late April and early May, I was really, really down because I was looking at the prospect of being, yet again, a failed pastor. Again, once again, a failed pastor. And it was a low, low point in my life, one of the lowest times of my life. And you all know what happened. We prayed. We sought the Lord.

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We worked, we gave, we raised money, but we found ourselves in January, just two months ago, when we ran the numbers at the end of January, we had surpassed the point from the previous January. And I don't want that to be lost on us. I mean, for me, it is a significant Ebenezer in my life,



where I was wondering if I would still be here, and if I would be a pastor anymore because I would go to law school or something. You know, I was pretty depressed.

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And here we find ourselves receiving God's grace and power and experiencing His answer to prayer. And for me, that's going to be an Ebenezer. And maybe this March and April will have bad months and I'll be depressed again. But I will remind myself that God did it. In fact...

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When I talked to Carl and Steve, some of you know who Carl and Steve are. Steve's the previous pastor. Carl was a previous elder. They've been here for a long, long time. When I talked to them about our financial troubles, they essentially just said, yeah, we've been there plenty of times and God always provided. And I was like, that's not helpful.

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but that was true. They were sharing with me their Ebenezers and I needed one of mine own. God provides in the here and now. If we have eyes to see it, He does and that is intended to sustain us. The second thing we see is that we're not to stay in those holy moments. We're to go out from those holy moments. Peter, oh I love Peter. Peter here responds

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to this moment. He finally wakes up. It says they were heavy with sleep and when they awoke they saw His glory and the two men that stood with Him. And as the men were parting with Him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and for Moses and Elijah. And Luke says, not knowing what he was talking about. And Jesus said, no, this is not literal, but Jesus said, bless your heart.

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Bless your heart, Peter. He just wants to stay there. And why wouldn't you? I'd want to stay there. But the point is, these moments are given to us to go out from there and do what God has called us to do. They're not to build tents. They're not to stay on the holy mountain. We're not supposed to live here in the sanctuary and spend all this time together in the sanctuary together. We're to go out and do the things God's called us to do. The vision to sustain us is to call us to...

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to do the things that God's called us to, the vocation that He's called us to, the life and the work that He's called us to. So we aren't to build tents and stay in those holy moments, but we're to go out with them fresh in our minds and to do the things that God wants us to do for His Kingdom. But the third point, the second point is really short. The third point is this, we're not to stay in those holy moments, but we are to keep before us the future, the future holy moment.

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And that is where 1 John comes back in. I told you 1 John would come back in. And you can see the sermon as a sort of an excursus on 1 John as we've been going through, where we kind of take a break and we think about this idea of the beatific vision. We saw this last week in chapter three, verse two. I'll read this verse for you again. John says, beloved, we are God's children now.

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There's the Ebenezer. There's the Transfiguration. You are God's children now. God gives you something now. He gives you adoption as sons and daughters. Jesus said, the Father said to Jesus, you are my son. The same thing is said to us. John says to us, you are children of God now. And therefore God does give us something now. But then John calls us to the future. And he says, beloved, we are God's children now. And what we will be

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has not yet appeared, but we will know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is." We shall see him as he is God and his beauty and his glory. Jesus and his resurrected glory. This is a vision to motivate us. To we want to be there. We want to be in that place.

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We want to be in that place where Jesus is revealed on His throne. And He's surrounded by billions and billions of the people of God from every tribe and tongue and nation. Experiencing the glory and grandeur of God and the beauty of Christ together. You've probably been in a big stadium before. Maybe a sporting event or a concert. But if you've ever been in a room with lots of people experiencing...

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Something like that and everyone's cheering and there's a great moment on the field or a particularly powerful moment on the stage of the musicians performing. And you got those

goosebumps on your arm. You know what I'm talking about? The chills, the goosebumps. It's like you're being elevated. What do you think it's going to be like when we get to heaven?

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And Jesus Christ is on the throne in the fullness of his glory and there are angels all around saying holy, holy, holy and billions of saints from every tongue and tribe and nation are shouting praises to God. It'll be like that stadium moment, that arena moment multiplied by a billion. I want to go there. I want to experience that. This is what John is holding for us. We don't talk about the beatific vision much in our tradition.

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The vision of God, the seeing God as John says, see him as he is. We don't talk about that a lot, but this is a concept I think that we can latch on to. As people who are visual or visual and visually motivated, this vision will be something that will be the greatest experience that any human could ever experience. And it's supposed to motivate us to get there.

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And all these human experiences here below are here to give us a little picture of that, as I said to the kids. All these little images and experiences that excite us, they're a small picture of that beautiful glory of God and the beauty of Christ. This week I had an opportunity to have a little holy moment. I got to go visit little Kiki.

26:03

And it's something about visiting a new child, seeing a new baby. You know, it's the freshness, it's the newness, it's the innocence, it's the smallness. Maybe not all of you are awed by little babies, but I think a lot of us are. As parents, we like to look back at when our kids were babies and it does something. There's something holy about it, there's something pure about it.

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By the way, that's true of all of us. You know, all of us are made in the image of God. All of us, the Psalm says, are crowned with glory and honor. But obviously, as we get older, we sin and we have the marks of sin on our bodies. And it's not as pure as when they're babies. But it's still true. If we could see it, it would still be true. C.S. Lewis said, if we could see any of our brothers and sisters in their true glory, we would be tempted to worship. But if...

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If we have a little moment where I was praying for this child with her parents and her grandmother and I started getting choked up a little bit, which I do a little more these days than I used to, to be honest. If that kind of moment, this little person evokes such awe, such an experience, how much more will the experience of God Almighty that this little girl is made in the image of? Yes.

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But how much more those experiences of people, those experiences of creation, of nature, of art, of beauty, are all a picture of the transcendent glory and beauty of Christ that we long for. And this is what God the Father says to us, and what Peter says to us as our takeaway.

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Yes, we make our Ebeneezers and we will remind ourselves of the Ebeneezers. That's the first takeaway. The second takeaway is this, listen to him. That's the only command we're given in this passage. Listen to him. He says, this is you are my beloved son, my chosen. Listen to him. This is what Peter took to heart when Peter talks about this in second Peter, uh, chapter one.

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He says, look, we have seen His glory. We saw Him on the mountain. We heard the words coming out of the cloud. And His conclusion is this. What we tell you is the truth. We saw it. We were there. And God the Father says, listen to Jesus. A lot of times we think about all sorts of stuff, about our faith, about religion, about ethics and morals.

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We may get caught up in whether this thing is true or that's true, or whether this moral principle is right or wrong. We may be consumed with doubt sometimes about, did this really happen, or are these things real? And when we get caught up in those confusing times and those confusing questions, and those doubts, those contradictions,

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I think what we can always do is we can get down to the simplicity of the transfiguration. Because if we're Christians, certainly, if we call ourselves Christians, we follow Christ. And if we follow Christ, we can heed to what God the Father says. It cuts through all the stuff, it gets down to the simplicity of it all. Listen to Him. You can never go wrong. By setting before yourself a vision.

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of Christ in His glory and His eternal glory and listening to what He says. This will sustain you through your life. This will sustain you through the season of Lent as we go into this penitential season together. And I hope that this will sustain us as we struggle with our fears, our anxieties, our worries, even now. Hold forth this future. Hold forth this present and listen to Christ. Let's pray.

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