

Transfiguration Sunday - March 2, 2025

Judges 4:5–10; Psalm 46; 2 Peter 1:16–21; Luke 9:28–36

“Pitching a tent”

1. It felt like the end of an era.
 - a. The Chicago Bulls basketball team had just completed a three-peat, the winning of the national championship 3 years in a row.
 - b. The city of Chicago loved their Bulls, and it became obvious eventually that the old Chicago stadium, homecourt for the Bulls for years, was not going to be around for much longer.
 - c. They eventually built the United Center, a building some called the house that Michael built, meaning the stadium that needed to be built because of the popularity of Michael Jordan, who was the star of the Bulls at the time.
 - d. And so it was no surprise to anybody that as they were building the new stadium that the old stadium had to be shut down and eventually demolished.
 - e. What people were not expecting was that Michael Jordan would retire at the top of his game after leading the Bulls to winning those three championships.
 - f. And so it was in that context, in the Fall of 1994 that an unusual event took place in the Chicago stadium right before it would be demolished. Scottie Pippen, number two player of the Bulls, hosted a game for charity inviting some of his NBA friends.
 - g. I remember getting tickets for that game, on a whim.
 - h. When we got to the stadium, the stadium had already started to be dismantled.
 - i. The big scoreboard was no longer above Center Court.
 - j. But everything else about that clunky old stadium was still there.
 - k. We got excellent seats because who goes to a pickup game with some random NBA players, right? But that's when the surprise came.
 - i. Michael Jordan came out of retirement to come play basketball with some of his buddies one last time in the home of the NBA team who had drafted him 9 years earlier.
 - ii. The crowd went crazy when Michael was introduced.
 - iii. The game itself was inconsequential, nobody would care about the score.
 - iv. There was no playoff on the line. There was no championship on the line.
 - v. It was just a bunch of guys playing basketball.
 - vi. Playing little defense by the way and with lots of dunks. MJ scored 52 points!
 - vii. There was a clock somewhere that told us that the fourth quarter had ended with a ridiculous score of 187-150 points (Jordan's team beat Scottie's).
 - l. And we stood there clapping and cheering as the game ended and none of us wanted to leave. Because we knew this was it.
 - i. We knew that the stadium would be torn down and we figured that nobody would ever see Michael Jordan play to play again. We were wrong on that one fortunately. But at the time we didn't know.
 - m. And so people clapped paying homage to this returning retired star who had given us so many great memories in that building.

- n. Michael himself didn't seem to want to leave, either, because then he did a very touching thing.
 - o. As he waved goodbye to the crowd, he went to Center Court right there where the big Chicago Bull's red logo was.
 - p. Michael got on his knees and bent down and kissed the logo. His last farewell.
 - q. And then he disappeared into some dark tunnel.
 - r. We all wanted to capture this moment and keep it forever. The best I was able to do that night was to hold one to the memory and take some pictures, which I cherish. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1994/09/09/Jordan-hits-for-52-in-charity-game/4184779083200/>
2. Our gospel story of the transfiguration on the mountaintop was that kind of event: one where no one wanted to leave.
- a. The disciples Jesus had selected for this experience were surprised to see the return of two retired Heroes of the Faith: Moses and Elijah who miraculously appeared with Jesus and shared a moment of fellowship with him on the mountaintop.
 - b. Jesus had changed in appearance right before their eyes, somehow himself and yet not himself.
 - c. The three disciples were witnessing something unique, incredible. They had no reference or preparation for it.
 - d. Peter's knee-jerk reaction is understandable
 - e. He wanted to pitch a tent. Have them gather. Share some stories. Have a meal. Linger. Peter wanted to make this moment last.
 - f. The scriptures don't tell us how long they stood there.
 - g. All we know is that it was interrupted by clouds rushing in, and in a revelation, a voice from heaven identified Jesus as the beloved Son of God. Listen to him.
 - h. And just like that the clouds, Moses and Elijah vanished. They were left speechless.
 - i. There was only one thing left to do: With their heads still spinning, they made their way back downhill, to continue their work.
3. For better or for worse, we were not made to stay up on those mountain tops.
- a. We may experience moments of unique clarity and peace, perhaps at a retreat or in a heart-to-heart conversation with a life-long friend
 - b. We may feel the elation of a moment which redefines our life, perhaps the birth of our child or the completion of our graduate degree
 - c. We may even gather weekly in this very building or online to catch our breath from the madness of this moment, seeking the nurture of worship and fellowship.
 - d. But ours is a life lived on the plain, certainly informed and even empowered by those mountaintop experiences, but lived on the plains.
 - e. We can't pitch a tent and remain up on the mountain.
 - f. We have to return to the places where God has called us to serve: in that office or that school, with our family or with neighbors, called to shape a welcoming, compassionate, nurturing community.
4. Like with those three disciples, God's voice from heaven reminds us to listen to Jesus and follow him back down to the plain. Afterall, there is work to do.