

He Made Our Heart His Home

Acts 2:1-21

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The Last Dance, a chronicle of the 1998 Chicago Bulls and a certain Nike shoe-tying, rafter flying, gravity defying superstar nicknamed, “Air Jordan” has been providing viewing entertainment for millions of people stuck at home during the Coronavirus. Being technologically challenged, I get the wrong channel or the wrong time and no matter how hard I try, I miss the episodes. I went online to try to get caught up. When I googled Michael Jordan, instead of *The Last Dance*, an old commercial popped up. It turns out Michael is not the only one fond of the air...there was this beloved hero of the Boston Celtics named Bird...Larry Bird. Larry Legend is shooting hoops in a deserted arena. Michael walks in with his baggy shorts and a bag of food from the Golden Arches. Larry sees the bag of food. Larry smells the bag of food. Larry wants the bag of food. He says to Michael, “Play you for it.”

With a curious look Michael responds, “You and me...for my Big Mac?”

“First one to miss watches the other one eat,” says the Birdman. But even though Larry is a Bird, he knows in one certain area he is outmatched. So, before the game begins, he says to Air Jordan, “No dunking.” And with that these two superstars begin the most awesome game of HORSE you could ever imagine.

- There are shots from behind the backboard.
- Soon they are firing from half-court
- Off the glass
- Left handed
- On one knee
- Full court
- And then...from the upper deck of the arena, Larry smugly says, “Off the floor, off the scoreboard...nothing but net
- Michael’s turn...from outside the arena! “Through the window, off the wall...nothing but net.”
- Finally, they are on top of a building in Chicago, maybe the Sears Trade Tower, that landmark that rises high above the Windy City...anyway one of them calls the shot...over the Expressway, across the river, off the billboard...as the commercial fades to a satisfying end, you feel like the only way to top that would be for Michael to break the no-dunking rule with some out of this world version of a Space Jam.

Today is the Day of Pentecost. Today is the fulfillment of a promise Jesus made to his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them. Today is the celebration of the day when the Holy Spirit came and filled the hearts and the lives of not only the original Apostles but the hearts and lives of thousands of other believers who had come from lands far and near, a clear and compelling sign that God's Spirit is for all people, people even to the ends of the earth. Imagine if Pentecost was God's ultimate shot in a game of HORSE, a game of HORSE in which from the very beginning God had been sending the Holy Spirit to display signs and wonders in this world, signs of God's power, signs of God's peace, and signs of God's presence.

In the beginning...when the game of HORSE was just being invented, when the game of HORSE was just being created, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters...God said, "Out of the chaos, under the deepest of the deep and through the darkest of the darkness, let there be light." And there was light. For six days God practiced his shot, creating the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry lands, the life Under the Sea and the life on the land, and the birds of the air. Just when God's mighty arm might have tired from making so many miraculous shots, late on the sixth day, as dusk was settling on the court and the sun was fading into the horizon, God said, "One more shot. I have one more shot for this Creation Story...one more to make this Creation Story complete....In our image...in our likeness...to rule over of the fish of the sea...over the birds of the air...over the livestock, and over all the creatures that move along the ground..." BAM! The shot was perfect. "God created human beings in God's very own image." That first game of HORSE came to an end. God was thinking, "That is a pretty good game, if I say so myself. Not just pretty good, that game is very good". On the seventh day God rested.

That was the first game of HORSE. Later, God got the urge to play again. He said to Noah, "Watch this." Through the gopher wood, up the gangplank, double-dribbling with the animals that entered the Ark two by two, off the neck of the giraffe, down the trunk of the elephant, rattling around through forty days and nights of rain, out the upper window on the wings of a dove, with a big arching rainbow...nothing but net.

Hey Moses, come on over to this burning bush...I'm on fire. I have something I want to show you. Show him he does. "With the staff, leaping off the hind legs of the frog, lifted on the wings of the gnats, hoisted high by the flies, off the livestock, off the locusts, bouncing from the doorposts that first Passover, through the Red Sea and settling safely in Miriam's tambourine as she leads a victory parade."

Sometimes God seems to take pleasure in repetition. Joshua, watch this. Around the walls of Jericho once, and around the walls again, and around the walls again, and again, and again, and again...around the walls of Jericho six times in six days, and then on the seventh day around the walls of Jericho seven times. Sometimes God seems to take pleasure in repetition.

Other times the action is quick and direct, like when David took a smooth stone, loaded it in his sling, and made the shot heard round the shepherd world, striking down Goliath, that mighty 10 foot center who starred for the Philistines.

God is unpredictable. God knows how to mix it up. Elijah heard God was playing a game of HORSE out near Mount Horeb. The prophet was hanging out in his hideout on Mount Horeb, doing everything he could to avoid being captured by the wicked Queen Jezebel. God told Elijah he was going to show up. Elijah stood at the mouth of the cave where he had been hiding. The wind rushed by and Elijah waited for God to appear. With a smile God said, “Not in the wind.” An earthquake rattled the ground and Elijah leaned in to see the Lord. With a smile God said, “Not in the earthquake.” A fire raged and Elijah was certain this time that it was God. With a smile God said, “Not even in the fire.” On that day, God’s perfect shot was just a still small voice. That shot was priceless.

Sometimes it is like a great big exciting three-ring circus. Daniel was sitting in an upstairs room praying to the Lord. The king said you can only pray to me. Daniel needed a miracle as he was arrested and hauled to judgment right during his daily prayers. What happened next is one of the truly great shots of all time. Out the window, through the fiery furnace, bouncing over the 90-foot golden idol, off the wall with the writing on it, and straight into the lion’s den. That one brought a roar from the crowd, a roar from the king, a roar from the lion, and a muffled roar from his opponents as they were thrown into the den where they became the dinner.

As awesome and amazing as those games of HORSE were that filled the annals of the Old Testament, it turns out God was just warming up. With the author of Hebrews at the microphone we hear this glorious and grand introduction, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son...” In the Old Testament God was just warming up. As the time came near for Jesus to be born God flexed his muscles and loosened his hamstrings. Then God said, “Pay attention. You are never going to believe this.” God starts dribbling the ball as he calls the shot...42 bounces for the forty-two generations from Abraham to Jesus, off the Star in the East, scaling the humps of the camels carrying the three kings, glancing off Herod’s old hard head, transported by the angels out to the shepherds in the field, carried in the womb of Mary, and finally coming to rest in a manger in Bethlehem. I call that shot *Emmanuel*. Now you can say, ‘God is with us.’”

But wait...there’s more. Michael made his fame as Air Jordan. Jesus makes his first adult appearance at River Jordan. Baptized in the Jordan is God’s own version of the Dunk. Pass the ball from Isaiah to John the Baptist, careful not to let the ball get all gummed up in the Baptist’s locusts and honey, down to the banks of the River Jordan, back up to heaven, heaven opens up and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and lands squarely on Jesus. God says, “I call that one, *The Blessing of the Beloved*. ‘This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.’”

Getting Jesus from the Jordan to Jerusalem taxes your tongue as we try to gather all his highlights into one single shot...the lame leper, tongue speakin' eye seekin', sin forgivin' life givin', heart healing hope feeling, love spreadin' devil dreadin, donkey ridin' demons hidin', kingdom comin' and victory drummin'...oh, naming even some of his miracles taxes our tongue, but the shot bears witness that in Jesus Christ God meets every hope and every dream we could have ever imagined.

In Jerusalem Jesus huddles with his disciples and makes a promise that must have sounded so sweet to their ears. "I am going to ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you as orphans...The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my give I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." How those words that promised a Counselor, a Comforter, the Holy Spirit himself must have done exactly what Jesus intended, how those words must have given the disciples peace. They would never be alone. They would not be orphans. Jesus would always be with them. Jesus promised he was going to make just that shot. It would be the ultimate shot.

But when the ultimate shot in the ultimate game of HORSE was launched, and the hearts of those disciples were troubled...when the hearts of those disciples were afraid...when the hearts of those disciples were not filled with peace...when the hearts of those disciples were filled with doubt, with dismay, with fear, and with a feeling of complete and utter abandonment, it looked like Jesus could not deliver on the ultimate shot.

In the Garden with prayers of great distress, captured and arrested, brought to trial, convicted and condemned...hung on a cross and crowned with thorns...suffering and dying...buried in a tomb. That shot was a complete failure in the eyes of the disciples. Jesus, who had done everything so right had a final shot that was so very wrong. He lost the game. He lost his life. And they lost all hope.

Little did they know the game was still on. Little did they know that the ball lying so lifelessly in the tomb still had a little air in it...little did they know that ball would start bouncing even in the darkness of the tomb...little did they know that on the third day, when the stone was rolled away from the tomb, the shot would continue, shooting out of the tomb to the astonishment of the weeping women, appearing now to Mary, now to disheartened disciples walking the road to Emmaus, now to Thomas, dispelling his doubts, now to Peter, graciously allowing the one who denied Jesus three times to affirm his love for Jesus three times, now to all the disciples who gathered in an upper room, now ascending all the way to heaven...and now, on the Day of Pentecost, finally on the Day of Pentecost, some fifty days after the crucifixion...now the miracle came true.

The shot descended on them. The shot descended on all of them. It was glorious. If they didn't know it was coming, they sure woke up when they heard the sound like the blowing of a violent wind. If they didn't know it was coming, they sure sat up straight as a bolt when they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire separating and coming to rest on each of them. If they didn't know it was coming, they must have been so surprised because at that moment they were filled with the Holy Spirit. That is where the ultimate shot landed.

Pentecost proclaims so many things. Today, on this Day of Pentecost in the year 2020, smack dab in the middle of a virus that has isolated us in so many ways, hear the good news, "We are not alone." God sent us a Counselor. God sent us a Comforter. God has come to us. God has come to be with us. God has come to fill us with the gifts of his very own Spirit. God has come to fill us with the fruit of his very own Spirit. God has come to fill us with the peace of his very own Spirit. God has come to fill us with the presence of his very own Spirit. God has come to fill us with the power of God's very own Spirit. Having risen from the dead, knowing he was about to whooshed into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

Hovering over the waters of creation...bouncing off the gopher wood of the ark...going bam off the ram that God provided on Mount Moriah...from the flames of the burning bush to the flames of the fiery furnace, dancing through the parted waters of the Red Sea as they started their journey to the Promised Land and still with them even when they wept by the Rivers of Babylon during the heartbreaking time of exile, into the manger, into the Jordan, into the lives of people who were hopeless and helpless, into Jerusalem, onto the cross, into the tomb, out of the tomb and up into heaven...and then, on Pentecost, descending on them like tongues of fire, the Spirit of God came into the disciples. The Spirit of God came into the hearts of those original Apostles. The Spirit of God came into a great crowd of people, into the hearts of a great crowd of people. Today, God wants that awesome and amazing shot to find its way into our hearts, into your heart and into my heart. The Spirit of God who has been active everywhere and always wants to come into your heart and be active in your life, in every way, in every moment, in every situation, for the rest of your life. The Spirit of God wants to fill your life forever and for always. God wants to make your heart his home. I hope and I pray that you will receive this great gift. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.