

If you're anything like me and have been drowning in the sports desert that is this pandemic, it's highly possible that you too have been living for ESPN's latest installments of "The Last Dance." It's been a fairly intense deep dive into the 1998 Chicago Bulls as they pursued their sixth NBA championship in eight years, while also going into an extremely in-depth psychological profile of just what exactly makes Michael Jordan, *Michael Jordan*. After ten hours of watching, one could come to a lot of different conclusions about just what it was that made MJ the phenomenon he was in the NBA—insane competitive drive, sheer raw talent, a take no prisoners attitude—but by the end of episode ten, one thing really stuck with me about MJ, something that I found myself intensely jealous of, an uncanny ability to stay wholly and completely in the moment.

It seemed like at every turn in his career, there was always someone asking, "What's next?" Whether it was the next game, the next workout, the next offseason, the next endorsement, people never wanted to talk to MJ about the here and now, they only

wanted to look towards the future, for him to lay out his plans before them, make predictions for every next step rather than talk about what was happening right then and there. You saw it especially during the 1997-98 season, where it was basically a well known fact that management was going to break up the team at the end of the year. After every game, at every press conference, reporters wanted to know, “Michael, is this your last season?” “Michael, are you going to retire?” It didn’t matter that it was October and the end of the season was *months* away, people were already looking ahead, wanting to know. And there was Michael, remaining steadfast, it’s about today, about this moment, about this game, refusing to say a word about the future. Even as he sat in his hotel room after they’d won the ’98 championship, and people wanted to know what came next, Michael demanded they stay in the moment. No matter what, no matter how insistent people were, Michael refused to let anyone take him out of the moment, all that mattered was the present, here and now.

Now, I'm not saying that the book of Acts is "The Last Dance" or that the disciples are the 1998 Bulls, but what I will say is that the disciples could have taken a few pages from MJ's book. They didn't need to like put a line of Air Jesus' out, but they absolutely could have benefitted from the call to live in the moment, focus on the present, and turn their attention away from the too far away future. Center themselves in the here and now, the current call of the gospel, not let their minds float to questions about what was going to happen, years, decades, centuries, maybe even millennia down the line.

We find the disciples and Jesus in their very last moments together in our Acts text this morning. This is very much post-resurrection Jesus, but a pre-Pentecost disciple corps. They've been living into this 50 days since Easter by seemingly, doing what they've always done. Jesus is still there with them, eating, teaching, being amongst them, and so it's probably been easy to get lulled into a false sense of confidence. Sure, we went through that whole crucifixion thing, but so much time has passed and

everything feels so *normal*, that they just revert back to their old selves, almost as though nothing has changed, as though Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection haven't entirely changed the trajectory of everything.

You see it, right off the bat, with this question they ask Jesus. They *know* what has happened, they lived it, they went through Palm Sunday, and the countless numbers of times that Jesus was like guys, my kingdom is not of this earth, my kingdom is not what you expect, and yet here they are, not looking at what's right in front of them, but thinking, wondering what comes next. Hoping that what comes next is what they all secretly are still hoping for even though everything has changed. Jesus! Is *now* the time that you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?! Is that what's coming next? What's your next move, Jesus? It's gotta be getting things here on earth kickstarted in a new way. And just have to imagine Jesus wanting to roll his eyes, like *guys*, *we've been over this*, that ain't happening. But ever so patiently, Jesus draws them back into the moment. No one knows the time that God has

ordained for all of that to happen, here's what you need to focus on *now*: the Holy Spirit is coming, and then you've got a whole world to witness to. It's going to start here in Jerusalem and then just keep spreading out, growing, getting bigger, until the gospel is heard to the ends of the earth. Don't worry about all of that kingdom stuff yet, it'll come when it comes, for now, for this very moment, you have witnessing to do, a whole world to talk to.

You would think that that would be enough of a reminder, enough to recenter and refocus them for the task at hand...and then, well, the disciples do what the disciples tend to always do, they repeat themselves. Jesus gives them this final commission reminder, *go witness to the world*, and then the ascension happens. Jesus is taken up into heaven, leaving the disciples to the work that is before them. And what happens? They all *stay there*, eyes focused upwards at heaven, like whoa, man, what does *that* mean? They just stand there, eyes turned up to the sky, paying zero attention to what's going on around them. It takes two angels showing up and tapping them on the shoulder like,

“Umm...guys...the work of the gospel is down here, not up there,” for them to come back to their senses. The angels actually just flat out call them on it, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” Why are you looking up there, when the world is down here? Why are you focusing at some faraway, future place, when Jesus just reminded you, you’ve got work to do, right here, right now, in this place? They can’t seem to help themselves, the world is waiting right there in front of them for them to spread the gospel, and they can’t keep their minds, their eyes from looking towards the future, wondering what comes next, what will Jesus do now? They can’t keep their feet firmly planted in the present, no matter how hard they seem to try.

I fear far too often we fall into the same trap as the disciples, that we need to take the same cue as they did from MJ...focus on the present, focus on the present, focus on the present. And I know, right now, the present isn’t the most fun thing to keep our eye on. We *want* to look forward to the future, to the what comes next, to the time when all of this is over, but the problem is, when

we do that too much, when we stand there, eyes glossed over, staring straight ahead towards what may be months ahead on the calendar, we lose the call of the present. And the same goes for life with our own faith and life in the church, and I don't just mean during this weird pandemic time. It can be really easy for us to get wrapped up in the staring off toward heaven part of faith. We can let ourselves just sink into that, I'll just stand right here and stare towards heaven, and think about my own personal faith and eternal life and resurrection, that we lose sight of what Jesus has *just* called us to, we lose sight of what our faith is trying to get us to focus on right here, right now. Obviously, as the church, both literally us the church, Trinity, but also the church writ large, we have a lot of questions to answer and things to wonder about about the future, but sometimes we spend so much time thinking so far afield we lose the ministry moments that are present right in this very minute. We focus so hard on what lies ahead that we don't see what's right around us, ripe for witness, for ministry, for mission, for spreading the gospel. We're always wondering what's

going to happen next, rather than asking what might happen *right now*?

I will whole-heartedly own that it is slightly ironic for me to be preaching this, when I know how deeply I'm guilty of this. I spend so much time worrying about the future that I think my present moment worries probably get a little jealous, but I think it drives home for me, how very much we all need this gospel, this reminder. Without a doubt, the future has very real questions and worries we have to consider, but our present day life also has a myriad of wonder and opportunities for faith, for ministry, for hope, if only we're willing to turn our eyes away from the sky and look around at where exactly on the ground our feet and our faith are firmly planted. The present is just as vital to who we are as individuals and as the church as the future is, and so rather than considering the heavens, the time may have finally come for us to consider the here and now.

We have a very real call and commission from Christ, just like the disciples, to go ye therefore and make disciples of all



nations, to witness to the wonders of the gospel with every act we do, with every breath we take. I would dare to say that taking a breath around your neighbor from behind the safety of a mask *is* an act of the gospel too. Those are the moments that we have to take advantage of, to not lose sight of, those moments when the gospel lies right in front of us, ripe for the taking, ripe for the living out. The present thirst of this world for the gospel, for the love of God, for the compassion of its neighbors is just as important, just as vital as what happens tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, next whenever. God is calling us to turn our eyes from the skies and look around and dare to ask how we can share the gospel right here, right now, right where we are, yes, even when right where we are is *home*. The gospel happens wherever we are if we dare to look around and find it, rather than looking ahead and missing the moment as it speed by us. Maybe we just gotta listen to MJ, when someone asked him if he had another one in him, hours after he had just won another title, “Y’all get in the moment and *stay here*.”

Just stay in the moment.” Get in the moment and stay here...I bet  
the gospel will find us. **AMEN!!!**