

February 27, 2022 – Hebrews 3:1-6 & Luke 9:28-36

If you're ever looking to make conversation with a fan of just about any sport, there is one topic you can always turn to for a good discussion: Who is the GOAT? By GOAT I don't mean the animal. I mean, the Greatest Of All Time.

Every sport has this discussion. Basketball: Is it Jordan? Is it Kobe? Is it LeBron? Is it somebody from further in the past like Wilt Chamberlain or Bill Russell. Baseball: Babe Ruth is the easy answer, but there are plenty of other contenders. Willie Mays. Nolan Ryan. Barry Bonds. Football: Well... as much as I hate to admit it, it's hard to argue against Tom Brady.

But I think I've made my point. Sports fans have a natural tendency to compare the best players. To take great athletes and try to rank them. "Yes, they were all great, but who was the greatest."

In fact, it's something that we do outside of sports too. Who was the greatest actor? Who was the greatest president? Who was the greatest artist? Who was the greatest scientific mind? Even Jesus' disciples argued one day about who was the greatest disciple among them. It's human nature.

Today in our Epistle Lesson, the writer of Hebrews makes a statement that might at first glance be pretty obvious to us. He writes, "*For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.*" And he spends this entire passage defending that statement. Defending his argument that Jesus is the GOAT. The greatest of all time. Greater, in particular, than Moses.

And all of us are reading this going, "Um... yeah. Duh?" Of course Jesus is the greatest. He's the Son of God. How could he not be the greatest? And, of course, we're right. He is.

But I think we need to keep this passage from Hebrews in mind as we read the account of the Transfiguration. Because it wasn't obvious to the people of Jesus' day. It wasn't obvious to Jesus' disciples. It wasn't obvious to Peter, James, and John as they climbed that mountain.

We don't know for sure exactly what mountain it was. Early Christian tradition held that it was Mount Tabor. And if so, it was a pretty strenuous climb. About 1800 feet in elevation from base to peak with steep sides.

But I doubt that the three disciples that Jesus took with him were complaining. Not only were they specially chosen by Jesus for this event, firmly planting them in at least the top 3 of the list of greatest disciples. But they also have to be thinking about Biblical history. God does special things on mountaintops. What special thing would he do on this one?

At first... nothing. Jesus starts praying. And, apparently, when Jesus starts praying, the disciples take that as their cue for nap time. Because just like in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus prays, they fall asleep.

Of course, they eventually wake up when the sun comes out. Except, it's not the sun. At least not the one in the sky. It's Jesus, shining as bright as the sun. His face altered. His clothing now dazzling white. With the glory of God surrounding him.

But Jesus wasn't alone anymore. Moses and Elijah were with him. Talking to him. Talking about his future. His entry into Jerusalem. His crucifixion. His resurrection. His ascension into heaven.

Now, you might expect that Peter would be fixated on Jesus alone. He's the one with dazzling white garments. He's the one they're talking about. But then he makes this silly comment, "*Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*" Even St Luke thinks it's a stupid comment. Peter didn't know what he was saying.

But I wonder if it tells us something about Peter's mindset. Because he's a Jew living in the 1st c A.D. And men like Moses and Elijah are his heroes. They are superstars. If you're arguing about who is the GOAT of the Old Testament, who is the greatest of all the Israelite men of faith, Moses and Elijah are probably going to be at the top of the list. The only argument is who's first and who's second.

They are the men that Jewish children looked up to. I can just imagine little Peter sitting on his father's lap. "Abba, tell me another story about Moses. Tell me another story about Elijah."

There were so many stories to tell. You've got Moses' being rescued from the river. Moses calling down ten plagues upon Egypt. Moses parting the Red Sea. Moses bring water from a rock. Moses bringing manna and quail in the desert. Moses meeting with God and receiving the ten commandments. Moses leading God's people to the Promised Land.

But then, Elijah has his own heroic deeds. Elijah punishing King Ahab with three years of drought. Elijah miraculously providing food to the widow of Zarephath. Elijah raising the widow's son from the dead. Elijah dueling with the priests of Baal and calling down the fire of God to burn up his offering. Elijah again calling down that same fire to destroy the soldiers of King Ahaziah. Elijah parting the Jordan. Elijah taken up to heaven in a whirlwind without tasting death.

Moses and Elijah. Moses, the bringer of God's Law. Elijah, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. And then, of course, Jesus. Standing amongst them. And all that Peter can think about is that he is in the presence of heroes. He is in the presence of superstars. He is in the presence of the GOAT. The greatest of all time. But which one? Let's make camp and find out.

God the Father puts a stop to all of that nonsense. A cloud comes down and envelops them. Just like the cloud that would envelop the Ark of the Covenant to indicate God's presence among them. And the voice of the Father spoken from within it, *"This is my Son, my Chosen One... listen to him!"*

Stop talking. Stop trying to make camp. Stop fanboying over Moses and Elijah. Listen to Jesus. He's the GOAT. He's the only one you need to pay attention to. He's the only hero you need.

Which, I'm sure Peter, James, and John readily accepted. Jesus is pretty amazing. He's done some pretty amazing miracles. And he's only 33 years old. He's got a serious shot at the title.

But then it all goes downhill. Literally. They come down from the mountain and the opposition to Jesus just gets stronger and stronger. The threats on his life more and more serious.

Until finally one evening, they arrest Jesus. They put him on trial. They sentence him to death. They nail him to a cross. And Peter, James, and John watch as he dies right in front of them.

This isn't how a hero behaves. This isn't what the greatest of all time does. This is weakness. This is humiliation. This is failure. How can God the Father say, "This is my Son, my Chosen One," and then just let him die? How can they listen to a man who could save others, but couldn't save himself?

You see, we're not that different than Peter. We have our ideas of what it means to be a hero. To be a superstar. What it means to be great. To be the greatest of all time.

It doesn't usually include things like being arrested and accused of crimes you didn't commit. It doesn't usually include being beaten and spit upon and humiliated in front of a crowd. It doesn't usually include dying a shameful death. And it certainly doesn't include doing all of this with such meekness and silence that you look like a sheep led to the slaughter.

That's not how Moses' stories went. He fought back with plagues and destruction. That's not how Elijah's stories went. He fought back with drought and the fire of God raining from heaven. But they are not the GOAT. Only Jesus is the greatest.

Moses and Elijah, the Old Testament people of Israel, the New Testament Church: We're all God's house. God has built us up together into his people. Into a great Temple to his glory that will last forever.

But Jesus is the builder of the house. And he built it by shedding his blood. By dying for us. By washing us in the waters of baptism and feeding us with his own Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

He is the builder. And he has shed blood, sweat, and tears to make us what we are today. He has worked harder than any athlete ever has to build us into a Temple to the Lord. Moses was great because was faithful as a servant. Serving in God's house. Doing what God commanded of him. Making use of the power that God gave to him.

Jesus is greater because he was faithful as a son. With his own authority. Watching over his household with the love and sacrifice that can only come from someone who takes ownership of it. And that is what Jesus has done. For when he makes us his house, he takes ownership of us. He puts his name on us and says, "You are mine."

The Father declared Jesus to be His Son, His Chosen One. And now Jesus declares us to be sons and daughters of God. Chosen by Him through baptism to be his house. Like the cloud that descended on the Ark of the Covenant and the cloud that descended on the Mountain of Transfiguration, the cloud of God's Spirit rests on we who have been baptized into his name. And so we are God's dwelling place. We are the place where His glory rests.

Jesus is the GOAT, the greatest of all time. That much is obvious. But he's not the greatest for his heroic deeds or his wondrous miracles. He's the greatest for his acts of love and sacrifice for us. He's the greatest for rising from the dead and giving us hope in the resurrection. He's the greatest for giving us something to hold fast to in confidence. A hope to boast about. For He is coming again. And then we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.