

**God's Foolishness**  
**1 Corinthians 1: 18-31**  
**Ann Hatfield**

My primary form of exercise is squash. No, not the vegetable, but the game. Squash is played on an indoor, enclosed court with a long racket and a small, hard ball. It's great fun and excellent exercise, which I have enjoyed since college. Not counting some years off during two pregnancies, I have been playing squash for about 40 years. Reflecting on four decades of practicing quick footwork, good racket preparation, and strategic shot selection, I often think to myself, "Ann, you should be A LOT better at this game!!"

Through the years, I've had numerous lessons and attended many clinics intent on improving my squash game. One lesson stands out. It was a training session with Ben Desombre, a coach from France. As with other racket sports, a basic skill is watching the ball. My tendency is to look at the wall where I want the ball to go. Ben reminded me to keep my eye on the ball, which is the moving target. I cannot do his French accent justice, but basically, he encouraged me to "Watch the ball, not the wall. The wall is not going to move. Focus on the ball."

The focus of the Christian faith is following Jesus Christ. Now.....how we follow Jesus varies from person to person. Some of us might follow Jesus by using medical skills to care for patients in an emergency room. Others might volunteer in the community or here at Westminster to ensure all God's children have access to healthy food and safe housing, and every person feels welcome. Knowing Christ and making Christ known looks different for you and me – each of us embody it in unique ways.

However, what doesn't change or vary is the backdrop of our efforts – the "Wall" if you will. The immovable constant of our faith is Christ crucified. While other religions may believe in one, holy God, only Christianity proclaims God took on human form, was crucified, died, and was resurrected. Writing to the early church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul explains the significance this way: "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." (v. 23)

As Paul journeyed from city to city sharing his theology of the cross, he was often ridiculed as a babbling of VERY strange ideas. The heart of Paul's message was claiming that a tortured and crucified man from Nazareth WAS the Messiah. Really? THIS is your good news???

Paul's audiences sneered at his message. Christ crucified appears to be a story of weakness and foolishness – a story repulsive to some and ridiculous to others. But to those who believe, it is the power of God.

Theologian N.T. Wright captures the significance of the cross this way:

The Christian good news is all about God dying on a rubbish-heap at the wrong end of the Empire.....It's about the true God confronting the world of posturing, power, and prestige, and overthrowing it in order to set up [God's] own kingdom, a kingdom in which the weak and the foolish find themselves just as welcome as the strong and the wise, if not more so.<sup>1</sup>

History records the Romans tortured Jesus, and he died a horrible death on a cross. But thankfully, that is not the end of the story. For God raised Jesus from the dead. Christ's resurrection fully reveals both the power of God and the depth of God's love. It means Jesus is alive as Lord of the world, and Christ continues to call people to faithful discipleship. God invites you and me to keep our eyes on Christ – to look for places where God is already at work in the world and join in. This must be our focus, as we strive to find our place of active discipleship in God's kingdom of justice, love, and peace.

Perhaps you remember the W-W-J-D bracelets that were popular years ago. WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? Asking this question can help us refocus our attention on following Jesus. As you and I live out our faith, it might also be beneficial to add some letters to that acronym: W-W-J-H-M-D. What Would Jesus Have **Me** Do. What WOULD Jesus have me do?

God invites you and me to become more Christ-like – to be shaped more and more into the image of God. KNOWING what Jesus would do is part of the equation. The other half is actually doing it. It is figuring out what Jesus wants ME to do – today, tomorrow, next week, and next year. Knowing Christ and making Christ known is a lifetime endeavor.

I've been playing squash for 40 years – which feels like a lifetime! – and now it's a victory if three things happen: I had fun, I got exercise, and no one got hurt!

What are we trying to accomplish as we practice a lifetime of Christian faith on a daily basis?

The 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet Micah poses that question this way: "What does the Lord require of you?" Micah's answer speaks to the true nature of worship and of loving God. It does not consist of rote, outward rituals. On the contrary, true worship is about inner transformation – allowing ourselves to be shaped into the likeness of Christ through the power of God. What does God want? God wants us to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God. We do justice when you and I are a voice for those who are oppressed, unprotected, and exploited – when fairness and equity are extended to those treated as less than a beloved child of God. We love kindness when you and I respond to God's extravagant love by sharing that love with others – when mercy and compassion overflow in abundance. We walk humbly with God when you and I listen for God's voice, keep our eye on the ball – ON JESUS, and allow ourselves to be transformed by the power of God's love made evident on the cross.

We are barely one month into a new year, and already the news media is dominated by multiple mass shootings, terrible climate change events, and the brutal murder of another black man by police officers. Into these horrible, life-taking realities, the prophet Micah and the message of the cross speak a hopeful, life-giving message. While the world judges the wisdom of God and Christ crucified to be foolishness, you and I know otherwise. A crucified Messiah may sound ridiculous to some, but to those who believe it is the power of God to work in us and through us – guiding and transforming you and me for the well-being of creation and all God’s children.

Today at our annual congregational meeting, we have the opportunity to review and give thanks for all the ways God’s love was made manifest in our community of faith during 2022. There is much to celebrate in the ways we have made Christ known together this past year. And now looking forward into 2023, let us keep our eyes focused on Jesus. Remember the encouraging words of Micah: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Truly, the power of God is revealed wherever and whenever the love of God is embodied through you and me.<sup>2</sup> May it be so. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 2004, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> Richard M. Simpson, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1*, 2010, p. 307.