

Most of you know that I like to play. I like to have fun with work and especially with life in general. And so playing games during VBS was a good fit. We played one game that the kids really enjoyed while we were playing although the next day, I heard that pretty much everyone ended up with rug burns and were not real happy with me.

The kids had to take off their shoes and socks and then had to put on a pair of my socks. Then they crawled around on their hands and knees trying to pull the socks off of others while keeping their own socks on. They all really seemed to enjoy it and then I noticed a couple of them still had both of their socks on and so I yelled out everyone go after Caidon and everyone still in the game swarmed him and got both of his socks. I think it was the older group that I yelled out for everyone, including those who had already lost both socks to go after Jake. And Jake was strong enough that I also had to grab both legs while he was on his back so that somebody could take off his socks.

It was a great game. The kids had fun since there was a lot of noise with this particular game but this game also had a tremendous purpose. It taught them about how easy it is to bully people and how willing they are to follow.

I was the bully. I was calling the shots when I told them to go after this kid or that kid. They did not stop with just taking one sock off because I wanted my victims to lose both socks so that they would be out of the game. And every one of those kids were more than willing to do my bidding.

I was the bully and had no problem convincing them to pick on whoever I called out. Even though this was a game to teach them about bullying, it is more than a game because it is real life. In some ways, Paul was a bully. In his own words Paul said, "I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it."

Paul was picking on Christians. He was persecuting them. He was bullying them. After he came to know Christ Jesus, he even admitted it because he knew that he was wrong. We are not much different than Paul. How often do we bully people? Some of us are really good at acting like a bully. We see somebody who is different from us or who may think differently and we decide that we need to attack. We decide that we cannot like them because of our differences.

But is that the way God calls us to live? Does HE expect us to live our life hurting and hating others because we are different or because of our own beliefs? There are plenty of

people who do live like that just as Paul did. But just like Paul, the gospel of Christ can change lives.

Bishop Gustafson preached at our opening worship at assembly this past Thursday and he closed the sermon with a story. He has a friend named Jason who hated all Muslims because of 9/11. One day he was driving and there was another car that was speeding and weaving in and out of traffic. The driver of that car slammed into another car that was stopped at a light. Jason stopped to help along with a number of other drivers and he ran to the car that was rear ended. He pulled open the door and was immediately confronted by his hatred. The innocent driver of the car that was rear ended by the road ragging driver was a woman who happened to be wearing a hijab. She was Muslim.

Jason froze for a couple of seconds as he took in the scene that was before his eyes. And then he reached out his hand and held hers with the cross that hung around his neck dangling between them. The love of God that flows through the cross broke through his hatred and allowed him to be compassionate to another who was hurt.

Just like Paul, it is the love of God that allows us to turn from our bullying and our hatred and instead to reach out to one another in compassion. When that happens, we glorify God.