

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
1 Corinthians 2:1-16 *Wisdom It Is*

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The game of King of the Hill was a popular past time when I was growing up. It's a game that is more challenging for kids who grow up in Northwest Ohio because topographical variation is rare and it can be hard to find a hill. In the winter it was easy because there were snow piles around. In the winter it was also safer because we were well padded in our snow suits and moon boots. But in the summer we were left to improvise as we identified a hill for our game. For a little while my brother and I were the luckiest kids in the neighborhood because we had a huge hill in our own backyard, a hill that was really just the pile of dirt left behind after a septic line was installed, but it worked brilliantly for our purposes. Trying to knock the neighborhood kid who was standing on the top of that mound of dirt down, often as we were wearing bath towels pinned around our necks to designate our status as super heroes, was an engaging challenge. The clumps of clay and occasional rocks made the journey up the hill challenging and made staying on the top difficult because it was hard to gain traction. I was usually the only girl but I was brawny and determined and wasn't afraid to get dirt under my fingernails as I clawed my way to the top. And so it was that we pushed and pulled and played with one another in our games of King of the Hill sometimes until someone started bleeding, but usually just until one of the neighborhood moms broke up the party by calling someone to come inside.

In many ways the philosophy of those King of the Hill games—do whatever you have to do to get to the top—was good training for getting ahead in this world, at least according to what the Apostle Paul refers to in this morning's scripture passage as "human wisdom." Often human wisdom tells us that it's okay to do whatever you have to do in order to get to, and stay at, the top of the hill, the ends justify the means, if you will.

Human wisdom lauds the mega rich without stopping to ask whom or what they may have exploited or taken advantage of—child laborers, the environment, former colleagues, their families—in order to get there. They're at the top of a hill of money and that's enough to make them appear a success in the eyes those who look at things from the perspective of human wisdom.

Human wisdom lauds people with degrees from prestigious universities and titles before names and letters after their names and yet, as my friend Conway used to say, "Some people are educated beyond their intelligence." Now I'm not condemning higher education, I'm a big fan of it. And again, thank you for generously supporting my efforts to put that "Dr." before my name ten years ago, but to suggest that a person who has a framed piece of paper on the wall is somehow better than a person who doesn't, that's a facet of human wisdom. Sometimes those titles and degrees are all smoke and mirrors, a matter of university legacies and who can afford the tuition. And, as we saw first-hand last year, sometimes a matter of corruption and someone's mom buying one's way into a spot that should have been held for someone who had actually earned it.

Human wisdom is lauded in the media. Oy, the media—be it conventional media or social media—the media often promotes and exonerates the King of the Hill behaviors of politicians, athletes, celebrities, and pundits. It doesn't need to be true to be published or posted—it just needs to attract readers, advertisers, or followers declaring that they "like" it. So much of the media promulgates lies, feeds fears, and celebrates the victories of those at the Top of the Hill while it turns a blind eye to those who get stepped on and pushed out of the way by those attempting to climb their way up.

And while it's tempting, and appropriate, to bemoan the state of human wisdom "these days" and long for the good old days, in many ways the human wisdom in those good old days was just as bad, if not worse than, the human wisdom of today. This point is driven home to me each week when I facilitate the three Bible studies of which I get to be a part. For the last three months these groups have been studying First Samuel and now have moved onto Second Samuel. We often lament the bloodshed and warring madness. We talk about the tribalism

and the futile King of the Hill games—all these things that are the result of human wisdom run amuck. And then we pause and wonder . . . what has really changed?

Well, the Apostle Paul is here to tell us this morning what has changed. Jesus is what changed, and changes, it all. Jesus shows us the folly of human wisdom and lives the way of Divine wisdom. Christ the Messiah did not come and follow in the ways of the kings of Israel who promoted warring madness with their games of King of the Hill. Though prophesied to be the one who would win the ultimate game of King of Hill, the one who would knock down all of the others—especially the invading armies of Rome—Jesus proved to be quite the opposite.

Indeed, Jesus wasn't interested in games of power and one-up-manship. Jesus wasn't born to be the King of the Hill. Jesus was born to be the Prince of Peace. He didn't try to reach the top of the hill. Rather, Jesus stood at the bottom of the hill where he could catch the folks who were being knocked down by the people on their way up. And, knowing it was too big of a job for one person, he went to some others and said, "Come and see." And they followed him and he showed them how it's done, he showed them the way.

And so Jesus and his followers caught the folks being knocked down by the kings of the hills. They caught the meek and the grieving and the poor and the widowed and the disinherited and the hungry and all of the everyone who suffered at the hands of the empire. And when Jesus and his friends caught them and helped them to get on their feet again, they didn't send them back up the hill. Rather, they said, "Come and see" and they showed them a different way—a way of peace and justice and inclusion and healing and wholeness.

Jesus showed them that while human wisdom was pursuing a position of power at the top of the hill, no matter the waste and wreckage left behind or the corrupted means by which one arrives there, divine wisdom is to help the folks at the bottom. Divine wisdom is that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Divine wisdom is that when you know you have just one day to live, you don't throw a lavish party; divine wisdom is that if you're got just one day to live, you wash the feet of your friends.

And this is the message about human wisdom that Paul is trying to communicate to the folks in the church in Corinth in this morning's scripture passage. He explains that he, like Jesus, is no King of the Hill kind of a guy, and that they don't need to be King of the Hill or Queen of the Hill, either. "I did not come with eloquence of human wisdom . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." Or, in the words of *The Message*, "I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified."

Who Jesus is? The guy at the bottom of the hill saving us from the Kings and Queens of the Hills of this world. Jesus is the one who is with us all of the moments of our lives, saving us from the evils of the world, saving us from the egos of ourselves, leading us not into the temptation of trying to clasp and grasp our way to the top with bloody knuckles, but rather to come on down and follow him, come on down and help and serve and love, not because you must, but because you may. Come on down and follow him, not because you fear what might happen if you don't, but rather because you're just so incredibly grateful to have been invited.

The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that we don't need to play the games, we don't need to fight our way to the top of the hill, we don't even need to climb the ladder of the expectations born of human wisdom. The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus lifts us up, cleans us off, and invites us to follow him into a new reality in which love, mercy, justice, and peace reign.