

**Super Bowl Sunday**  
**And What's Really Important**  
Psalm 138; I Corinthians 15:1-11

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This *must* be the most important day of the year worldwide, right? And the most important event of the year worldwide begins this evening at 5:25 Central Standard Time. Everybody will be watching—in homes, restaurants, churches, at parties, and, if you are one of the fortunate, in person in Miami. Super Bowl XVIV: what possibly could be more important? What could be bigger than America's biggest football game? NFL.com is running a countdown clock, as are some airports, and television networks. ESPN's live coverage began about thirty minutes ago. Postgame coverage will begin at 10 p.m. Bloggers are providing wall-to-wall coverage. What a game! What a day this is!

Of course, sports fans in Europe have a wry smile on their faces today because they know differently. They know that more people worldwide tune in to their soccer finals than will watch the Super Bowl tonight. As hard as that is for us to believe, it is true. Apparently the soccer finals truly have a global audience, while the Super Bowl has little interest outside the U.S. With all the super hype for the Super Bowl, all the great players, the creative and expensive commercials, it's hard to believe the whole world isn't watching. Even harder to believe is this: most of us won't watch either. As super-hyped as this game is, only about a third of us will watch it.

So it begs the question, "What really is important today?" Some of you are looking for work. You'd probably say that that's really important to you. Some of you see your health or your spouse's health deteriorating, and you would say that that is important to you. Some fear that your marriage is crumbling. You worry about choices you see your children making. Your son or daughter is in Afghanistan or Iraq or Haiti. Your retirement money is dwindling. There are some really important things today, and they have nothing to do with tonight's big game.

Of course, the Apostle Paul had never heard of the Super Bowl or football or soccer. This early champion of our faith, a faith that is truly

global, a faith that has thrived for over 2000 years, Paul knew what was really important, and that important fact continues to bear upon us. In our text for today, Paul was writing to the church in the city of Corinth, a congregation in serious conflict, to remind them of what was most important. The congregation had divided into factions over a variety of issues. They needed something that they all could agree upon, some central truth they all could embrace, something that would pull them together.

This is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I handed on to you *as of first importance* what I in turn had received....”

Paul started the church in Corinth. At that time, he handed to them what was of *first importance*. What he handed them in the beginning was not like the issues that had the church in Corinth divided into factions. No, what he handed to them in the beginning was the most important thing. It was central, their core identity. What Paul writes next is the basic confession, the central message, of the church. It was then, and it is today. This is it:

*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and...he was buried, and...he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures....*

Paul goes on to say that the resurrected Christ then appeared to the apostles, then to “more than five hundred brothers and sisters.” Finally, “last of all” Christ appeared to Paul, who considered himself to be “the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” because he had persecuted the church. But God appeared to Paul too, in a dramatic fashion on the Road to Damascus. It wasn’t because Paul earned it. It wasn’t a reward for faithful service. No, it was an act of grace, God’s grace, and it changed the direction of Paul’s life. It changed the direction of history.

If the Apostle Paul could speak to us today—Super Bowl Sunday, with the countdown clock ticking—here is what I think he would say: God’s grace is what’s important. When the weight of life bears upon you, when your burdens feel like they’re about to smother you, the grace of God that we find in Christ is important. The grace we find in the One who died for our sins, who was buried and raised on the third day, that is important. The grace we find represented at this table, that is important to you, to me, and to the world.

In a moment, I will serve you a piece of bread, and Rev. Johnson will serve you a cup. They are symbols of the body and blood of Christ who died for our sins. When you eat the bread and drink the cup, remember...and know that the grace of God is still available, even if you don't feel like you deserve it.

If you are a guest and you too are a follower of Christ, you are our brother or sister. We invite you to join us in this act of remembrance. When you are served, hold the element until everyone is served. A blessing will be pronounced, and we will partake together.

A Prayer of Confession is printed in your worship guide. Join me as we pray together.