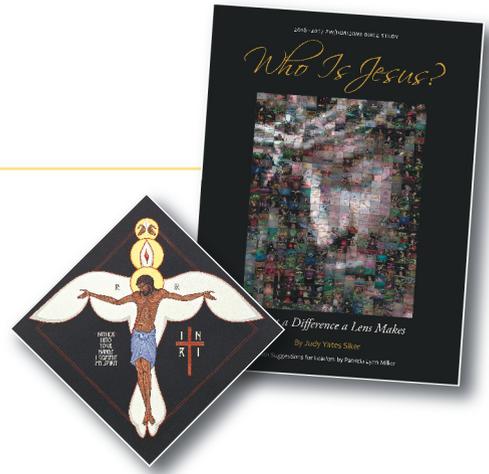


# A Walk with Jesus

BY KATIE MULLIGAN

For use with Lesson Five of the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker



## Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Over the last few years, some of my most significant theological insights and friendships have come from interactions on Twitter. Twitter is a social media platform that functions a little differently than Facebook. On Twitter, I interact mostly with strangers, and our posts are limited to only 140 characters at a time. These constraints make for lively conversation! Twitter is a very useful tool in learning about the world because it allows me to connect with people I don't know from a wide variety of backgrounds.

One night a few years ago, I was up late corresponding with Twitter friends. A black woman I sometimes interact with tweeted a comment about something offensive a white acquaintance had done. Embarrassed, I replied to her tweet, apologizing for what had happened. She responded swiftly and clearly: "Why are *you* apologizing? I wasn't talking about you. Your receipts are good with me."

As I read the 1 Corinthians passage, I am reminded of this interaction and my knee-jerk, defensive response. Embarrassed, I rushed to say, "I'm not *that* kind of white person," feeling the need to define myself against the experience of the other. I found it difficult to rest easy in my own self without declaring what I was *not*.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." I wonder whether Paul could see the irony of defining believers so sharply up against what he was determined they were not.

James Baldwin wrote a letter titled "Anti-Semitism and Black Power," and in that letter he stated, "I would like us to do something unprecedented: to create ourselves without finding it necessary to create an enemy."<sup>\*</sup> As I read Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I wonder about his need to define believers by insulting Jews and Greeks. Was the "foolishness" of the "message about the cross" not enough on its own? Where did Paul's defensiveness come from?

My thoughts tumble back to Baldwin. I wonder what it would be like for Christians to define ourselves by the foolishness of the cross and to not worry so much about what we are not. If we take Paul's word for the wisdom and power in the centrality of the cross, what rules and tenets and requirements and boundaries might fall away? What could we offer the world as Christians without defense? What defense does Jesus really need?

**Questions**

1. What does the phrase “the foolishness of the cross” mean to you?
  
2. Can you define who Jesus is without saying who Jesus is not?

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\* James Baldwin, “Anti-Semitism and Black Power,” in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 204.

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