

PASSION FOR SPORT

How serious is that?

“You can not be serious!” To do it justice, that utterance really needs to be spaced out, set in capitals and adorned with a few more exclamation marks. Let me try again: YOU CAN NOT BE SERIOUS!!!! That's more like it.

Whatever it was the charismatic tennis star, John McEnroe, wished to communicate with those words, it was probably not an understatement. His view could not have been made more clear.

By comparison so many utterances offered in the name of the Christian faith are cringingly wimpish. Words are arcane, phrases clichéd, sentences convoluted, paragraphs unintelligible. How sad that something so important becomes so obscured by the very words used to express it.

It was so, so refreshing to overhear a teenage girl who was being goaded about her refusal to participate in a questionable activity, say, with maximum eye contact, “Because I'm a Christian; you got a problem with that?” You can not be serious? She was, and all credit to her.

Of course that sort of confrontation may seem light years away from anything experienced by those who were witnesses to the great events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. They had watched him, listened to him, quizzed him and, in turn, been bemused and confused by him. And yet when he had gone and his Spirit had swept them up and sorted them out, they were as in-yer-face as was that teenage girl and McEnroe, with rather less of his attitude.

I have the impression of the apostle Paul being a crusty and crotchety sort – a possible model for a later McEnroe, perhaps. After all, he had been blasted into belief on the Damascus road (Acts 9; 1-9), viewed with understandable suspicion by those he had previously been persecuting and then he embarked upon a series of journeys which were punctuated with beatings, imprisonment, a shipwreck and political as well as religious opposition (2 Cor 11; 24-31). No shortage of bad hair days for Paul in that lot.

But Paul never let go of his conviction that he had discovered the most serious thing in the whole of creation. While the authorities, the mockers, and the fearful were saying: You can not be serious! Paul was ploughing, at times, a very lonely furrow which serves to underline just how serious were both he and his message.

So how seriously do you take your faith as a follower of Jesus Christ? Seriously enough to know what you believe? Good start. Seriously enough to examine what you believe? That's better. Seriously enough to share what you believe? That's crunch time, isn't it? And perhaps the really big crunch comes when someone says to you: YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS! And you can reply: MORE SERIOUS THAN YOU COULD EVER BELIEVE!

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