

# The Vintage Voice

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## The Score Vs. The Game

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One of my favorite *The New Yorker* cartoons shows a lady golfer knee deep in the rough beside the fairway. She addresses her caddy, “Young man, you and I are going to share a little secret.” The secret, of course, is that the golfer is going to use a “hand mashie” to place the ball out of the rough onto the fairway; two acts of cheating: saving herself from a bad shot and avoiding a penalty stroke. I prize that drawing because it captures for me a larger truth about life: you can cheat on the score, but you can’t cheat the game. The “score” being the visible rewards of a “successful” life; the “game” being the moral realities of human life as God has created it.

I learned the realities of golf on a particular round in my teens when my ball went astray on an easy putt. I looked at the ball in heavy frustration and favored it with an unprintable condemnation. As I stepped back to survey the situation a bit more calmly, it occurred to me that the ball was utterly innocent: it had responded precisely to the instructions of the club. Furthermore, the club had done to the ball precisely what the golfer’s arms and hands and shoulders and feet had instructed it to do. Ball and club head are utterly innocent in the game of golf; aside from the occasional disruptions owing to maintenance and repair of the course or the equipment, total responsibility lies with the golfer. Club and ball are quietly obedient; they do precisely what the golfer instructs.

How like life. In the moral world God created when he led us to the borders of Eden and gave us the gift of freedom, life responds to what we do, not to what we intend or imagine we intend. Nowhere is this more poignantly true than in our personal relationships: what we do speaks louder than what we say; how we act speaks louder than the words we use. Extending the golfing metaphor where one’s whole body is involved in the stroke, one’s whole self is involved in the personal encounter: every choice, every relationship, every value, every dream — all I am is involved and expressed in each encounter, and the deeper the encounter, the more the profound the revelation.

And because each of us is an imperfect being, burdened with a mixed past and striving for a better future, deeply embedded in each child of God is the need to be forgiven. Little wonder the cry of Solomon at the dedication of the temple: “. . . hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and when thou hearest, forgive.” Forgive. Our first need in the presence of God: his forgiveness. This is not to say we are required to grovel; it is saying we are required to be honest, and to recognize that we come into God’s presence with unclean hands. Honesty: the primary, the basic requirement in our encounter with God, our need to be forgiven.

Work on your game; the score will take care of itself. (And please replace your divots.)



Edward and Elizabeth Sims enjoy their thirty-third year of retirement on the Atlantic coast, thanks to the consummate investment skill of the Church Pension Fund.