

20th August 2023 at the Sunday 9.00 am and 10.30 am

SKIING OFF-PISTE

Sermon preached by The Revd Dr Tony Martin delivered at Cromwell
Presbyterian Church

READINGS:

Matthew 7:13-14

The Narrow and Wide Gates

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 11:25-30

The Father Revealed in the Son

25 At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

27 “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Matthew 9:9-13

The Calling of Matthew

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

SENTENCE FOR THE DAY

Matthew 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

INTRODUCTION

A very warm welcome to Calvin Gore Church youth group ... and of course to our own youth group.

Now, I hear that you had a great day on the slopes skiing yesterday ... and that this is an annual fixture ... which has been going on for some time.

So, it is wonderful to welcome you all to worship this morning ... and I trust you are not aching too much from your exertions on the slope ... and lack of sleep.

I would like to make three brief points this morning ... in the 10 minutes allocated to me.

And they are based on three important Scripture verses from Jesus ... in Matthew's Gospel ... which we heard read earlier.

1. Choose your course in life carefully ... and avoid skiing off-piste ... or bush bashing to use a tramping metaphor ... unless you measure the dangers well ... and take precautionary action. And remember God has a deep and profound love for you. You are valuable. You are priceless.
2. Remember that if ... and when ... you feel a bit lost ... especially if you have skied off-piste ... then ... that is the moment to ask some of the big questions in life. And to be reminded that Jesus said **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**
3. Be aware that God calls some very interesting and peculiar people to love and serve him ... including some of us this morning ... which is a great comfort if ... you feel a bit odd ... or are not in the cool kids group.

FIRSTLY, I WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO CHOOSE YOUR COURSE IN LIFE CAREFULLY AND AVOID SKIING OFF-PISTE UNLESS YOU MEASURE THE DANGERS WELL AND TAKE PRECAUTIONARY ACTION.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember skiing with some friends and as we were racing down the slope we decided to leave the main route and go off-piste.

All was fine until we bumped into an icy patch ... which created a heart flutter or three.

At the bottom of the slope, we came to an inglorious halt ... and were pleased to stop in one piece, apparently.

The last person to arrive was the garrison sergeant major – a distinguished fellow who rejoiced in keeping order and discipline in the troops. Sadly, just after he came to a

dishevelled halt ... he flopped forward ... and broke his ankle.

Now, I will not trouble you with the drama of

- casualty evacuation off the mountain,
- the complex medical treatment challenges and cost
- transporting him from Austria back to German ... disgruntled and less than happy
- and the embarrassment he felt limping around the garrison with a large unsightly plaster cast

Suffice it to say, he might have had some sympathy with Jesus ... when Jesus was speaking in a more general sense said,

Enter through the narrow gate (or authorised ski route). For wide is the gate and broad is the road (or off-piste route) that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

Now, of course, I am using ... skiing off-piste ... as a metaphor for life ... where we might be tempted ... to live dangerously ... or unethically.

So, if you arrive in an unhappy situation in life ... off-piste ... allow me to say to you this morning ... to remember that God has a deep and profound love for you.

**For example, have you seen this before ...
\$100 note**

- **Does anyone want it**
- **What is the picture on the note ... can you remember**
- **How valuable is it**
 - **crinkled up**
 - **soiled**
 - **stamped on**
 - **kicked**
 - **ripped?**

You know, the value doesn't change ... and by illustration ... neither do you ... to God ... if ... or when you arrive in life ... unhappily off-piste ... so to speak ... so please ... young people, remember that God has a deep and profound love for you. You are valuable ... you are always priceless to him ... always.

SECONDLY, REMEMBER THAT IF ... AND WHEN YOU FEEL A BIT LOST ... ESPECIALLY IF YOU HAVE SKIED OFF-PISTE ... THEN THAT IS THE MOMENT TO ASK SOME OF THE BIG QUESTIONS IN LIFE.

Video – Tell me there is a heaven

Please remember that Jesus said,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will

find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Some of the big questions in life are ...is there life beyond the grave, is there a heaven ... and a hell ... is there any comfort for me from God today ... do I ... and others ... really matter to God ... does life have meaning and purpose?

Well, I will say 'yes' and I ask you to think about these words from Jesus,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

THIRDLY AND FINALLY, BE AWARE THAT GOD CALLS SOME VERY INTERESTING AND PECULIAR PEOPLE ... TO LOVE AND SERVE HIM ... INCLUDING SOME OF US THIS MORNING ... WHICH IS A GREAT COMFORT ... IF YOU FEEL ... A BIT ODD ... OR ARE NOT IN THE COOL KIDS GROUP.

Let's here again from Matthew Chapter 9:9 says,

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever felt ... unworthy ... or different from others ... then ... allow me to say ... you are in good company.

- 1. Moses stuttered.**
- 2. David's armour didn't fit.**
- 3. John Mark was rejected by Paul.**

4. Timothy had ulcers.
5. Hosea's wife was a prostitute.
6. Amos' only training was in the school of fig-tree pruning.
7. The patriarch Jacob was a liar.
8. David had an affair.
9. Solomon was too rich.
10. Jesus was too poor.
11. Abraham was too old.
12. David was too young.
13. Peter was afraid of death.
14. Lazarus was dead.
15. John was self-righteous.
16. Naomi was a widow.
17. Paul was guilty of man-slaughter.
18. Moses was a murderer.
19. Jonah ran from God.
20. Miriam was a gossip.
21. Gideon and Thomas both doubted.
22. Jeremiah was a depressive.

23. **Elijah was burned out.**
24. **John the Baptist was a loudmouth.**
25. **Martha was a worrier.**
26. **Her sister may have been lazy.**
27. **Samson had long hair.**
28. **Noah got drunk.**
29. **Did I mention that Moses had a short fuse?**
30. **So did Peter, Paul - well, lots of people did.**

But ... you see ... God doesn't require a job interview and references when he calls us to follow him. He doesn't look at financial gain or loss. He's not prejudiced ... or partial ... or grudging ... not deaf to our cry ... and not blind to our need.

Now, I know it sounds crazy ... and perhaps it does not make a great deal of sense ... but God actually loves you and me, and some of us are

very odd indeed ... starting ... some might say ... with me.

Well, to summarise. Young people, thank you for coming to Church today ... to worship the Lord.

Please,

1. Choose your course in life carefully ... and avoid skiing off-piste ... or bush bashing to use a tramping metaphor ... unless you measure the dangers well ... and take precautionary action. And remember God has a deep and profound love for you. You are valuable. You are priceless.
2. Remember that if ... and when ... you feel a bit lost ... especially if you have skied off-piste ... then ... that is the moment to ask some of the big questions in life. And to be reminded that Jesus said **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**
3. Be aware that God calls some very interesting and peculiar people to love and

serve him ... including some of us this morning ... which is a great comfort if ... you feel a bit odd ... or are not in the cool kids group.

AMEN