

**6 June 2021**

## **West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

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Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

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A couple of weeks ago, the schools had a Monday holiday, so the lovely 3 boys in my life decided that we should go camping!

Let me just give you some background information here: I do not camp. I didn't even camp in South Africa where the sun always shines, so needless to say it's not something I would EVER consider doing here in Scotland!

But then Covid happened... And there's no chance of us going to SA, and the boys kept nagging and nagging: PLEASE mum, it will be fun! It always is!! So they've twisted my arm, and I went along.

They even bought me a stretcher so I didn't have to sleep on the ground, and there were so many goodies and gadgets in the car – we couldn't move! The 4 of us, the dog, the tent, a gazebo, a huge cooler box, 3 tables, a storage unit, 4 stretchers, the barbeque, clothes, food, sleeping bags, loads of blankets – which were really needed, because it was -1 degrees at night (as it sometimes happens in the lovely Scottish summer!), and 3 bikes!

I think it's safe to say that we had everything we needed!

Now the reason I don't like the idea of camping, is because it entails a lot of work. And when I'm on holiday, I want to rest. And I wasn't wrong about that! How on earth my 3 boys pitched the tent without me in the past is beyond me – they had no idea what they were doing!

But they were right about 1 thing – it was lots of fun. We laughed so much!

One night, when we were lying in our sleeping bags, trying to all squeeze in together in the tiny sleeping area of the tent, Henro giggled and said that they should make a reality TV show called “Camping with the Groenewalds” – because seriously, I'm quite convinced some of the other campers were in stitches when they saw how clueless we were!

Let me just give you one wee example: The ground looked level when we pitched the tent, but believe me, I quickly realised it wasn't, when I kept rolling off my stretcher at night. I moved things around for night 2, but then my side of the tent collapsed during the night, and by night 3 I just gave up completely and moved out of the sleeping area so I could have room to breathe...

But it was such fun to be so close to nature! We walked and cycled and explored, and bonded and laughed so much!

It was Leo's first camping trip too, and I'm sure he enjoyed it, but I am convinced that if he could speak he would say he much prefers his own bed in our house!

Cooking and eating outside was fun, the boys really pulled their weight and impressed me with how grown-up they have become. They took such good care of Leo too: The poor wee thing was freezing and he didn't like lying on the cold ground, so he would end up on one of their chairs, and then they had to sit on the ground!

We left Edinburgh in pouring rain, and I was really apprehensive about the whole thing, but when we arrived just outside Aberfoyle, it was sunny and dry. It stayed like that for the next day too, but on the Sunday it started raining. And raining, and raining...

It is Scotland after all!

Seasoned campers knew how to handle it, but of course, we didn't.

We were told that it could have been much worse! We even heard stories of tents blowing away completely in the wind, and I thought to myself – who does this for FUN?

After 24 hours of torrential rain everything was a muddy mess!

And it's in those conditions that we had to pack up camp. Needless to say, I was EXHAUSTED when I eventually crawled into the tiny wee space I had to sit in in the car!

So I said to the boys – thanks guys – that was great fun, and I love that we made so many memories, but for me, the camping box is ticked now! I am not doing it again!

I have never in my life been so happy so see our house, to take a lovely warm shower and sleep in my own comfy bed! I appreciated all the wee things I take for granted every day so much more!

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And you know, I think this is exactly what the apostle Paul is trying to explain in his letter to the Corinthians.

This is such an easy metaphor to understand! I just love how Paul doesn't tire his readers out with complicated theological explanations, but how he describes their situation in a way even a child could understand!

Paul knew exactly what living in a tent entailed, because he was a tentmaker by trade. And in this letter he make use of the knowledge he had, to explain the journey of faith to his readers.

The believers in Corinth didn't have it easy, and they were struggling to make sense of the fact that believing in God sometimes made their lives harder, and not easier.

And that's why Paul explains that live here on earth is very similar to living in a tent: Sometimes it's amazing, it's fun, it most certainly is about making memories; but sometimes it's uncomfortable and exhausting and hard.

But the main thing to remember, is that it's *temporary*. And that's what got me through the weekend, knowing that I didn't have to stay in that tent forever.

Our lives here on earth are fleeting, but we have a permanent residence with God, something to look forward to.

The difference between a tent and a house is huge!

If I showed you a picture of our manse in the summer, in the sunshine, and then again in the winter, in the freezing cold snow, what would you notice? The house still looks exactly the same! It doesn't matter what is going on outside – inside it is nice and warm and cosy, it's comfortable and familiar.

I love our house!

And that is what it will be like to be with God one day. Perfect.

But Paul doesn't say that we should wish our lives away. No. He says that *precisely* because it's fleeting, we should make the most of every minute. We should focus on the good, and when it's hard, we should be courageous and strong.

There are so many things that can make our lives hard. Things that annoy us, way more than the midges can(!), things that hurt us, things that cause us to worry and stress, things that can throw our lives completely upside down – I'm thinking Covid-19, for instance, but not only that.

The wind and the rain and the thunder and the mud of life; relationship trouble, financial concern, illness, bereavement, you name it, these

things can sometimes make getting through a day no fun at all, BUT that is not what we should focus on.

We should focus on the positives. On the fun. On the good. On the love and the care and the kindness and the laughter, on the support and the flowers and the sunshine and the rainbows, because these things are there too – most of time at the same time as the harder things.

And how will we be able to focus on the things that are really important? God will help us. We should just trust him.

Because even though we are still on earth and not with him yet – He is here with us now.

His love for us forms a protective layer around us.

So the way I see it, is that although life on earth might be like living in a tent, it's a tent like no other, with more than just the bare necessities. It's stitched together by the grace of God, waterproofed with God's protection, anchored into the ground with the love of Jesus, which means that even when the winds of hardship blows it around, it will never blow away.

It's filled with the Spirit's guidance and support, like a pair of wellies at the entrance, getting us through the mud underfoot, until it is dry again.

So let's focus on all the positives. Not on the negatives, on everything we wish we had, but on everything we do have; because in reality – I know deep down that although I told my boys that *that* was my first and

last camp, I'll probably go again if they ask me nicely, because the special memories, and the love and laughter, are worth so much more than the struggles (which I know I'll forget about after a while, because that is how God made us).

So let's take heed of the apostle Paul's advice: let's be full of courage, and make sure that - more than anything else - we want to please God.

Because ultimately, *that* is why we are here in the first place, not to have fun. The fun and the laughter are a bonus!

May God help us all through his grace to be able to distinguish between what is trivial and what is important, what is fleeting and what is everlasting...

Amen