

## Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2024

In January, we had the privilege of going skiing as a family. It's a number of years since we managed this and I never take it for granted. I love being in the mountains and this year's venue was in the Aosta Valley in Italy and featured the Matterhorn. It had an 'other-worldly' feel and it was good for the soul. That said, it was holiday which we enjoyed on different levels; in fact finding a level was harder for some than others.

Caroline, who is a proficient skier just struggled with a lack of energy that impacted her usual confidence. On the first day, as the children with the confidence of youth flew down the hillside and outta sight, I stayed with Caroline as she wound her way slowly down 'blue run 26' until eventually we got to a little cafe. She turned to me and said '*Chris, I can't do this, I need to stop, rest and get a coffee and then try again*'. It was the wisest call she made that week as it set the tone for how she needed to manage her skiing and get the maximum enjoyment. Each day (with increasing confidence it has to be said) she'd make her way down blue run 26 and park at Cafe Etoile for a latte and then go again - refreshed. I've reflected on that recently, in particular through the eyes of Lent.

The 40 days of Lent can mean different things to different people but usually the common denominator is that the journey is one of the individual giving up something rather than a collective responsibility. But what if the overriding feeling for many this Lent is just wanting to 'give up' rather than any sacrificial giving up?

In talking to others and observing it...people are just weary.

For my part, I've been drawn to the Old Testament prophet Elijah who, when at his most vulnerable said *I've had enough Lord, just let me die*. God's response wasn't to give him a tough time but rather prioritised rest and recuperation for the journey ahead. Elijah had emptied the tank and was scared and lonely.

I actually wonder if for many this Lent, the wilderness experience is less about sacrifice and more about refuelling our broken weary fragile selves. After all, it was Jesus himself who asked the question *Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.* Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

Maybe this Lent we need to take something of this on board and do so because it's important self-care. And we need people with us on the journey to help with that refuelling process. So, let's acknowledge that feeling like giving up is valid but then seek the support we need to put self-care in place recognising that Jesus - in a very clear and permission giving way - put a priority on it because it's a necessity.