

The 1999 movie *October Sky* is the true story of Homer Hickam, Jr., who rose from a gloomy West Virginia coal mining town with not much hope of a future to become a NASA engineer. Homer's mind and imagination is completely captured by the launch of Sputnik. All a sudden he is fascinated by rockets. There's a scene early in the movie when Homer is thinking about talking to Quentin, the school nerd and his best friend, Roy Lee says: "You can't be seen with him Homer. He's a weirdo."

As Homer gets up to go talk to Quentin, Roy hollers: "Go ahead but you can kiss your social life goodbye"

Homer's best friend, Roy, was just trying to warn him by talking to Quentin, Homer would be ruining his reputation. But Homer ignored the warning because he had a dream; he wanted to build a rocket. The dream began the night he saw Sputnik fly overhead in the October sky. However, like any dream, Homer had to overcome some large obstacles, the most imposing being his lack of knowledge about either math or physics. That's why he needed to make friends with the school nerd. Quentin had studied rocketry and what he didn't know he could learn.

Homer also had to overcome the mindset of a small coal town whose only dreams laid buried underneath a mountain of dirt. So, Homer Hickam risked his reputation and walked across the school cafeteria to become friends with the one person everyone in school avoided. And so began a friendship that became known as the Rocket Boys.

Overcoming social barriers to befriend someone else is difficult in our social conscious society. The people with whom we associate reflect who we are. If you're into social status then you know that you don't move up the social ladder by hanging out with those kind of people. You can't climb the ladder by hanging out with weirdoes. If you do, people look at you like you're crazy and soon they label you as one of the weirdoes. **But, you know, that is exactly what Jesus did.**

Let's look at the 1st part of today's message, and you'll see what I mean.

Matthew 9:9-13.

[9] As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

[10] And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples.

[11] When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

[12] But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

[13] Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

The Pharisees sounded just like Homer's best friend, Roy Lee, didn't they. But did you notice Jesus' answer? Listen to how Eugene Peterson's *The Message* puts it: *"Jesus, overhearing, shot back, 'Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: 'I'm after mercy, not religion.' I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.'"*

Pretty strong stuff. And yet, that's what the Church's work is all about. To reach out to others with the Good News of Jesus. **This passage contains a Challenge, a Call and a Cure.**

So, What is The Challenge?

Finding the Challenge is simple. Accepting the Challenge is the hard part. The first thing any of us must overcome is the same thing Homer Hickam had to overcome. **For the Tax Collector, Matthew, the challenge was to improve his reputation, not lose it. For Jesus,** it was the tarnishing of His reputation for the sake of Matthew and the rest of the world.

Homer Hickam did lose his reputation, but he gained a whole lot more. He convinced Quentin, Roy Lee and Odell to dream with him. Together they not only dreamed but they started building rockets. They didn't get much support from the people of Coalwood. Everybody seemed to be against them. Everybody seemed to be discouraged by them but those four boys never gave up. **They finally received the reward for their dream and their hard work by winning first prize for their rocket design in the national science fair.** Along with the first prize, each boy was

awarded a college scholarship and each one graduated. Homer Hickam, went on to train astronauts for the space shuttle program.

The lives of those four boys were changed all because one of them was willing to risk his reputation and become friends with someone who was friendless. By taking a risk, accepting the challenge to see the worth of another person, and by a lot of hard work, the Rocket Boys fulfilled their dream.

Our challenge is the same. Jesus saw not only Matthew, but every outcast, every sinner, every human being as a person of worth. We're called to look at one another through the eyes of Jesus; through the eyes of faith. When we look through His eyes, all the social barriers, all the social stigmas melt away *and all we see is a child of God in need of the care of the Great Physician.*

II. The Call

That was The Challenge, and the CHALLENGE Led to THE CALL.

Just as Jesus called Matthew and said: "Follow me." We too are called to "Follow Him." We're called to live a life like His. Now, I'm not talking about becoming an itinerant preacher gathering disciples, preaching in fields and performing miracles. Don't give up your day jobs. Instead, *I'm talking about being a disciple. I'm talking about living a life whose sole purpose is to glorify God and to become more like Jesus every day.*

The Call is also to spread the Good News of Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins, who gave His life so we might have life. Who died and was buried, then three days later rose from the grave destroying death completely and offering us resurrection and life eternal.

The Call is simple, to become more like Jesus and tell the whole world about Jesus.

BUT WITH OUR "CALL" WE ALL CARRY A "CURE." *Why? Because there is a sickness in this world called SIN.* It's sin that separates us from God and from each other. It alienates us and isolates us. *And Jesus has the Cure. He's passed it on to us and we now have the Cure for the Common Coldness of Life.*

I ran across an old story about a man who was visiting a friend who had five children. Dad got called to the phone which left the man with the kids. He asked one of the little girls about her doll collection: *"Which one is your favorite?"*

"Promise you won't laugh if I tell you?" she answered. "No I won't laugh," he said. She went into the next room and brought back a doll that was the most tattered, dilapidated, worn-out doll he had ever seen, a real refugee from the trash heap. All the hair was missing, the nose was broken off and an arm was cracked. He didn't laugh, but he couldn't cover his surprise.

So, he asked, *"Why do you love this one the most?"*

The little girl replied, *"Because she needs my love the most. If I didn't love her, nobody would."*

Jesus said that God is like that. God loves us the most when we need it most. That's not to say that God doesn't love us when we're good; when we're on the right path; when we're living in God's will. God loves us then, just like the father loved the eldest son in the parable of the prodigal son.

But God's love is deeper and closer when we feel broken and abandoned because God's heart breaks for us. And God desires for us to be healed and whole and back home with Christ where we belong. When we are in need of healing, God is ready to work His miracle, through the love of Jesus.

EVERYDAY GOD KNOWS WE FACE "CHALLENGES," SO HE SENT HIS SON JESUS TO HEAL US AND HELP US THROUGH LIFE. AND WHEN WE ARE "STRONGER," HE "CALLS" US—AND SENDS US OUT TO OTHERS IN NEED. WHY?

BECAUSE JESUS HAS THE CURE. It was purchased on the cross and began to be dispensed the moment of the resurrection. And He's passed it on to us. Through our faith in Christ, through His entrusting us with His message of salvation and healing, **we now have the Cure for the Common Coldness of Life.**

One Christmas season, members of a Church were preparing for annual Christmas Pageant. A little boy who had been crippled by polio and walked with crutches wanted to play a part in the pageant. All the major roles had been given out, Joseph, the Wise Men, Shepherds. The boy was disappointed. Finally, it was decided that he would play the role of the innkeeper. This boy was a very sensitive boy, and it really bothered him that he was going to be the only person in the play who would have to reject Jesus. All during rehearsals he was excited to be in the pageant but troubled by his role.

The night of the performance, the auditorium was packed. The play began. And then came the part where Joseph knocked on the door of the inn. The little boy's big moment had arrived! He couldn't restrain himself any longer. He threw open the door and shouted at the top of his voice, ***"Come on in! I've been expecting you."***

The audience roared, thunderous applause broke out, and they all agreed later that this was the greatest Christmas play they had ever seen. **In his own special way, that little boy had expressed the spirit of the Gospel, the Spirit of Jesus reaching out to us: "Come on in! I've been expecting you."**

Maybe the greatest act of Grace you and I can experience is the grace that allows us to see the need for Grace in the lives of others. *The folk of the world who are seen as outsiders, outcasts, and Sinners --- those who need the GRACE OF JESUS JUST LIKE YOU ARE I DO.*

THAT IS THE "CALL," the "CHALLENGE" and the "CURE" all rolled into one.

I remember one little girl from the community, who came to church with her friend on Communion Sunday like today. When the service was over, she came by, shook my hand and said: ***"I like YOUR church. They serve refreshments."***

Someone once said that after we experience the love of God in Christ, life and faith become a party. **If that's true, then the elements of Holy Communion ARE our refreshments.** The only problem with that analogy is that while we're in here celebrating and having a party in honor of the **Great Physician**, the ones who need this party the most, **the ones who need what the Great Physician is offering are still out in OUR COMMUNITY WAITING FOR US TO INVITE THEM IN.**

Don't you think it's time we grabbed some cake and took it out to them. Because I don't think they know there's a party going on here.

I don't think many of them will ever know there's a "CURE" waiting for them.

IT IS OUR "CHALLENGE" AND OUR "CALL" TO TELL THEM THAT. ARE YOU READY??

AMEN.