

I have to be honest with you; I didn't have time to work on a sermon this week. I do have what I believe is a good excuse. This week was our joint Vacation Bible School with St. David's. It was an "all-age" VBS and I was responsible for delivering the adult lectures each night, that's 4, 45 minute long lectures in one week, so I hope that you can understand that they took up all of my thinking and writing time.

It was a great week. We focused on the C.S. Lewis story, "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe." We had a good turnout all week long, and on Friday night we gathered here at Christ Church to finish by actually watching the movie.

But when I rose yesterday morning to write a sermon all I had in my head was the C.S. Lewis material I spoke on during the week. So I'm going to share with you a few of the points from those talks and then connect them to the major point that Jesus is making in today's gospel lesson.

First. C.S. Lewis led a fascinating life. He lived from 1898-1963, and he actually died on the same day that JFK was assassinated. He was raised in Belfast, Ireland, and had at least three generations of distinguished Anglican clergy in his family, including a bishop. The family home, called "Little Lea," provided the imaginative background for the professor's house in "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe." Sadly, when Lewis was 8 years old, his mother died of cancer and from that time on he seemed to close off a part of himself. By his mid-teens he had become an atheist. He fought and was wounded in WWI. Upon returning to England he graduated from Oxford University, after which he was appointed a tutor in English language and Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, a position he held for the next 29 years. Atheism was fashionable in 1920's Oxford, but to his astonishment Lewis found that the people who impressed him the most always turned out to be Christians, people like JRR Tolkien, who went on to be one of Lewis' closest friends. Then in 1929, at the age of 30 Lewis, while riding atop a double decker bus, and in his own words, "admitted that God was God," and, became the "most reluctant convert in all of England."

During the 1930's Lewis was instrumental in founding a group called the Inklings; a gathering of Oxford intellectuals who were also creative writers. They met weekly at the pub, enjoyed drinks and one another's company, and read to each other whatever they were writing at the moment. Tolkien was in this group as well as Lewis.

When WWII broke out, Lewis took in four school girls who had been evacuated from London. This is when he first conceived of writing a story about four children. During the war Lewis also became a national figure by accident. First by publishing satirical letters in The Guardian about a Senior Demon writing to a Junior Demon about how to more effectively tempt humans, but he

also gave radio broadcasts on the BBC about the basics of the Christian faith. These broadcasts were hugely popular to a war torn nation, and the talks were later published under the title “Mere Christianity.”

The Chronicles of Narnia were published between 1950-1956 during which time he met and married Joy Gresham, a Jewish American who had been converted to Christianity through reading Lewis’ books. Joy finally melted the emotional wall that had been there since his mother’s death, but, sadly she too died of cancer in 1960, providing the emotional backdrop to one of Lewis’ most moving books, “A Grief Observed.” Lewis, as I said, passed away 3 years later in November of 1963. A fascinating life indeed.

Second, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* is a fascinating book. It was published in 1950, and one of the questions I have had about Lewis is how a 50 year old bachelor academic came to be the author of children’s literature.

Prior to that time he wrote mostly academic and intellectual works, although he had a space trilogy and the *Screwtape Letters* to his credit. But in 1947 Lewis participated in a public debate at the Socratic Club in Oxford with a philosopher names Elizabeth Anscomb, who challenged Lewis’s book titled “*Miracles*,” beat him badly in the debate, and sent him into a period where he seems to have questioned his own faith.

He apparently worked through this crisis of faith by returning to his childhood love of fantasy, because, if his intellect had let him down, his imagination, his religious imagination, reawakened within him his deep seeded faith.

Thus the land of Narnia, a Lion Messiah, a Witch/devil, talking animals, and, of course, four children were born.

Lewis found that make believe was really another very effective way of talking about what is real. And so Lewis produced the seven *Chronicles of Narnia* in six years.

And this is the link I see with today’s gospel lesson. Jesus’ disciples were criticized by the Pharisees for not following Jewish law by washing their hands before eating, thus rendering them ritually unclean.

Jesus responded by saying that it is not what goes into a person that defiles them, but what comes out of them. In other words God is not so much interested in our hands as he is in our hearts; our inner lives, our secret motivations, what really goes on inside of us.

Christianity and all religions inevitably have a split between those who are concerned with externals and those who are concerned with the internals. And we Episcopalians love our externals. We worship in beautiful buildings. Our clergy were ornate robes. We know when to bow, kneel, and make signs of the cross. And Jesus isn’t necessarily against externals, he is simply saying that the internals are a better indication of the state of our souls.

And Lewis' focus on his religious imagination was how he learned to focus on his own internal life. For example, how can we conceive of a Kingdom of God within us and among us, as opposed to what we perceive as the "real world," unless we can allow our imaginations to fantasize about what God really desires for us?

You see, both Jesus and C.S. Lewis are saying that there is a reality that is more real than what our five senses can tell us. That reality requires a lively inner life, filled with prayer and love and imagination and, Lewis would add, really good books.

So that's my sermon for today. Hear the scriptures and allow your religious imaginations to explore what this Kingdom of God is like. And then live in that Kingdom as much as possible. Amen.