

Sermon for 27th September 2026

May I speak...

This week I will take the liberty of preaching on the Epistle rather than the Gospel.

Here the Beaver's voice sank into silence and it gave one or two very mysterious nods. Then, signalling to the children to stand as close around it as they possibly could, so that their faces were actually tickled by its whiskers, it added in a low whisper – "They say Aslan is on the move – perhaps has already landed."

I realise that this is not the Epistle but it has some bearing on that text, so I hope you'll forgive me

And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it has some enormous meaning – either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the children felt something jump in its inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.

Some of you will recognise that passage, or at least be able to guess where it is from. Aptly enough, it is probably the name “Aslan” which gives it away, which seems suitable as the text is all about what the name of Aslan can do. It is from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis. That novel is the first of the so-called “Chronicles of Narnia”. It definitely is the first, despite what Greta Gerwig might have to say on the subject, but that’s another argument for another day.

It came to mind this week because it strikes me as itself a sermon or commentary on today’s Epistle. Perhaps we could say that the whole of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is a commentary on that passage. I didn’t notice it the first time, but on rereading, the phrase “at the name of Aslan...” signals the connection. That small textual detail parallels the reading we heard earlier:

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father

And in setting up the parallel, it calls our attention to the significance of that name, both in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and in the New Testament. And each of the Pevensie children have a different experience at the name. These all suit their personalities. Peter feels brave, Edmund horrified, Susan entranced and Lucy delighted. The name of Aslan – just like the name of Jesus – speaks to each person’s inner self. But I think we can find another parallel here. The Epistle says that “at the name of Jesus” every knee should bend but also “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”. None of them declares that Aslan is Lord - though Mr Beaver is soon to tell them that he is King of the Wood, and Son of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. But at this moment, each of the children have a sudden feeling which expresses something of God’s nature and action towards humanity.

“Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror.” As many of you know, in the story Edmund has betrayed his family and made a deal with the evil White Witch, in exchange for magical Turkish Delight. Edmund’s feeling seems to recognise the name of Aslan as a judge or someone who knows his secrets. As our creed says “he will come again to judge the living and the dead”. Edmund becomes suddenly aware of his own need for redemption, and Aslan will redeem him at great cost.

Peter “felt suddenly brave and adventurous”. Peter reacts to another meaning of Aslan’s name – the mighty deeds of God. As the Magnificat says “He hath shown strength with his arm”, or as Psalm 77 says you have displayed your might among the peoples/ With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph”. Now Susan “felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by”. Susan is reacting to beauty, one of the names of God. As St Augustine cried out, “Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient ever new, late have I loved you!” But there’s also something distinctive about the kinds of beauty she reacts to – a delicious smell or a strain of music. These are things people create for the sake of beauty. I think Susan is responding to God as creator – again our creed “maker of heaven and earth... through him all things were made, seen and unseen.” The latter being exactly what a smell and a strain of music are.

And Lucy feels like the beginning of the holidays or of summer. I used to think that this is as close as C.S. Lewis could get to describing the idea of eternal life to children – that sense that all the good things will last forever. I still feel there’s a tinge of that. But considering it as an aspect of God’s nature and actions, I had another idea: it’s freedom. As it says in the Benedictus, “for he has come to his people and set them free”. It’s one of the great themes of salvation, the Israelites literally being “set free” from slavery by God’s action in Egypt, and humanity being “set free” by Jesus’ atonement. That sense of the holidays beginning, of being released into “free time”, has a faint echo of freedom in a broader and richer sense. The name of Aslan means being set free.

None of the Pevensies know who Aslan is at this moment, so they are in no position to identify him as the King of the Wood, or indeed “confess” him as Lord. I should point out that “confess” here is used in the older sense, to mean “make a statement of belief”. But they all do “confess” Aslan in their different ways. Something in each of them reacts to some part of him and his work of salvation. What happens to them, though inarticulate, is much deeper, and changes them more, than simply saying “Aslan is King”. They are stirred, changed, called towards their destiny, drawn towards becoming their truest selves.

We might consider this kind of “confessing” in our own lives. Not just saying that “Jesus is Lord”, though it is important to do so, and a great deal of our liturgy is directed towards saying it in the fullest way possible. But also reacting to the full meaning of that phrase. Letting it make us feel adventurous. Recognising in it our need for redemption, and the accomplishment of our salvation. Seeing it as a key to the beauty of the world. And hearing in it the prospect of freedom.

Amen.