

“THE INSIDE IS BIGGER”

(Narnia – The Adventure Begins)

Rev. Alan Jackson

Matthew 7:13-14 (p. 939)

Romans 6:18-23 (p. 1095)

The dedication page reads: *To Lucy Barfield*

*My dear Lucy, I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it. I shall probably be too deaf to hear, and too old to understand a word you say, but I shall still be your affectionate Godfather, C. S. Lewis. Thus begins **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** – the first of Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia.*

The idea of reading and reflecting on this book over the course of several Sundays came to me during my sabbatical last summer at Oxford University where Lewis lived and taught. My plan is to take one chapter each week and reflect on it. I hope that you are, as Lewis put it, “old enough to start reading fairy tales again.” More importantly, my prayer is that you will find this book not only an enchanting fairy tale, although it certainly is that. Lewis believed, as do I, that sometimes truth is best apprehended by the imagination rather than by simply hearing a report of the facts. Jesus certainly made great use of stories in teaching deep truths about the Kingdom of God. So each week after reading from the book, I’ll offer a few thoughts for you to reflect on. Now – to the story.

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 1

We have yet to meet the lion – and the witch – but we now know something about the wardrobe. In teaching about the Kingdom of God, Jesus said, “*Enter through the narrow Gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*” I wonder if Lewis had that paradox in mind when he had Lucy enter the adventure by stepping through a wardrobe door.

When Peter entered the room and saw only the wardrobe, he said, “*Nothing there!*” and they trooped out. He found nothing extraordinary about a piece of furniture. Yet Lewis uses that wardrobe to introduce a concept that will surface repeatedly in the Chronicles of Narnia. The idea is this: **The inside is bigger than**

the outside. From the outside, the wardrobe looked quite ordinary. It was a known quantity with fixed dimensions. Ah, but once she was inside the wardrobe, Lucy found far more than she expected. The concept that the inside is bigger than the outside is a key part of the way Lewis viewed life. And of course, there are all sorts of examples of it.

It's true when it comes to education. The course description may have seemed simple in the syllabus. But once you got into the subject you began to realize that there was a lot more to learn than you thought. And isn't that the way it works? A typical sophomore thinks he knows everything. But if he survives to graduate school, eventually he'll come to terms with the fact that he will never completely master the subject. It turns out the subject is a whole lot bigger on the inside than it appeared from the outside.

It's true of people. We're all tempted to look at their exterior and think we know who people are. We've all heard the lines. "*Well, what did you expect? After all, she's a Republican!*" – or "*He's gay, so that explains it.*" – or "*You know how lazy those Mexicans are.*" We look at people on the outside and think we know everything there is to know about them. Far more often than not we know very little. When young David was being sized up as a candidate for King of Israel in 1st Samuel, his father told the prophet that he shouldn't bother to check David out. After all, he was the runt of the litter – a nobody. His big brothers were far more impressive. And do you remember what God said to Samuel? He said, "*Man looks at the outward appearance – I look at the heart.*" God looks inside and sees that there's a whole lot more to you than what may appear on the outside. I am so thankful that God sees us that way.

More often than we realize, things are bigger on the inside than on the outside. And in case you've never thought about it, it is every bit as true when it comes to faith. And the wardrobe might help us understand just how true that is. As long as you only look at the wardrobe from the outside, you're bound to conclude that if you were to get yourself locked inside it, that would be a very unpleasant experience. Lewis makes that point by having Lucy repeat the thought that it would be a very foolish thing to shut oneself into a wardrobe. That's conventional wisdom. But it is also the way many people view the adventure of faith. They may want the adventure, but they want it to be safe, predictable, controlled.

Critics of Christianity will sometimes argue that those who lock on to faith in God are rather like people who lock themselves in a wardrobe. They willingly and foolishly imprison themselves in a system of rules and regulations. Sad to say, that is true of some people who embrace Christianity. They turn it into a stultifying regimen of dos and don'ts. But that is not Christian faith. One of my favorite authors, Paul Scherer, put it this way. "*It has been said by intelligent,*

sensitive people, that there always seems to be something wrong with very Christian people; they're odd somehow, and say odd things, with cramped little ways – as if they had been forced into a mold they didn't fit. Maybe. But that isn't what Christianity does to them. It's what they do to Christianity.”

Critics of faith will look at such people and make of them their generalized assessment of all Christians. And I'll have to admit that, as long as they're only looking at faith from the outside, that conclusion is quite understandable. It's only when you get into the faith that you realize how much room there is. It's not cramped at all. There's more freedom on the inside than on the outside.

Jesus expressed this paradox in a number of ways. He said that if you want to be number one, you'll have to become the servant of all. If you want to be great, you'll have to humble yourself and become like a child. If you want to be on the winning side, you have to pick up your cross. Try to save your life and you'll lose it. Lose your life for His sake and you'll keep it forever. The wide gate and the broad way lead to a dead end. It's the small gate and the narrow way that open out into life. That's what Jesus said.

But aren't those all paradoxes? Yes they are. Well then, they must not be true. No, they are true – more true than you may realize. A paradox is a truth that appears false when you're looking at it from the outside. The curious thing about a paradox is that it is only by getting inside it that you will understand how true it really is. That's what led Paul to write in his letter to the Romans: *“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.”* That is, as long as you were outside the faith, you figured you were free to do anything you wanted. And in a sense you were right. There were no rules to stop you from sinning. The problem was that, while you were exercising your freedom, you were slaves to sin and didn't realize it.

I want you to know that Christ offers you an alternative paradox. You'll still be slaves. But instead of being slaves to sin, you can choose to become slaves to righteousness. And here is the bottom line. The paradox of being a slave to sin is that, while you may think you're free to do as you wish, you're killing yourself – you're committing spiritual suicide step-by-step. The paradox of being a slave to righteousness is that, while you know you are no longer free to do whatever you wish, step-by-step you are becoming more and more fully alive – and it will never end.

When it comes to faith, in ways that many of us may have never imagined, the inside is bigger than the outside. But whether or not you enter through that narrow door – that's your choice.