

“AT THE NAME”

(Narnia 7)

Luke 8:4-8 (p. 1001)

“Have you realized what we’re doing?” whispered Edmund to Peter. *“We’re following a guide we know nothing about.”* And it was true. The children were following a silent robin deeper and deeper into an unknown forest on nothing more than a hunch that they were doing the right thing. Soon Edmund began sowing doubt. And, of course, his words echo those of everyone and everything that has ever called faith into question. *“How do you know who you’re following – or that you’re going the right way?”*

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” – Chapter 7

Now, let’s go back to when the children first met Mr. Beaver. We already know about the witch and the wardrobe. But only now do we for the first time hear mention of the lion. Beckoning the children to come close, Mr. Beaver said in a low whisper, *“They say Aslan is on the move – perhaps has already landed.”* And at the name of Aslan each of the children felt something jump in his inside. Edmund felt a sense of horror; Peter felt suddenly brave; Susan felt deliciously pleased; and Lucy felt sheer, unrestrained delight – all that from simply hearing the name of Aslan. What was Lewis getting at in this scene? How could nothing more than the mention of a name cause that kind of profound reaction?

To answer that question I’m afraid we’ll need to go back to our Old Testament roots. Thirty-five hundred years ago (give or take a few years) most people believed in all sorts of gods. Each god had a name. And people thought that, if you invoked the name of a particular god in just the right way, you could make that god do what you wanted. So people routinely used the names of their gods like magical incantations.

However, the one true and living God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – wasn’t about to be jerked around that way. So when Moses asked for the name of this particular deity who was speaking to him out of a burning bush, back came the reply, *“My name is I AM WHO I AM. If anyone asks who sent you, tell them I AM WHO I AM sent you.”* That is the literal meaning of those four Hebrew letters (yod het vav heh) that we have transliterated as either “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.”

God said to Moses, in effect, *“I understand how tempting it is to want to use my name to get what you want. But you’re going to have to trust me in this. I’m*

not like those other gods. I'm real. There is more power in my name than you know how to handle. And I'm not going to let you fool yourself into thinking you can control me – because you can't.” When God said to Moses, “*My name is I AM WHO I AM,*” he was making it utterly clear that he will not let us manipulate him or get him to do what we want, even in our prayers – especially in our prayers.

Lewis touches on something of that same mystery when the name of Aslan is first mentioned here in the book. Although they do not yet understand it, it's clear that all four of the children intuitively recognize that there is something mysteriously powerful in that name. And yet Lewis rightly captures the fact that, although there is power in the name, that name can have a dramatically different effect on different people.

In his teachings about the kingdom of God, Jesus taught the same truth. He said the word of God is like a farmer who went out to sow his seed. Some seed fell along the path where the birds ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky soil where it shriveled in the heat. Some seed fell among the weeds and had the life choked out of it before it could grow up. And some seed fell on clean soil where it produced a good harvest.

Now, just as proclaiming the word of God meets with four very different kinds of reception in the parable, so each of the four children responds to the name of Aslan in a unique way. Now, I'm sure Lewis never intended this scene as a kind of veiled re-telling of the parable of the soils. But I do see a striking similarity between Edmund's response to Aslan's name and the hardened path on which some of the seed fell. Face it, Edmund's heart was hardened before he had ever heard Aslan's name mentioned. I suppose it was almost inevitable that he would see Aslan as the enemy. But it was the White Witch who had seen to that.

Similarly, when Jesus later explained the parable to his disciples, he said that the seed that fell on the path was the word that the devil had then stolen away. It wasn't just Edmunds' fault that he reacted the way he did to the name of Aslan. True enough, he was responsible for what he had done. But he had help. The Witch played on his weakness.

Incidentally, in case you didn't know it, a heart full of self-pity is one of Satan's favorite workplaces. Lewis understood that self-pity is an ideal place for Satan to raise a bumper crop of resentment and envy and misdirected anger. And that's just how it was with Edmund. He was bitter and feeling immensely sorry for himself. I wonder if you noticed that while the other three were all busy helping with dinner, Edmund is not mentioned once, and we don't hear a thing from him. Do you know why? I think Lewis was implying that Edmund was sulking. And as we will discover next week, the outcome could prove to be devastating.

But take heart. There is still much more to the story. For all we may think we know, there remains a good deal of ambiguity. Hearts may yet be won. Lives

can be redeemed. What may seem certain now can change. But there is one thing you can be sure of. If Mr. Beaver is right – if, as he put it, “*Aslan is on the move – perhaps has already landed*” – then the time will come, inevitably and inexorably, when all doubt will be removed as to who he is, and which side is the right one. But mark my words: the time to choose sides comes sooner, rather than later. C. S. Lewis put the matter this way in his book *Mere Christianity*. He was talking about Christ coming to earth, and he asks:

Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is He not landing in force, invading it? Is it that he is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why he is delaying. He wants to give us the chance of joining His side freely...

When the author walks on the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right. But what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream or when something else – something it never entered your head to conceive – comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others, that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side.

There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

In our story today Lewis wrote of how, at the name of Aslan, each one of the children felt something inside, whether terror or bravery or pleasure or delight. Was Lewis overstating the case? Or is it possible that nothing more than the mention of his name could cause that kind of profound reaction? I tell you the truth, it is more than possible – it is inevitable.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote about how Jesus, who is one with Almighty God the Father, willingly humbled himself to live a human life and to die an ignominious death. And then he added this: “*Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” You can pay him his due now, or you can pay later. It’s your choice.