

Lamb of God or Lion of Judah?

Based on 1Corinthians 1:18-25 and John 2:13-22

3rd Sunday in Lent

You have, on occasion, heard me refer to the movies about the Land of Narnia, based on the books by C.S. Lewis, one of my heroes. In "Narnia, The Dawn Treader", at the end of the world, where the Narnian sky meets the earth, Edmund and Lucy climb out of the mire and begin to wade southward, along a beach.

Between them and the foot of the sky, there was something so white on the green grass, that they could hardly look at it. When they reached the source of this light, they saw that it was a lamb.

"Come and have breakfast", said the lamb in its sweet milky voice.

Then they noticed, for the first time, that there was a fire on the grass, and fish roasting on it. They sat on the grass and ate the fish. It was the most delicious food they had ever tasted.

"Please, lamb," said Lucy, "Is this the way to Aslan's country?"

"Not for you," said the lamb, "For you, the door into Aslan's country is from your own world."

"What?" said Edmund, "So there's a way to Aslan's country from your world and ours too?"

"There is a way into my country from all the worlds," said the lamb, but as he spoke, his snowy white, flushed into a tawney gold, and his size changed. He transformed into the lion they were seeking. Aslan himself, towered above them and scattered light from his mane.

C.S. Lewis uses two Bible images for God's Messiah – a lamb and a lion. The lamb is easier to love. The lamb takes away the sin of the world. The lamb is gentle, meek and mild. The Lamb is without blemish, soft and cuddly.

The lion, on the other hand, is ferocious. Of the 150 times that the Bible uses "lion" or "lioness", none refer to a gentle or friendly relationship. There are neutral verses – as when Samson found honey in the carcass of a dead lion; but otherwise, the purpose of lions in the Bible seems to be eating people and other animals.

But the cuddly lamb seems to stand in stark contrast to the lion in our temple story this morning, when Jesus confronts the money changers.

The lamb becomes the lion, and His zeal is evident in His anger and actions. We know, from the transformation of the cute lamb, into Aslan, that the lion needn't always be ferocious...he could also be kind.

However, Jesus did become angry when He saw money-changers in the Temple. Jesus is zealous to redeem a people – to take hearts and souls distracted from the glory of God and to restore them to that for which we were made.

Does the text from John today, seem to be saying that we should not exchange money in the Lord's house? While I appreciate the desire to honour God in all we do, that is not a correct application. Let us carefully consider the scene.

During the Passover, as many as 2 million journeyed to Jerusalem - the result was a carnival atmosphere with trinkets and food and imported finery. It was a wild, Middle-Eastern bazaar, and it meant big business, and each worshipper needed both money for the Temple tax, and animals to sacrifice.

So, in the midst of teeming excitement, inside the Old Testament church, two groups of businessmen draw our attention - sellers of animals, and money-changers. Thousands of animals were needed, but each had to be, "without blemish." The sacrificial system pointed to, and prepared us for, our Saviour - a man without blemish, whose death would save the world.

Unfortunately, there was a profound temptation to abuse, which polluted this system. If you lived near enough to Jerusalem that you could drive your own lamb to the sacrifice, there was a strong chance that your animal would be declared defective, and this is how the sellers made their money. For every unscrupulous priest, a dozen 'approved' sellers could be found, who would certify the sheep as 'perfect' – at a greatly inflated price. And the priest would get a cut of the profit. Therefore, certified sellers, empowered by approved inspectors, were in abundance, and so were extortion, payoffs, bribes and corruption.

Special money was needed also, to pay the temple tax, which every male over the age of 20 was required to pay - in Jewish currency, not dirty and defiled funds! Fortunately for you, money-changers would convert (at a profit), your filthy money into Holy Coins.

Religion defrauded God's people, and worship was exploited for crass profit. Jesus condemned crooks for changing God's Temple from a House of Prayer, into a den of robbers. He made a whip, and drove the traders from the temple, throwing their coins to the ground.

Of these three things we can be sure...

First, Jesus was **angry!**

Now you might think that the words 'angry' and Jesus would never belong together according to contemporary ideas of God. One writer even suggests that this story is a gross exaggeration.

Mark's version says that Jesus stared at the crowd 'with anger.' In Matthew, Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are like "a brood of vipers, snakes who would not escape being sentenced to Hell".

In Revelation, we read of the effect the final judgement will have on those who do not worship and follow Jesus. "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb, for on the great day of their wrath, who can stand?"

Secondly, Jesus is **passionate!**

In reading the Bible, we usually find a Jesus who is warm and accepting, forgiving and gracious, merciful and kind. But here, He is different. Why? His anger is directed at those who would keep people from finding His kindness and compassion. He is never angry with those who confess their need, and call out for help.

Jesus was angry with the Pharisees who said they had no need, and He was angry with the priests, who prevented people from finding true grace. Jesus is *angry* when religion distracts from God's glory, but is *passionate* about God's glory, to the point of sacrificing himself, for the sins of the whole world.

Finally, Jesus is **powerful!**

Some first century church-fathers called this Jesus' greatest miracle. We might not agree, but we must be struck by His ability to walk among the crowd and insist on getting his way. He has the power and authority to effect the change necessary to bring God glory.

The greatest statement of this power was when Jesus performed the great miracle of dying and rising again, so that we would believe the word and worship the lamb who is the lion.

Dare I suggest that we ask Jesus to put a whip to our own hearts and drive us from the Temple of insincerity, into a genuine desire for behaviours which will please our God.

Now back to Narnia! In one book from C.S. Lewis, 'The Silver Chair', Jill Pole is whisked away from her boarding school in England, as if by magic, to the land of Narnia. The adventure begins poorly as she is frightened by a large lion and ends up face down on the grass, crying.

When she stops, she is very thirsty, and plucks up the courage to go and look for the running water she hears. The sound grew clearer every moment, and, sooner than she expected, she came upon an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across the turf a stones-throw from her. But although the sight of the water made her even thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward to drink.

She stood as still as if she had been turned to stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason – just on this side of the stream lay the lion.

“If you are thirsty, you may drink.”

For a second, she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, “If you are thirsty, come and drink”. The voice was not like that of a man. It was deeper, wider and stronger – a sort of heavy golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before, it made her frightened in a rather different way.

“Are you not thirsty?” said the lion.

“I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I, could I, would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill.

The lion answered this, only by a look and a very low growl. And, as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well ask for a whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to...do anything to me if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the lion.

Jill was so thirsty now, that without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms”, said the lion.

“I dare not come to drink”, said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst”, said the Lion.

“O dear,” said Jill, coming another step closer, I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion, no one that had seen his stern face could do that – and her mind suddenly ‘made itself up!’ It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted. The lamb is a lion – but those who come to Him for mercy, find Him as meek as a lamb.

Think about that. AMEN