

Lent IV (B) RCL  
March 22, 2009

St. Margaret's  
Annapolis

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.  
*Amen.*

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, (most of us will quote the King James Version, saying "only begotten Son") so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Who among us – at least of a certain age – does not know that verse of scripture, if no other, by heart? We learned it in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. It was worked in embroidery, framed and hung in our grandmothers' houses, and scribed in our first Bibles. It is committed to our memories and written on our hearts. "For God so loved the world..."

My guess, though, is that few of us could quote the verses that follow: "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." That the world, the whole of it, be saved! Too bad more of us didn't memorize that part, too!

I wish I had a nickel, as my mother used to say, for every time someone has asked me something like: Will so-and-so (you can fill in the blank) be saved? Or: If a person doesn't believe in Jesus, will he or she get into heaven? Just a nickel, and I would be a rich woman.

I think the most poignant version was when a parent came to me for help with what to say to her young daughter. The daughter's best friend was Jewish, and it seems that someone told the daughter that her friend was going to hell.

As awful as that sounds, it's not an unusual question. In one form or another, the subject of who and how we might be saved has been the stuff of theological debate since theology was invented. And in this day and time, what with religious fanaticism in all shapes and sizes, it has become more than an abstract question, but one that hangs heavily in the air.

## WHO GETS SAVED?

The gospel of John goes on to say more: it says, "Those who believe in him [in Jesus] are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light... But those who do what is true, come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

The light has come into the world, but the world loves darkness!

I have loved the work of C.S. Lewis for decades. My favorites include The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, Mere Christianity, Surprised by Joy, and of course, The Chronicles of Narnia. I try to make sure that when our grandchildren are old enough to read, that they have copies of The Chronicles of Narnia. You know that series. It's the one that begins with The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.

Just as a sidebar here, according to Lewis scholars, he begged people not to *explain* the Chronicles to their children; just to let them absorb the stories. But back to the subject at hand.

I refer to Lewis because the question of salvation – of who and how we are saved – was near and dear to his heart, and often the subject of his books. His answer to the question of salvation is, in my opinion, best and most eloquently answered in the final book of the Narnia series, The Last Battle. Let me set the scene...

The children of Narnia, known as the Sons of Adam and the Daughters of Eve, have been through a final confrontation with the powers of evil, who are the followers of the god, Tash. Having refused to bow down before the enemy, they are forced through a dark barn and out its back doorway.

Resisting the urge to explain to you what that represents, let me just say that they find themselves in a new Narnia; one that is more real, more beautiful, more glorious than they had known it before. It is bright with new light. The grass is more truly grass, the flowers are more truly flowers – everything is being freshly reborn.

Others from the battle, the enemy dwarfs for instance, are there also. But they – in the very same place, and visible to the children – find themselves in total darkness. Then suddenly, one of the children spots a soldier of the enemy, a servant of Tash, named Emeth. It is clear that he can see; that he too is in the new Narnia. He proceeds to explain to the children how it happens that he is there.

It seems that he had been given cause to doubt his loyalties, and like the others was forced through the barn door. Soon after coming into Narnia, he came face-to-face with Aslan, the great lion. (We adults know who Aslan represents, but don't explain it to the children!)

Anyway, Emeth expected his meeting with Aslan would be the end of him. But instead, Aslan greeted and welcomed him. Emeth confessed that he had spent his whole life in service to Tash. And this is what Aslan said back to him: "Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service to me."

Attempting to understand, Emeth asked then if who one served didn't matter. Aslan explained: Any good deed is in service to him, Aslan, no matter in whose name it was done; and no bad deed, even if done in Aslan's name, is in his service.

"Beloved," said the Glorious One, "unless thy desire had been for me, thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."

All find what they truly seek.

So don't explain Narnia to your children. But if they come to you and ask who will be saved, tell them this: that everyone who loves the light, everyone who seeks truth and justice, everyone who cares for their neighbor, no matter in whose name, is beloved of the One who sent the Son to save the world.

And tell them that no amount of shouting the name of Jesus is in his service if it is full of bile and hate, if it judges or condemns others, or if it is not accompanied by works of mercy and forgiveness.

And whatever else you tell them, tell them this: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life." Indeed, God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn or destroy it, but to save it – to save the world. Tell them that.

Amen.

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