

The story is told of a boy who was raised in a palace. When he was old enough to understand, he was told that he was not living there by accident but because he was the nephew of the king. What's more, he also was told he would one day sit on the throne since the king had no children. But a few years later, the excitement of that news ended when he discovered that his uncle was not who he claimed to be. He was not the rightful king at all, but a usurper! The boy himself was the true king! That is because it was his father who held the throne before his uncle. And the throne now belonged to his uncle only because his uncle murdered his father to get it.

Those who have read the book, or seen the movie, realize the storyline, I just described is that of the C.S. Lewis tale Prince Caspian. But that storyline did not originate with C.S., Lewis. Nor is it just his fictional tale of an imaginary place called Narnia. That storyline is the true tale of the human race. To see this, we need to turn scripture. That is because in the very first verse, of the very first book of the Bible, we are told "*in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" The word "Genesis" literally means "*beginnings*," and the book by that name is therefore the declaration by God Himself that the world did not come into being merely as the result of the accidental colliding of celestial matter. It came into being by God's command!

Which is why the first two chapters of Genesis describe just how God commanded things into existence "*ex nihilo*," which is Latin for "*out of nothing*." "*Let there be light*," God said, and there was light. "*Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night*," God said, and it was so. "*Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth*," God said, and it happened. And on and on it went until God said on the sixth day "*Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth.*"

Yet just like the false rule of King Miraz in that C.S. Lewis tale, there is more to our world than meets the eye. And just like Caspian, we may be oblivious to our true identity. But the truth has been revealed! That is because after He was born in Bethlehem (as was prophesied), and grew up in Nazareth and began His work in Capernaum (as was also prophesied), Jesus began to go through Israel to help those who did not know who they were to discover their true identity. And He did this by helping them see that they were not just children of earthly parents, or even the children of Abraham, but children of the Creator. He also began to help them see that as children of the Creator, they were called to be His emissaries to the rest of His creation.

We hear this spoken about throughout the gospels. In Matthew, for instance, Jesus commanded His followers in what we call the Great Commission to "*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" In his own version of the Great Commission, Mark tells us Jesus told His disciples "*go into all the world and preach the gospel.*" In a similar vein, Luke tells us Jesus told His disciples to "*preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . to all the nations.*" And John says Jesus told those following Him that "*whoever accepts anyone I send, accepts Me; and whoever accepts Me accepts the One who sent Me.*"

But like Prince Caspian, those of us living today may be a victim of mistaken identity. In Caspian's case, this was because he was told from the time he was a baby that he was just the nephew of the king. He was told he was living in the palace because his father had died. And he was told after his aunt and uncle had a child of their own that he would therefore no longer sit on the throne one day. All of which was true. But it was not the whole truth. For, as Dr. Cornelius told the young Caspian, those partial truths were delivered in the covering of a lie.

In a similar way, the world tells us we are just the product of genetic mutations. The world tells us we are just the result of evolutionary processes. And the world tells us we are just the children of our biological parents. Which is true. But those truths are told to us in the covering of a lie. For we are not just biological beings at the top of the food chain. We are not just sentient primates. And we are not just, as the Apostle James says, "*a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.*" We are beings who have been created by God, in His very image, and because we bear His very image we have been tasked with caring for His creation.

What's more if we accept the truth of who God says we are, we can not only have "*abundant life*," but "*eternal life*." And that fact has meaning for this year's confirmation class. That fact has meaning for those who will be confirmed in years to come. And that fact has meaning for those confirmed many years ago. To discover the meaning of that fact, however, we need to remember that we are created in the image of God. We need to live in ways that are consistent with the image of God. And we need to go forth as God's emissaries to invite others to discover who they are as well. We see this in the story of Prince Caspian.

Late one night, Dr. Cornelius awakened him to warn that King Miraz was plotting to kill him since he was the true heir to the throne. So Caspian mounted a horse, and headed off to an area where it was believed the Old Narnians still lived. Things didn't go as planned, however, and Caspian was thrown from his horse and hit his head. When he woke up, he was surrounded by a collection of odd creatures. As they discussed with one another - and then with him - what might be happening, Caspian came to the conclusion that he must seek to regain his throne and restore Narnia to the way Aslan (the Son of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea) created it to be.

In our case, the battle we need to undertake to restore our world to the way God intended it to be is not with humans, however, but Satan. For, as Paul says, "*our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms.*" This means that we are not to fight by putting on armor and picking up a sword. We are to fight this battle by putting on the "*belt of truth*" and the "*helmet of salvation*," picking up the "*shield of faith*" and wielding the "*sword of the Spirit*" that is "*the Word of God*." We see how to do this in the story of Prince Caspian.

That is because in that C.S. Lewis tale, he writes that after the Pevensie children were drawn back into Narnia, they journeyed to help Prince Caspian because he had used Susan's magic horn to summon help from the "Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea." As they journeyed, Lucy saw Aslan. She tried to tell the others He was calling them to follow Him in a different direction. But since she was the

youngest, they did not believe her - even though it was Lucy who first found the way into Narnia through the wardrobe.

That night, Aslan came to Lucy again and asked why she did not follow Him. Lucy began to blame the others, but Aslan cut her off and reprimanded her. But He did not reprimand her for the refusal of the others to follow. He reprimanded her for her failure to follow, but she was the one who saw Him, he reminded her. So even if the others refused to follow, Aslan went on to explain, it was no excuse for her not to follow. After that encounter, Lucy returned to the Pevensie encampment and awakened the others. She told them what Aslan had said, and that she was going to follow Him whether they came along or not. Begrudgingly, they followed. And one by one, each one saw Aslan as well, and began to obediently follow His commands.

The same reality is true for us. For whether we are 13 or 31, or decades older than that, and whether we are being confirmed today, or were confirmed many years ago, we must choose in each present day what we are going to believe about who we are and how we are to live. For that decision matters. If you wonder why that decision matters, just think about what has happened in our nation over the last several years.

In March of 2020, a pandemic swept through our country. People grew scared. They suffered. And they needed to hear about God's love, God's protection, and God's will for their lives. In response to their needs, the churches of our land could displayed their true identity. As beings created in God's image, the people of the churches of our nation could have cared for those who were sick, protected those who were vulnerable, and helped those impacted by the economic effects of the pandemic. But all too many of the people in all too many of the churches of our land did none of those things.

At the same time, there have been numerous issues of racial discrimination in our nation over the last few years. There have been violent rampages in our country where masses of innocent people have been killed, right up to this very week. And in the United Methodist Church we have been distracted from dealing with those various issues because we have been bickering over our differing opinions about sexuality. But all is not lost. It is never too late to respond. As we enter the season of Pentecost this year, and as we confirm a new group of young members in our church, we can remember who we are. We can claim our true identity as children of the Creator. And we can act as God's emissaries by sharing His love with a lost and dying world.

We see this when we use the tale of Prince Caspian to remember why the Holy Spirit was sent to establish the Church on the Day of Pentecost. For in the book Following Prince Caspian, Thomas Williams writes how "*hundreds of years had passed in Narnia since the days of The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe. Foreign invaders from the country of Telmar had taken over the land, ridding it of talking animals. [And] a new way of looking at the world prevailed. [For] the Telmarines hated wild, natural things. So they destroyed the forests, and ruined the rivers to build their civilization, ushering in a new 'enlightened' age, free of ancient myths.*" Williams then goes on to say that "*it is not too hard to see the resemblance between Caspian's Narnia and our world*

*today. A new way of thinking is sweeping our schools, universities, governments, and media. [As a result] materialism dominates today's worldview, and the old stories of creation, miracles, and a God who . . . died for us seem out of place."*

But that is only the case if people do not know who they are, and live in selfish and self-serving ways instead of the ways of their Heavenly Father. It is only the case if people do not know WHOSE they are, and act as if their lives are their own to live out how they please. And it is only the case if people do not know they have been called to not only embrace their true identity as children of the Creator, but also to go forth as His emissaries to share His love with a lost as dying world. For things are no different today than when Peter stood up to speak so long ago.

God still promises to everyone who knows and embraces their true identity that He will *"pour out His Spirit"* upon them. God still promises to the daughters who know and embrace their true identity that they will *"prophesy,"* to the young men who know and embrace their true identity that they will see *"visions,"* and to us old people who know and embrace our true identity that we will continue to *"dream dreams"* of what God wants to do IN us and THROUGH us. That is because 2,000 years after Peter spoke it is still the promise of our Creator that *"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

So let us in this season of Pentecost remember our true identity. Let us *"call on the name of the Lord."* And let us in the sacrament of communion then seek the grace we need to go forth as God's emissaries to invite a lost and dying world to call on the name of the Lord as well so they too might be *"saved."*