



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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"Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." I Timothy 1:2.

When our children were quite young, we took a family trip with some other families from our church to Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center located high in the Cascade Mountains of Washington. The journey is more than half the fun, ending with a 40-50 minute boat ride up the scenic Lake Chelan (1,500 feet deep) followed by a rickety bus ride up the switchbacks to this quaint little village. People come to Holden for a whole variety of reasons: to retreat, to hike, to find solitude, to learn, to study, to read, to renew or develop friendships, to worship and to do volunteer work.

We were fortunate the week we attended, there were some excellent classes led by seminary professors. One of the most interesting, I remember, had the title "Will The Grass Grow In Heaven," taught by Jim Burtness from Luther Seminary. The rather flippant title did not do justice to the rather intense discussion which developed around the nature of heaven. The serious question was this, will there be growth in heaven, will human beings and nature grow, for it is growth which many of us truly value. Or will everything stay the same forever? We finally determined, as if we have anything to say about it, that the grass will indeed grow in heaven, but only those who love to mow it will have to do so.

At the same time that the adults were occupied, the children were invited to spend their week in a place called "Narnia." Narnia proved to be this engaging wonderland, where the children could learn and grow and use their gifts in a wide variety of ways. Caring adults shaped an environment which was especially warm and empowering to the children. Our daughter even ended up writing and illustrating a book.

With our interest piqued, we wanted to know more about this place called Narnia. Was it real or imaginative? We soon learned the concept had come from the books of a Christian author named C.S. Lewis, and there were some very biblical themes running through the stories. Before looking further at Narnia, it might

be helpful to understand Lewis's biography.

C.S. Lewis was born in Belfast in 1898, his mother died of cancer when he was nine years old and his father shipped him away to an English boarding school. Here Lewis developed a life-long passion for Norse mythology. At the age of 19 Lewis interrupted his studies to fight in World War I, being wounded twice. Later he would return to Oxford University where he spent the rest of his life teaching English, reading and writing. He died the same day that John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

In his early years Lewis rejected religion and God and called himself an atheist. But, in part at the urging of his friend and fellow Oxfordian, J.R.R. Tolkien (a Catholic and creator of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings), Lewis became a devout Christian in 1931. At first he was not all that excited about his decision, as he is quoted as saying, "I was perhaps at that time the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England." But later he would become one of the leading apologists for the Christian faith in the whole world.

During the early 1940's, the philosophy of "inevitable progress" was predominant in Europe, progress brought by science and education. But when the most educated and scientific of all of the nations, Germany, was taken over by the Nazis and the whole world seemed on the edge of collapse, inevitable progress became harder and harder to defend. Lewis would then write a book that says it is pain and suffering which are inevitable, not progress. Also Christians have the promise that in the next life pain and suffering would be over. He writes:

"We are afraid of the jeer about the 'pie in the sky' and being told we are trying to escape from the duty of making a happy world here and now into dreams of a happy world elsewhere. But either there is a pie in the sky or not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is written into its whole fabric.

If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced.”

Books such as the The Problem of Pain, The Great Divorce, Mere Christianity, and the Screwtape Letters had world-wide acclaim. Lewis became a sensation all over the world, appearing on the cover of Time Magazine in 1947. Certainly Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer dominated much of the intellectual Christian market at that time.

But by 1950 Lewis had turned his attention to a completely different venue, that of fantasy, myth, parable. Lewis describes this kind of writing as akin to “smuggling the Gospel past the watchful dragon.” These books became children’s stories, and were centered in a mythological place named Narnia. Between the years of 1950 and 1956 Lewis wrote one book per year, with the total of seven in the Chronicles of Narnia.

In many ways Lewis was a strange figure to be writing children’s books, for he had no children of his own, and was not perceived as loving children all that much. Yet his first work was entitled The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe. It became inordinately popular, eventually being translated into more than 30 languages and selling more than 85 million copies.

The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe basically tells the story of four children who were evacuated to the countryside during the World War II bombing of London, only to find a magical wardrobe which leads to an eternal world. Themes such as good versus evil and ultimately forgiveness are woven into the tale. The witch tempts one of the children to betray his friends and a battle begins. This child is then sentenced to die but the great lion Aslan, son of the emperor, offers himself as the sacrifice. But then Aslan comes back to life, bringing about the ultimate defeat of evil. Of course Aslan becomes a Jesus figure, dying and rising for the salvation of the world.

Strong interest in making these stories into movies has existed for a long time, but two problems were prohibitive. The first is that the technology just was not perfected, it was hard to make a lion seem real,

for instance, and the hundreds of other creatures. But more than this was the hesitancy of any major movie company to make a movie with Christian symbolism. Hollywood is scared stiff at being seen in any way embracing religious values. Of course they are not nearly as worried about depicting the occult or even the demonic, but that is a different story.

But now as a smaller company was undertaking this gigantic task of putting a movie together, Disney jumped in as a major partner. Many are saying that the success of The Passion of the Christ, more than \$600 million in receipts, and also The Lord Of The Rings have been the tipping point for Disney. It is amazing how the bottom line can trump even a fear of being identified with Christians.

While the debate has raged around Disney, Disney has launched a ten-month campaign aimed at the Christian community. It has hired several Christian marketing firms to peddle the film, including the same one which marketed The Passion of the Christ. And as a result, Christians all over the country are gearing up to go and see the movie.

As pastoral leadership we are not saying this will be a great movie, because we simply don’t know. But from all that we have heard the strong Christian symbolism does come through. In previews I saw on television, however, it seemed awful scary for little children, modern technology today can make animated monsters looked terribly real. But for older children it should be a fascinating experience.

Also the movie will lend itself to many study programs, both for children and adults. Resources are being developed in many Christian publishing companies for this very purpose. It might become a huge teaching moment just as C.S. Lewis no doubt planned, and as The Passion of the Christ became. And we probably should be ready for more Chronicles to come down the line, for Lewis wrote seven of them.