



*Rev. Chris Taylor - 6-9-19*

*"Come, Holy Spirit"*

*Acts 2:1-21 and John 14:8-17*

I love the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel. This chapter is so packed with different truths that we could easily spend months exploring just these thirty one verses. Our text this morning is a case in point: so full on its own account that the verse which leads to Philip's request – "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied" – isn't even included. It is one of the most referenced and hotly debated verses in all of Scripture; it is Jesus saying (v. 6), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

In his commentary on this passage, Dr. Dale Bruner refers to a scene from C.S. Lewis' book, *The Silver Chair*. It is the sixth book of Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*. One of the constants in that series is the Christ figure, Aslan who happens to be a great lion. Bruner believes that this particular passage offers us Lewis' take on Christ's claim that no one comes to the father but by him. Jill, the protagonist, has stepped through a door into a magical land. She's crying because she has just lost her friend, Eustace Scrubb.

Crying is all right in its way while it lasts. But you have to stop sooner or later, and then you still have to decide what to do. When Jill stopped, she found she was dreadfully thirsty. She had been lying face downward, and now she sat up. The birds had ceased singing and there was perfect silence except for one small, persistent sound, which seemed to come from a good distance away. She listened carefully, and felt almost sure it was the sound of running water...

She went on tiptoes [for she had already seen the lion once], stealing cautiously from tree to tree, and stopping to peer round her at every step.

The wood was so still that it was not difficult to decide where the sound was coming from. It grew clearer every moment and, sooner than she expected, she came to an open glade and saw the stream, bright as glass, running across

the turf a stone's throw away from her. But although the sight of the water made her feel ten times thirstier than before, she didn't rush forward and drink. She stood as still as if she had been turned into stone, with her mouth wide open. And she had a very good reason; just on this side of the stream lay the lion...

"If I run away, it'll be after me in a moment," thought Jill. "And if I go on, I shall run straight into its mouth." Anyway, she couldn't have moved if she had tried, and she couldn't take her eyes off it. How long this lasted, she could not be sure; it seemed like hours. And the thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first.

"If you're thirsty, you may drink."

They were the first words she had heard since Scrubb had spoken to her on the edge of the cliff. For a second she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, "If you are thirsty, come and drink," and of course she remembered what Scrubb had said about animals talking in that other world, and realized that it was the lion speaking. Anyway, she had seen its lips move this time, and the voice was not like a man's. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger; a sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her less frightened than she had been before, but it made her frightened in a rather a 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 have asked the 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. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

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

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

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

Isn’t that us? Like Jill, we want the life-giving water that only Jesus offers – a life-changing encounter with the Father – but like her, we are afraid of the cost; afraid of being swallowed up and losing ourselves in him.

“Show us the Father”, Philip says. And Jesus has done exactly that. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus says. The Father dwells in the Son and the Son in the Father, so that in Jesus we have a window into the divine life. To look at Jesus, to study him, is to see God’s very nature.

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One of the most famous battles in naval history was Admiral Nelson’s crushing victory over a combined French and Spanish fleet off Cape Trafalgar in southwest Spain. Nelson was shot and killed in the battle, and some thirty five years later construction was begun to create a monument just in front of the newly completed National Gallery.

Today a statue of Lord Nelson stands on top of a Corinthian column which itself stands on a massive pedestal. Taken together, the monument rises 170 feet up into the air – too high for people to really see the statue itself. So before placing the statue on top of the column, the commission decided to exhibit it for a time down at ground level where people could actually see it. About 100,000 people then paid to have a glimpse of it before it was moved.

That is what Jesus offers. He brings to ground level what is too high for us to grasp; the inaccessible and transcendent. Here is the Word, the self-communication of God, made flesh – God coming to us, revealing God’s very self at a level and in a form that we can see and understand.

How do we know that God cares, that God is love, that God is active and involved in this world? There is so much in this world that would seem to deny such a God; so many experiences that cause us to wonder, “How could a loving God possibly allow that to happen?” But we do know, and we can be sure, because that’s the God we see in Jesus.

So here is the great Lion, Jesus himself, standing between us and that God we long to know and experience. It is through him that we make our way to the life-giving waters of that encounter. But getting there means being swallowed whole. Getting there means accepting Christ’s saving Lordship. And there is a kind of death in that; a death to self. Yet it is in that very dying that we become part of something so much greater; a part of something that even now is changing the very world in which we live.

What did Jesus mean when he said “the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...”? Jesus died, reconciling the world to God. He died carrying the great weight of the world’s sins to cross. He rose again, defeating death and opening to us the doors of all eternity. Is there any way in which you and I can do greater works than those?

Of course we can’t. But I don’t think that’s what Jesus was talking about. He wasn’t talking about doing something more wonderful than him. He was talking about doing something of greater breadth.

Over the course of his life, Jesus was limited by time and space: he was one human being. His entire life was spent in a relatively small, obscure part of the Roman Empire. The best estimates suggest there were about 255,000,000 in the world at that time. How many of those do you think Jesus actually met, and spoke to, and touched? It was a tiny fraction of them; so small as to almost statistically insignificant.

But look what happened after Jesus died and was raised again: his followers went out into the world and by the end of that first generation had brought the gospel to much of the Mediterranean. And think of the lives that have been touched

in the centuries since: think of all the hospitals that were built, all the people touched and healed – hospitals with names like Presbyterian, and St. Margaret’s and St. Francis – think of the food that has been distributed; the clothes that have been shared; the homes built; the funding provided; the education offered to millions upon millions over the course of some 2000 years. All of it in obedience to Jesus. All of it in Jesus’ name.

These are the “greater things” that Jesus was talking about. These are the works of justice and love and mercy that the Church has carried forward from one century to the next, and that you and I are now called to carry into the generation that follows.

And the beauty of it is that we don’t these works on our own. Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate [or “helper”], to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

This is the promised Spirit that came upon the Church at Pentecost. This is the presence of Christ himself, at work in us and through us – a power (present and real) that allows us to do so much more than we ever thought or imagined; a power that can do in us and through us so much more than we could ever do alone.

Do you want to know this power in your own life? Then swallow your pride, swallow your fears and make your way to the Lion. Open your life in love and in obedience, and let the fresh waters of God’s own Spirit start bubbling up within.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, (Harper Collins, New York, 1981), pp. 19-23