

Homily for Advent 2 2017

December 10th*The Hidden Kingdom*

The sixth book in C.S. Lewis' Narnia Chronicles is called *The Silver Chair*. It chronicles the journey of Jill Pool and Eustace Scrubb, who have been summoned by Aslan to the land of Narnia, to find Prince Rilian the successor to the throne of Narnia. His father, King Caspian is near death and his heir needs to be found. You see, Rilian has been kidnapped by the evil Emerald Witch who is really a serpent disguised as a princess.

While on their journey in search of Prince Rilian, Jill and Eustace meet a marshwiggles named Puddleglum whose opening line to the children is: "Puddleglum's my name. But it doesn't matter if you forget it." From then on, he is a caricature of pessimism and a bastion of gloomy fortitude: "I see you're making the best of a bad job" he says at one point. And yet when the story reaches its climax and the children and Puddleglum have made their way into the underworld of rock, darkness and gloom and the domain of the Emerald Witch, Puddleglum turns out to be the hero. It is in this underworld that Rilian is being held captive where he has forgotten that he is the rightful heir of Narnia. The spell cast on him is also cast on the rescuing trio so that they are beginning to forget that there is any world other than the underworld. At a point when the witch's spell seems to have worked its forgetful magic Puddleglum exclaims:

Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all of those things—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself. Suppose we have. Then all I can say is that, in that case, the made-up things seem a good deal more important than the real ones... We're just babies making up a game, if you're right. But four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow.

It is the evidence of history that there are those in every generation, who like the Emerald Witch, want to cast a spell on people and have them believe the only world is the world you see before you. There is no other world and there are no other realities. The declaration of the Gospel though is that there is another world that will lick this "real world" hollow.

St. Mark is the Puddleglum of the New Testament. As a younger man he was himself something of a wet blanket, unreliable and pessimistic. Paul was so disappointed with him that he felt he could no longer have him with him on his missionary journeys. And yet by the time we get to his writing a Gospel account, based on the eye witness accounts of St. Peter, he, like Puddleglum, is willing to speak the truth in a world of deceit and spells of power that want people to forget God and his kingdom.

Nero is Emperor at the time of Mark's writing and is making it very clear that the only world that is real is the one he controls. There is no other world and there surely is no other king or emperor. His is the only show in town. And yet here is Mark, stationed in Rome, writing words that challenge this view at its core. Mark's first line are fighting words:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

These are words every bit as incendiary as Puddleglum's treasonous speech before the witch. In Rome, to begin a correspondence with the words "Gospel" or "good news" were words reserved for formal declarations associated with the Emperor. The Gospel of military victories and other advancements that the emperor had accomplished was the content of this good news. And yet here is the New Testament's Puddleglum saying, "Oh yeh, I am going to declare to you a world that will lick your world hollow". Not only that, Mark then goes on to say that the news he has to tell is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Now in Rome this title Son of God would have been familiar to the people of Nero's town, for this was again a title reserved for the emperor.

So, do you understand what Mark is doing in this one verse? He is challenging at its core the view that the only world is Nero's world and the only king to whom allegiance is due is Nero and those who will be emperors after him.

This is the perennial conflict the Gospel always faces. As Christians we are a people who declare there is another world and there is another king to whom we owe our allegiance and our lives. And yet when this message is declared with clarity and conviction it comes up against opposition.

We do not live in Imperial Rome. We do not face the opposition resulting from Emperor Worship. In our day we face a pernicious ideology that declares that the only world that matters is the one where the individual is king. My life is my own and my body is my own to do with as I please. No one has a right to tell me how I am to order my sexuality, whether or not I abort my child, or whether or not I should end my life if I am suffering. We live at a time where the spell is being cast on people so that many now believe that the ordering of human relationships, whether or not life in the womb lives, and questions pertaining to euthanasia are solely determined by personal preference. Because I am king, I am queen, and am the sole determiner in these matters.

If these values are questioned the response is often one where vitriol and personal attack are directed against those who play the part of Mark and Puddleglum. It is into a world like this that we are to be the voice crying in the wilderness, the voice that invites people to consider there is another way. The way that is governed by the call to a renewed vision of human relationships that takes to heart the call to repentance.

St. John the Baptist's words to repent and believe the Gospel are words of challenge and invitation. The challenge is to realize that the sexual revolution has not only changed our understanding of the nature of intimate relationships and the treatment of the lives of the most vulnerable, especially in the womb, it is also resulting in a rejection of God and the Judeo Christian ethic that has shaped western societies of centuries.

The invitation is to reconsider the intention of God for families and the gift of life so that we can live in such a way that our lives become ever more a reflection of the one who is the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

However such a challenge and invitation will be met by many with anger, resistance and outright hostility. At the same time there will be those who in hearing the good news of Jesus for the family and for life will be wakened from their stupor to hear of another world and another way that is in keeping with God's good purposes.

St Peter in today's Gospel understands that to live with the perspective of Jesus and his kingdom requires patience and perseverance. Patience because the fulfillment of God's purposes seems

slow in coming from our perspective. However he says to us, see things from God's perspective where:

with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.

When we can see our lives with this perspective, one that St. John the Baptist saw clearly we also understand that we can persevere in living lives of holiness and godliness as we await the coming of the Lord.

Today the readings call us to be Puddleglum's in a world where for so many the only God is self. For there is another who is indeed God, Jesus Christ. St. Mark was a bearer of this good news in the first century in the face of Nero's opposition and we are to be the bearers of this good news in face of the opposition from the sexual revolution and the placing of self as king and queen.