

## **Not a Tame Lion**

Let me start with a quote. “He’ll be coming and going. One day you’ll see him and another you won’t. He doesn’t like being tied down – and of course he has other countries to attend to. It’s quite alright. He’ll often drop in. Only you mustn’t press him. He’s wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.” These are the wise words of Mr Beaver to Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy towards the end of ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.’ And that phrase, ‘Not a tame lion,’ runs like a refrain through the remaining six books telling the story of Narnia.

A few of you will have recognised the quote straight away but for most of us, including me, it won’t have been until that key phrase appeared that you’ll have been certain that this was about Aslan, the great lion of Narnia. If you’ve never read, heard or seen any of the stories of Narnia, don’t worry, this isn’t all going to be about Narnia. But there is a reason why I’ve started here. C S Lewis, the author of the stories, was already well-known as a Christian writer by the time the stories were published during the 1950s. There may not be as much theology in the Narnia stories as there is in his other books but it is there and told in a way that makes it accessible not just for children but for adults too.

So who is Aslan? He is there at the start, calling Narnia into existence; he is there at the end when he brings Narnia to a close; he is there to help at key moments of crisis and to support creatures at all sorts of times – and, most importantly, by sacrificing himself he rescues Narnia from the evil grip of the White Witch. Remind you of anyone? Aslan is, of course, the Narnian equivalent of Jesus Christ; he is Jesus Christ in that other world. And in a world populated with thinking and talking animals, being a lion makes perfectly good sense.

As we look at Aslan, Lewis is telling us something about Jesus and about God since Jesus, Emmanuel, is God with us. In this season of Epiphany, when we show Jesus Christ to the world, reminding ourselves about who he is and who God is makes a lot of sense. When Lewis says that God is not a tame god, he reminds us that God is not under our control – however much we might wish he were! Because, of course, Jesus showed us that God, uncomfortably, doesn’t follow our rules, our social niceties and can be downright subversive!

Back in 1952, J B Phillips published a short book called, ‘Your God is too Small,’ in which he challenged those surprisingly common views people had about God – and which bore little or no resemblance to the truth about the amazing, glorious, loving and definitely not tame God we claim to believe in. The worry was, and still is today, that many people only see the made-up versions of God they have created, the God they’ve made small enough to fit their own spaces,

the God they've tried to tame. Let me quote from the book; "The Churches... seem to have captured and tamed and trained to their own liking something that is really far too big ever to be forced into little man-made boxes with neat labels upon them."

The more you try to cram God into a box, to tame him, the more he will be found way outside the box – and it doesn't matter what you label the box with either. God is not just the god of St Whoever Church of Wherever; he doesn't live here; he's much bigger than that. God is not just the god of Christians, however much we'd love to believe that; he's much bigger than that. God is not just the god of the whole Earth, he's the God of the entire universe – and possibly more universes beside. Every time we try to put God neatly into a box, what we're really trying to do is to cut him down to size – to tame him. It won't work; it never has and it never will; our God is not a tame god!

When I talk to visitors in Church, I often hear a comment like this. "I can really feel God here in this place." I don't usually have the heart to tell them that they are completely wrong. If the only place you feel God is inside this building, it's not God you're feeling, it's atmosphere! The same applies if the only place you can feel God is watching a sunset. That's not God, it's an effect caused by the rotation of the earth and the refraction and scattering of light by the atmosphere. Very pretty – but not God!

The real God, the untame God, is present just as much outside a Church as inside, present just as much when you look at an ugly city as when you look at the beauties of nature! We, and I mean we because we all know in our heart of hearts that we do this too; we have to remind ourselves over and over again that we cannot contain or constrain God. That's a real challenge for us as Christians, we who claim to follow the real God. So much of our Christian life is tied up in Church, particularly in worship. Many Christians get so caught up in what worship is like, that they fail to notice they're no longer worshipping God at all; they're worshipping the worship itself, the words, the music, even Communion. We've made another box to try and fit God into; we've tried to tame him yet again.

And when we do this, we fail, because we are no longer following God but something we have invented. This year, let's try and rediscover the real God and let him lead us. It might be an uncomfortable journey in places; it'll certainly be challenging but the rewards are eternal.

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