

## **Year B**

### **Mark 9:30-37**

C.S. Lewis' celebrated children's book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, tells of the adventures of four children in the magical kingdom of Narnia. The story is fun, but it's also an allegory of Christ and salvation, with Christ represented by the lion Aslan. When in Narnia, the children meet Mr and Mrs Beaver, who describe the mighty lion to them.

"Is he a man?" asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr Beaver sternly. Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond-the-sea. Don’t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great lion.”

“Oh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake” said Mrs Beaver; “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr Beaver; “don’t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”<sup>1</sup>

The disciples were discovering that Jesus was far from safe. In fact, they were beginning to become a bit afraid of him.

Five year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. "It's dark in there and I'm scared." She

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis C.S. 1950 *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*  
London: Geoffrey Bles chapter 8

asked again, and he persisted. Finally she said, "It's OK--Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all of a sudden an idea came, and he said: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?"<sup>2</sup>

If Jesus, the Son of Man, was going to be the classic Messiah, then that would be great. He would powerfully advance towards Jerusalem and drive out the Romans. But if he was going to speak in strange terms of

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, Charles *Victory in the Valleys*

being betrayed and killed and then rising on the third day, whatever that meant, then everything was different. The disciples could not be safe with a person like that and so they began to withdraw into themselves and began to vie for position. After all, all this strange talk was making them insecure. Who was going to be the greatest among themselves?

Isn't it true that in times of insecurity and fear we are more likely to try and look after our own interests? A kind of survival instinct kicks in that drives us to force our way to the front. We are told by scientists

that this urge is part of our animal nature. It's the way that evolution works. Only those species that can adapt, find a niche and look after themselves will survive. The survival of the fittest, isn't that right? But for the Christian believer there is a fundamental problem with that. Yes, we are part of the created order. We are flesh and bone like the animals but we are distinct. We are created in the image of God to reflect his godliness into the creation. We are to live as gods, small 'g', with a responsibility to lead and to act as stewards of God's creation. We are to be like God and so the knee jerk reaction to

insecurity and fear just will not do. So what is the answer? Well, the answer is once again scandalous news for the confused disciples. Jesus brought a little child and placed it among them. If you welcome the child in my name you welcome me. Now this is where we can get a bit confused too. We sometimes have in our minds an image of gentle Jesus, meek and mild. A pastoral scene with Jesus welcoming the children and all is peaceful and lovely. We must do our best to dispel that image because it does nothing to help us to understand Jesus here. Children in first century Palestine were at

the very bottom of the social ladder. How different from twenty-first century Scotland. I was amused the other day in Aldi's in Elgin. A woman was doing her best to shop while wheeling her toddler around in a push chair. The toddler was shouting out to all the other customers she passed, making a terrible din. At one point the youngster kicked out at a woman who was leaning over the buggy to lift a piece of fruit. Instead of addressing the situation and behaviour of the child the mother just continued on regardless. It wouldn't have been like that when I was a wee boy and it wouldn't have been like that

in Jesus' day either. Children had no social worth and Jesus was making the point that he considered himself to be like them and he was telling them that if they valued him at all they would be welcoming the children unconditionally.

Jesus was turning their world and their view of it upside down.

Lawrence was a deacon serving in Rome in the third century when a wave of persecution broke out. When Pope Sixtus and others were killed Lawrence knew it was only a matter of time before they came for him. As keeper of the Church's goods, he had already

been responsible for giving alms to the poor. Now he started giving them even more.

Soon Lawrence was called before Roman officials who demanded he hand over the church's treasure. He replied that indeed the church was rich and asked for three days to get everything in order.

The days passed and the Roman officials arrived not to a church filled with silver and gold but one filled with the poor, blind, lame and leprous. "Here are the treasures of the church" declared Lawrence.

The officials were furious and in the year 258AD had Lawrence executed. But

Lawrence was absolutely right. In the lowly and the excluded Jesus is found. Now, the challenge for the church today is to believe that. Too often it is the case that personal advancement and pride shape the agenda and in so doing the person of Jesus is lost. We will not find him in the company of those who are after self-advancement. We must not let fear drive us to self-protection but like Lawrence to acts of kindness and self-giving.