

*Message to American Christians:  
Live Like a Narnian!*

2 Kings 6: 8-17

**First Presbyterian Church  
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There's a great episode of the old Andy Griffith Show in which a goat gets loose. His owner warns that this goat will eat anything. So when a storage room door is left open, the goat wanders in and eats several sticks of dynamite. Then the goat begins to wander around the town of Mayberry, full of explosives.



When always high-strung Deputy Barney Fife encounters the dynamite digesting goat, he panics. In his shrill voice, he exclaims, "Andy, there's a goat that ate dynamite! What are we gonna to do!" That's classic Barney Fife syndrome. We have a problem. Danger is involved. That means the world is ending. Andy, what are we gonna do! Do you ever suffer from Barney Fife syndrome? Does it seem like everyone has swallowed dynamite and is walking around just waiting to blow up at the least jostle?

In today's passage from 2 Kings, the servant of Elisha the prophet certainly suffered from Barney Fife syndrome. The situation was that the king of Syria wanted to war against Israel. He tried to make strategic incursions into the country from which he could launch an attack against the king of Israel. But the LORD always revealed to Elisha the prophet where the invading king had camped. So the prophet continually warned the king of Israel. His supernatural knowledge saved Israel from war and destruction. So the king of Syria sought to capture Elisha. One night, his army and chariots surrounded the city where the prophet resided. Early in the morning Elisha's servant looked out upon the siege and panicked.

“And the servant said, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’” Pure Barney Fife syndrome! Horses and chariots are all around! What are we gonna do!”

Elisha, however, was not anxious. He said, ‘Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6: 15-17).

Earthly eyes saw only earthly things. Fierce Syrian warriors and chariots surrounded the city. But the eyes of faith, as the Spirit enabled, saw much more of reality. The LORD’s army, vast and powerful, protected the prophet in his city. God’s angelic host had chariots of fire! The king of Syria was not in charge of reality. There is much more going on in the world than meets the eye. The Sovereign God still reigns and works out all things according to his purpose.

This is an especially helpful word for us on this Independence weekend. For as Biblical Christians, we can easily feel dismayed. It seems that everything we thought was right and good and worthy has been turned on its head. Reality seems to have warped inside out. The Barney in me shrieks out, “What are we gonna do?”



The fight over what is real runs through a thrilling scene from C.S. Lewis’ *The Silver Chair*. English schoolchildren Jill and Eustace are sent to the magical realm of Narnia by the great lion, Aslan, to rescue the lost Prince Rillian. He has been captured by the Witch-queen of the Underland, a dank, stale region beneath the beautiful lands and skies of Narnia. Just when the children have found Rillian and set him free, the Witch appears.

Rather than subdue them physically, the Witch attempts to enchant them so they will never even desire to flee her dim, shadowy realm.

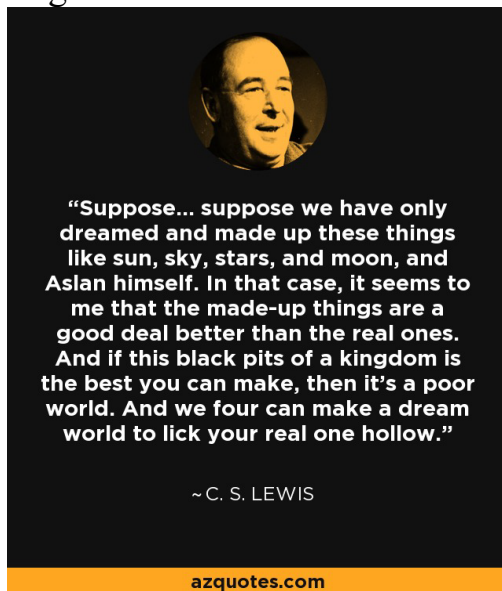
The Witch throws a magic powder in the glowing fireplace. She strums a stringed instrument with a “steady, monotonous thrumming.” Then she begins to define reality for them. The land of England from which they came was just imaginary. Narnia with its talking animals, shining stars, bright sunlight and vivid colors was merely a fantasy. “There never was such a world,” says the Witch. The children repeat back her words. Then she asserts, “There never was any world but

mine.” They parrot her again, and it seems to the children a relief to stop fighting her spell. They are almost lost.

“There never was any world but mine.” Do you ever feel that someone is casting a spell over you with those very words? Perhaps you’ve been told that your antiquated Christian beliefs place you “on the wrong side of history.” The thrumming enchantment makes you wonder, “What if that’s so?” The Witch-queen calmly but constantly repeats her lies. “What you remember about the world never was. My world-- dim, dreary, confined, regulated--*There never was any world but mine.*”

Almost, the children and Prince Rillian succumb to the enchantment. After all, they cannot now *see* Narnia. Perhaps their memories are only remnants of dreams. But they have with them one more companion on the quest to rescue the prince. Puddleglum, an odd creature called a Marsh-wiggle is, as his name implies, a rather dour realist. But his gloomy personality makes him more resistant to enchantment. Just before it is too late, Puddleglum, with great effort rouses himself to move towards the fireplace. He stamps one of his great hard, bare feet into the flames. The terrible pain clears his head. He has also put out much of the fire, dampening the aroma of the magic powder. The Witch rages. But the children start to come back to themselves.

Then Puddleglum confronts the Witch-queen with some of the great lines in English literature:



One word, Ma'am," he said, coming back from the fire; limping, because of the pain. "One word... Suppose we have only dreamed, or made up, all 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. Suppose this black pit of a kingdom of yours is the only world. Well, it strikes me as a pretty poor one. And that's a funny thing, when you come to think of it. 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.* That's why I'm going to stand by the play world. I'm on Aslan's side

even if there isn't any Aslan to lead it. I'm going to live as like a Narnian as I can even if there isn't any Narnia.



*Four babies playing a game can make a play-world which licks your real world hollow.* I'm on the great lion Aslan's side whether he's real or not. What we see through the eyes of faith, when it is grounded in the revealed Word of Scripture, is far more interesting and wondrous and life giving than all the seemingly sophisticated posturing of the self-centered world. The world where Aslan lives makes more sense, gives more hope, frees more people and inspires more courage than all the dreary self-centered, self-obsessed narratives of liberation that flow around us.

So the message to American Christians in today's America is simply this. Live like a Narnian. If you don't know C.S. Lewis' books, I'll just state it plainly. Live like you belong to Jesus and that Jesus is Lord of all. Live like you believe in the Kingdom of God. Live like you believe in the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Here are 3 ways to live like a Narnian in a world that seems controlled by the Witch-queen.

**1) Open Your Eyes.** The King of Syria wanted God's people to see only his horses and chariots. To believe that his power was unassailable and absolute. But Elisha prayed that the eyes of his panicked servant would be open to a higher, deeper reality. The Witch-queen in the *Silver Chair* wanted the children to believe that reality was only her dark, confining cave. But Puddleglum stamped on the fire and named the beauty of the sun, the trees, the sky and Aslan himself.

Bullies always want us to believe that theirs is the only reality. In fear, we cry out with Barney Fife, "What are we gonna do!" But take courage. Open your eyes. Evil doesn't own everything. Evil doesn't own more than a speck of this universe. Take your stand with Jesus by whom all things in heaven and earth were made. Though you have not seen him, you believe in him. When you do, you realize just who and what is on your side. Almost everything! The green earth belongs to Jesus. The fruit and flowers yet come forth. Leaves still pour out oxygen for us. Birds are still on the wing. Children, kittens and puppies still play. Babies still nurse. Parents still lay down their lives for their young. The world still rotates every 24 hours and revolves around the sun every year. Chemistry,

physics, even music still exist as real. Our evil cannot stop this. Our evil cannot reach to the stars. There remain inexhaustible mysteries around us, below us and above us. Beauty is everywhere if we would get off our screens and rejoice in it.

But more, the hosts of heaven have not withdrawn. God has not left his people. We are not alone. I remembered this week that in elementary school we learned a gospel song, a song that can be sung even in grueling conditions, when faith yet opens our eyes to the great more of God's reality. "All night, all day, angels watching over me, my Lord. Lord stay with me through the night, angels watching over me. All day, all night, angels watching over me." And even more, the highest angels are gathered around the throne of the triune God, forever singing praises. They declare reality. It makes them rejoice in music so passionate, so piercing that if we heard it now we would fall on our faces. Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He works all things after the counsel of his will. His kingdom shall come and his will be done.

**2) Live Not By Lies.** The corollary to opening our eyes to reality is refusing to accept the lies told by the witch. That's one of the chief reasons we need Christian community. We are realists and we are truth tellers. We have to keep reminding each other of reality. And we are called to speak truth into the lies being firehosed into our culture. Let's just say some of the truth to the lies we are tempted to believe. And pardon me as I smack truth against both the right and the left.

- Life is a gift from God. The heartbeat inside a human womb comes from a uniquely created human being.
- The purpose of my life, then, is not to live *my* dream. My purpose is to glorify and serve the God who gave me life.
- God created human beings male and female. Marriage is a union between male and female who by their very difference reveal the mysterious image of God in relationship.
- Money can't buy you love. The one with the most toys does not win. The measure of life is not how much we have acquired but how much we have given away.
- Utopia cannot be created on earth by human beings in their own power. For power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- You're not better than someone because you have more education, more athletic ability, more good looks, and more opportunity than others. You're also not worse. You can rejoice in thanks to God for your blessings.

- God is the source of all things. To whom much has been given, much is required.
- Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is not a license to isolation, detachment, hoarding, and hedonism.
- This world is not all there is. Satisfaction, safety, ease and prosperity is not the chief end of life.
- The way of the cross is the way of life. The mission of your life is not yourself but the mission of Christ Jesus to the world through you.

**3) Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly with Your God.** What happened after the servant of Elisha saw the hosts of heaven guarding the city? The Syrians were struck with a kind of a blindness, and Elisha led them like cattle to the king of Israel. The king was delighted. He wanted to slaughter his enemies. Can I strike them down? Can I? Can I? Elisha the prophet ordered the king of Israel to give food and drink to the invading army. In fact, the king treated them with more than mercy. He offered a great feast, then set them free. The Syrians did not raid Israel again.

How very careful we have to be as Christians, as Narnians, not to become like our opponents. We may not adopt the culture of contempt. We may not seek to wound our enemies. We are called to offer kindness. The lost people of America are blind to their peril. They accuse us of wanting to thwart their flourishing. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ethics of Scripture order life so that people can live in peace, security, safety and fruitfulness. We know that. But we will have to show this distinctively for it to be believed. Be very careful what you post on social media. Are you treating others with contempt? Are you trying to destroy not philosophies but people? That is not our way. We offer food and drink to enemies as well as friends. It doesn't matter how bad it gets out there. Our mission remains the same. To stretch forth a hand of love in a thousand different ways. To be those who do not curse others but bless, even our enemies. To bring bandages and ointment even to those who are injured by their own stupid choices.

Yes, it seems like most of America has swallowed dynamite. And Barney Fife is very nervous. What are we gonna do? We're going to live trusting in Jesus even if it seems crazy. We're going to live not by lies, but by gracious, continual truth telling. We're going to love and give glory to God that the gospel has never been thwarted by opposition, persecution, or scorn. We, no matter what, will keep joining our voices with all creation, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven who forever cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was, and is and is to come!"