

Graduation Speech Notes

Teaching 7th grade Secondary Books for the past three years has been pure delight for me. What a gift to walk through the stories of Narnia with my classes, and help them see how CS Lewis used his imagination, molded by his love of medieval literature, the truths in the Bible, and the Christian story, to write these seven stories in the Chronicles of Narnia, stories that still bring joy to readers of many ages. One cannot help be drawn to how he both loved his reader and loved putting a good story together.

As I would often say to my students, CS Lewis used words in such a way that would “show, not just tell” us. He invited us in to use our imagination, all the while he was weaving an engrossing story. When spring came to Narnia and the winter curse was broken, we walked along with Eustace, and experienced with him what the coming spring looked like and sounded like. Lewis didn’t merely tell us spring had come, he showed it to us. Telling a good story and telling it well was very important to CS Lewis, just as important as the foundational, Biblical truths he was pointing to... he was showing us truths, and trusting us to see what we were ready to see.

When CS Lewis wrote *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and then the rest of the Narnian tales, he sought to write stories that he himself would want to have read as a child. But he also wanted to write stories that would re-enchant his readers with the truths of the Christian faith as found in the Scriptures. These stories can be summed up as “The Great Supposal” —suppose the Creator God of the Scriptures chose to make another world, what would it look like for the Son of God to act there? Writing these stories with this vision, he wanted to baptize the imaginations of those reading them – so that people who thought they knew everything about Christianity but were dulled by their knowledge could be re-awakened to its beauty; and so people who did not accept Christianity because they assumed they knew what it was all about could encounter these truths with new eyes.

It is with Lewis’s desire to re-enchant us that I want to share three truths. It was hard to select just three; each book expresses such richness about the Christian life – from the Sacrificial Love in the *LWW*, to Transformational Grace in *The Silver Chair*, to Providential Care in *Horse and His Boy*. These are my personal three favorite, and I think they fit well for the times we are living in right now.

First - Love. Think. Speak.

In *The Magician’s Nephew*, we meet the great lion and Son of the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea, Aslan, singing the world into existence. With words forming a rich visual tapestry, Lewis helps us imagine Narnia—it’s land and it’s animals—coming to life. The climax of this creation account is when he chooses certain pairs of animals, big and small, and brings them to

himself, breathes his warm breath on them, and says “Narnia, Narnia, Narnia, awake. Love. Think. Speak.”

Love. Think. Speak. He is calling them to reflect himself in this newly created world and to steward it in his name.

This is what God has done with us at creation. He made us, male and female, in his image and calls us to “*Love. Think. Speak.*” just as he did in creating and sustaining the world. Lewis’s words can help us, children and adults together, to move into the places God has called us, and use our imagination, our gifts, our ideas, our skills, even our weaknesses, to build goodness. Just as Adam and Eve were put in a place to imagine and work for it’s growth we, too, are here, not merely to write our own stories, but to be in on the renewing work of God of in the world.

Love with the grace of God in you, sacrificing yourself for others.

Think with the words and the wisdom of Scripture forming you - - not just giving you the right answers but creating in you a God-renewed mind and heart.

Speak out of that love and wisdom, reflecting the wonders of God our Creator, Jesus our Savior, and the Spirit our Counselor.

Second - Bear it Well.

We are inclined to exhort young people to go out and do big things for God. But we must resist this temptation because Jesus, at the cross and at his resurrection, already did the biggest thing that could ever be done—he reconciled a hostile world to God the Father and is making all things new. We are invited to participate in this work; he gives us the good works to walk in.

We are called, also, to *Bear It Well*.

In *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, at the end of the 100-years of winter, a winter without Christmas, the Pevensie children were crowned by Aslan to be Narnia’s Kings and Queens. After placing the crowns on their heads, he charged them to “Bear it well, Sons of Adam. Bear it well, Daughters of Eve.”

And so also God, with his grace in us, says this to his children, “*Bear it well.*”

Bear well being an image bearer of God, reflecting his existence to the world.

Bear well being a child of God, through faith in Jesus, with the Spirit of God living in you.

Bear it well by growing in wisdom as Proverbs urges.

Bear it well by acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God as the prophet Micah wrote.

Bear it well by being imitators of God, as beloved children, living a life of love, just as Paul teaches in the book of Ephesians.

Third - We are all between the paws of the true Aslan

In the final book of the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Last Battle*, we meet among many others, King Tirian of Narnia. Midway through the book, Tirian and his followers are surveying the area where their enemies are encamped. The Narnians have been in one conflict after another with these foes, and they are readying themselves for a battle which they know will be deadly. One character shares her anxious concern about what lies before them.

The king responds, *“But courage, child: we are all between the paws of the true Aslan.”*

Our days, even with the goodness of being God’s child, will have trouble. The Bible does not shy away from the fact that we are sinful and broken, and the world is fallen. Because of this, we will experience trials and sorrow—we are all feeling this right now as we live these days in this pandemic.

But courage, child, we are all between the paws of the true Aslan.

The resurrected and renewing hands of Jesus hold you. He is the Good Shepherd, who promises never to leave you or forsake you. You will walk through ordinary days, ones filled with light, as well ones filled with darkness, but goodness and mercy will not abandon you. He is with you.