

### SPEAKING UP AND SINGING OUT

For fans of fantasy literature this fall is proving to be a real bonanza. Not only has the latest Harry Potter movie opened this weekend, but also, early in December, a new adaptation of C. S. Lewis' book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* will be seen in theatres all across the country and around the world.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is based on the first of seven books Lewis wrote about the world of Narnia. It is a place populated by people, mythical beasts like unicorns and centaurs, and most especially, talking animals.

It is a well-known truism that the lion is the king of the beasts, but in Narnia that is taken to the ultimate level. For the Lion Aslan is not only the chief among the animals, he is also a divine figure. And in one of the later books in the series, *The Magician's Nephew* we discover that it is through Aslan that the world of Narnia came into being.

In an elegant piece of writing, Lewis describes the genesis of his make-believe world.

In the book, several of the key characters are magically transported out of our world and suddenly find themselves standing in the midst of sheer darkness. Lewis writes: "It was uncommonly like Nothing. It was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all . . . ." (*The Magician's Nephew*, 85)

After an uncomfortable time in the darkness, they notice a new element.

"AS voice had begun to sing . . . . Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise [they had ever heard] . . . . Then two wonders happened at the same time. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count . . . . The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars." (*Ibid*, 87-88)

As the voice goes on singing, Lewis writes, "The eastern sky changed from white to pink, and from pink to gold. The voice rose and rose, till all the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose." (*Ibid*, 90)

In the light one can see the emerging world of Narnia . . . hills and valleys, mountains and streams. "It made you feel excited," writes Lewis, "until you saw the singer himself, and then you forgot everything else. It was a Lion . . . . Its mouth was wide open in song . . . . [And] when you listened to the song you heard the

things he was making up. When you looked round you, you saw them.” (Ibid, 94-95)

With each note, with each line, a new tree, a new flower, a new animal springs into existence. It is the music itself that gives life to the world.

Such a lovely image, such a powerful idea! That is at the root of it all, at the core of existence, in the beginning, there is music. Music that continues to wend its way throughout creation—and throughout life itself. Music that expresses itself in each and every life as a wonderfully unique song.

Jack Kornfield speaks in one of his books about a tribe in Africa that understands this truth. It seems that in that culture when a woman realizes she is going to become a mother she finds a spot away from the hustle and bustle of village life. Then, writes Kornfield, “she sits and listens [to the universe about her] until she can hear the song of the child . . . . Once she has heard it she teaches it to the father . . . [and] to the baby in her womb. Then she teaches it to the old women and midwives of the village, so that throughout labor and at the miraculous moment of birth itself, the child is greeted with its [very own] song. After the birth all the villagers learn the song . . . and sing it to the child when it falls or hurts itself. It is sung in times of triumph . . . in rituals . . . and at the end of life, his or her loved ones will gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the last time.” (*A Path with Heart*, 334)

I think the members of that African tribe are onto something! For deep within each of us is our own song, a song uniquely our own, given us at conception, carried by us throughout life, and then beyond.

But it is a song that is often muffled by layer after layer of pretense and shame. We worry our song’s not good enough, not long enough, not pretty enough. And so it is tilled. And the song in our soul grows silent.

Donald Hustad, a composer and editor of hymnals, points out that forty percent of church goers feel that “singing in church is for [trained] singers.” But singing, he says, is for all of us. “The relevant question is not, ‘Do you have a voice?’ but ‘Do you have a song.’” (*Leadership*, Volume 3, Number 1)

I would modify that a bit. It’s not ‘do you *have* a song’—rather it is do you *know* your song? Are you willing to sing your song? Are you willing to add your voice to the ongoing concert of creation? And are you willing to raise your voice in praise of the Creator?

Our scripture reading this morning is one of the best known of the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is a book of hymns, of songs, to be sung in worship. Psalm 100 is all about knowing your song, singing your song, raising your voice in praise.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord,  
all the earth.

**Worship the Lord with gladness;  
Come into [God's] presence with  
singing . . . .  
enter [God's] gates with  
thanksgiving and [God's] courts with  
praise.” (100:1-2; 4a)**

**The Psalmist reminds us that you and I have been given a song—and sing it we must!**

**Speaker Annie Chapman tells about a woman she once met at a conference.**

**So Chapman was gathering up her materials at the end of a session when she noticed the woman sitting all alone at the back of the auditorium. It was clear she was in distress.**

**Chapman sat down to talk with her and discovered the woman had three children—one of whom had been in a wheelchair for seventeen years with muscular dystrophy. The other two had a variety of emotional and intellectual limitations. To make matters worse, the woman's father had just died.**

**She was married, but her husband was just one more burden. He never helped with their disabled son. He was spiteful and filled with hate.**

**“I came [to this conference],” she told Chapman, “with one prayer . . . . I asked God to kill my husband. I prayed, ‘Lord, I need a way out! I feel like a bird in a cage.’”**

**The woman paused, tears streaming down her face. Finally she spoke again.**

**“When I prayed that prayer God spoke to me as clearly as I've ever sensed His voice. He said, ‘Even a bird in a cage sings . . . .’ What am I supposed to do with that? How do I live with that answer?”**

**Chapman was stunned. How could she respond to such despair? At last, stumbling on her own thoughts, she replied, “[I guess] if God says ‘sing’ you need to find your song.” (Decision, October, 2002, 9)**

**And so it is with each of us. Each one of us needs to find our own song so that we might sing. For it is truly in singing the song of your very soul that you will find life. Indeed it is in singing your song that you may bring life to others.**

**A young woman from Panther Creek, Tennessee, named Karen, wanted to prepare her older child for the birth of a new sibling. So once she found out they were expecting a girl, Karen had her first born, three year old Michael, snuggle up to her belly every day, and sing to his unborn sister.**

**A few months pass and at last the anticipated day arrives. Karen goes into labor. But there are complications. The little girl is born with serious problems, and is rushed to the nearest neonatal intensive care unit in Knoxville.**

**But things only get worse. The baby's condition deteriorates. The finest doctors, the best nurses, the most expensive equipment, none of it seems to make a difference. The pediatrician in charge tells Karen to prepare for the worst.**

**Torn with sadness, Karen and her husband arrange for a burial plot and a funeral. But through it all three-year old Michael keeps pestering them. He wants to see his new sister. He wants to sing to her.**

**Finally Karen relents. The baby could die anytime, and if Michael is to see her, it has to be now. But the hospital won't permit sibling visits. No children allowed in the neonatal unit. But Karen is undeterred. She suits Michael up in a surgical gown and marches him in. The head nurse is not fooled.**

**"That boy does not belong here."**

**Karen is unimpressed. "He's not going until he sees his sister." And then she takes him to the incubator where the infant lies on the edge of death.**

**At first, Michael just stares, but then, very softly, he begins to sing:**

**"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine; you make me happy when skies are grey . . . ."**

**Suddenly, the baby's erratic pulse starts to steady out and calm down.**

**"You'll never know dear, how much I love you, please don't take my sunshine away . . ."**

**Her breathing becomes more regular.**

**"The other night dear, as I lay sleeping, I dreamed I held you in my arms . . . ."**

**The baby's whole body relaxes into a peaceful sleep.**

**Even the head nurse is amazed.**

**A few weeks later Michael stands proudly by his sister, his sunshine, as she is baptized at the Panther Creek Church.**

**Not the greatest doctors, nor the best nurses, nor the most expensive equipment, saved her life, but a little boy's simple song. One that he knew. One he was willing to sing.**

**Barbara McKeever tells of a time she was in church with her grandson Chandler. In the middle of a solo, Chandler turned to his grandmother and whispered, “She can’t sing very well, can she?”**

**McKeever knew the soloist, and knew of her deep faith in God, and so she whispered back, “Chandler, she sings from her heart. That’s what makes it good.”**

**A few days later while out for a car ride, Chandler and his grandmother were singing along with a song on the radio when Chandler suddenly looked at his grandmother and said, “Nana, you sing from your heart, don’t you?”**

**Might that be said of us all. For the Great Composer of Creation calls all worlds into being, and fills them with Divine Music and gives you your very own song. And you are invited to sing.**

**“Come,” says the Psalmist, “Come into God’s presence with singing.” For your song *is* good enough. Your song *is* long enough, and pretty enough. For your song was composed by God.**

**It matters not if you stay on pitch. It matters not if you can keep the beat. What matters is that you find your song and sing. What matters is that you sing from the heart.**

**Amen  
John H. Danner**