

The Rite of Holy Matrimony
Linda Whittier and Brian Miller

C.S. Lewis wrote a series of books for children that has captivated readers for generations; he titled them “The Chronicles of Narnia.” Even as children’s literature, they are fertile stories of love and grace and virtue and sacrifice and hope and mystery. The book “The Magician’s Nephew” tells the story of Narnia’s beginning. Aslan, the Christ figure in the series, is a lion with an unmistakably majestic nature. To understand Aslan’s character, this quote from a talking horse who appears later in the series, a horse named Hwin will suffice. Speaking to Aslan: **"Please," she said, "you're so beautiful. You may eat me if you like. I'd sooner be eaten by you than fed by anyone else."** As Aslan creates Narnia and it becomes a chaotic affair. Evil makes its way into this good land. And a man and his wife are transported in from London amidst the chaos to become the first king and queen of Narnia – Frank and Helen.

Frank is a humble, “God-fearing” cabby back in England, driving his horse-drawn-carriage and Helen is his good-lady wife. Aslan knows them and they know Aslan, although by a different name back on Earth. When you read the story, these two are a captivating couple; honest, strong, hard-working, faithful, unpretentious. Frank and Helen are the epitome of those who don’t seem too important, at least according to the world’s reckoning. But God chose them. C.S. Lewis shows us that the humble and the ordinary are responsive to God and His Word. Those who seek out status and power for themselves are contrary to the very nature of Christ and His kingdom. I have been deeply touched by these stories, this one in particular, and the two of you, Brian and Linda, are, to me, the real-life embodiment of the first king and queen of Narnia.

Marriage is a bond unlike any other. We are stewards of God’s good gifts and we are called to protect and defend marriage. Husbands are to protect their wives and their marriages. Wives are to nurture their husbands and their marriages. There is no way that anyone can adequately do this apart from the Lord Christ. He is our Creator. He, in love, brought forth humanity from the dust of the earth, forging into us His own image. Male and female created He them – for each other, He created them. To have a counterpart, a God-given compliment, is an extraordinary blessing. To face the world with an ally, a boon companion, a sympathetic source of strength and for that person to be in absolute solidarity with us – that is a great blessing. But marriage is more than friendship. Marriage is more than camaraderie and shared assets and an elaborate way to reduce our chores. Marriage is the Gospel of Jesus Christ in bodily form.

One thing that Christians believe is that God knows the end of the story. His eternal design isn’t limited by a linear understanding of time. When God created Adam and Eve, He knew what Jesus would do on the Holy Cross. Before God created Adam and Eve, He planned and He knew that Jesus would redeem humanity by shedding His blood. Mt. Calvary, where Jesus died, informed the Garden of Eden. It’s true, the sin that took place when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – that sin and all that followed made Mt. Calvary necessary. It may be hard for some to picture, but Mt. Calvary is more beautiful, more astoundingly beautiful than the Garden of Eden could ever be. Jesus died, giving up His life in the most loving act of self-giving that there ever could be. We were mired in muck and hell was our destiny. We were consumed by sin and death was our dark future, and Christ intervened.

There was no Eve for Him. He was desperately alone. Apart from God, we are all alone. Jesus changes that dramatically. Jesus changes everything.

In a very real sense, Jesus came in search of a bride. But there was no holy bone of His bone, no pure flesh of His flesh. We were corrupt; filthy rags were our garments, apostate minds, all the ugly consequences of sin were anchored in our deepest parts. But God wanted us. He fully intended to lay claim to us, to restore and beautify us. The heavenly Bridegroom would do this and Him alone. He takes the initiative. He lays down His life. He sheds His holy blood; all for you; all to gain for Himself a bride. That reality is why God created Adam and Eve the way He did. Jesus' Death and Resurrection, Christ and His bride, His church – that is the principal reason, the template for why God created Adam and Eve the way He did. Christ and the church is the reason we have men and women who are bonded to each other. That is why we have a commandment against adultery – to keep this bond pure.

Adam was alone. It was not good for the man to be alone so God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and from his side God brought forth Adam's bride, the sublime Eve. The two became one flesh. There was no suitable helper for the Lord Christ, so God caused the second Adam to fall into a deep sleep, the sleep of death on the cross and God opened a place in His side by way of a Roman soldier. Out poured blood and water, our poured His bride. Christ's blood washed us (Ephesians 5). Christians are holy by virtue of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and how that sacrifice has been brought to us in Holy Baptism. The church is for Him and Him only; the two become one flesh as He gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. Christ gives Himself to His church, He protects, defends, nurtures and loves her like no other.

Life is difficult. The two of you have faced painful days seemingly on your own. Brian, Linda has told me that you are the man that she has been praying for for years. Your union is connected to Ben's death. Kristie, Brian's sister, reached out to Linda and the two ladies hatched a hiking plan that incorporated Mr. Miller here. Less than a year ago, on June 12th, when these two first met, there was an instant connection. So says your bride. That is sweet. Here's a quote from the bride: "We believe the same things, we strive for the same things, Brian makes me a better woman. I trust our connection. I trust our Heavenly Father."

Life will remain difficult. Marriage is our soft place, a sanctuary of safety from the world. Two are better than one – so King Solomon writes. "For it they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:10). Brian has told me that you, Linda, are kind, caring, beautiful, smart, funny and that you compliment him perfectly in life. You are his queen. You will need to lift him up when he falls. God has made you king and queen of Narnia; Narnia is your marriage, your life together. You are both regal and humble. Regal by virtue of Christ's life which is in you. Humble for exactly the same reason. About that counterintuitive balance, Martin Luther wrote this: "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, subject to everyone."

Christ was dreadfully alone and God saw that it was good. Only this man, only this Savior could win a bride like the church for Himself. He fell, bearing His cross, and there was no one to help Him up. Love pushed Him forward; love for the two of you. Crucified, blood pouring from His

flesh, the Father gave His Son to the world. “This is my Son, whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.” As Eve was brought from the side of Adam, so Christ’s bride would come flowing from His side. Death was the marriage proposal, a cross was the ring, and an empty tomb was the new life together. You are radiant by virtue of the blood and water that streamed from Christ’s side and love defines your life together. This congregation has loved your bride, Brian. And you are taking her from us but we are charmed, CHARMED! that she has you and you have her. We are so happy for you both and wish you every blessing in Christ. The first king and queen of Narnia – Brian and Linda. God has chosen you... for Himself. God has chosen you for each other.