

Jane Williams RIP

Monday 8th November 2021

Aslan

Aslan is dead. The champion of the free world has been captured and tortured by the White Witch and her disgusting friends. They had strapped him to a stone table and ran off to continue their destructive work elsewhere in creation. Aslan's friends, the terrified children, were left to mourn the loss of their hero. They sheltered nearby, in the bushes, distracted, as dawn begins to break. Suddenly they heard a loud crack. They turned round to face their dead friend only to find the body gone and the stone table broken in two. Still in a state of shock, the children heard a familiar voice and there was Aslan, upright and growing in strength.

So runs the much-loved children's story written by the Oxford Professor of English, C.S. Lewis at the start of his series known as 'The Chronicles of Narnia'. It was a metaphor which Jane would have devoured years ago, though we never discussed it. Generations of children will have been kept in touch with Christianity through the writings of Lewis: adults too, for his output was prolific.

Death

But the death of Aslan is just a metaphor, though a powerful one. Jane believed in death. She took her prognosis stoically; she refused any interventions which might "snatch at" a few extra days. She wanted to die at home surrounded by her familiar things, Cora the dog and her growing circle of friends and admirers.

Death for Jane was an important element in her life and critical to her faith. Where there was no death there can be no resurrection. She was determined to take it on heroically – not fighting her cancer but accepting it as part of her life.

We discussed the title of this service. Jane was uncertain about the contemporary shift to 'Celebrations of Life' or 'Thanksgiving Services' for that would seem to overlook reality, to deny the value of death and rob us of the reality of resurrection. For Jane, Jesus died an agonizing death upon a cross for all of us - that we might be enfolded in the resurrection. She was part of that. She had been baptized into Christ and for the mature Jane, that was the drowning, the only death that mattered. Physical death would not part her from her saviour. So Jane was adamant that this should be a funeral for anything else would have colluded with our prevailing fantasy about the shallowness of death.

Jane too died a difficult death: "mediocre" in the words of her brother. For much of the time she was uncomfortable. She was radiant with life in the hospice as they strove to counter

the pain but she wanted to die at home among her friends. This she felt called to do. But she was apprehensive. *“Will I let God down? Will God let me down?”*

Resurrection.

In the end, Jane did not let God down and I don't believe that God let her down either. Jane was surrounded by excellent professional care – though there were some early bumps in the road – and her friends rallied round with loving and prayerful support. They saw her through death.

But where is evidence of the resurrection? In literature it is hard to depict. Lewis's Aslan is a wonderful story but requires the suspension of mature criticism. Shakespeare fares little better, bringing dead heroines back to life as thawed statues in 'The Winter's Tale'.

We are not party to The Resurrection in The Bible. We are only aware of its transformative results: Mary, shocked by Jesus in the garden before dawn; a supper-party on the road to Emmaus with surprising results; the shift from terrified disciples to bold apostles caused by the presence of the Risen Lord in the Upper Room.

If we mean by resurrection the raising to new life, then it also happens in Morcott. Through dying in this place, Jane knew herself to be loved and valued. It changed her and she wanted us all to know it. [It is a great shame that we have to wait for death to tell each other how valuable they are]. Secondly, Jane's death has enlivened the networks of prayer, care and friendship in the village and beyond. Strangers met in her kitchen; love was expressed in a bowl of soup; worship was conducted around her bedside. Thirdly, Jane's faith – constant and growing until the end – has made others question their scepticism.

Through this costly and premature death, the Risen Lord has made himself known once more in the streets and households of Morcott and beyond. We will all count it a privilege to be touched by Jane in life and through death. Thanks be to God. Amen.