



“And as goosebumps ran up and down my arms, the Father verified that He was giving me a peek into the origin story of His creation of me.”

As a child, I can remember wondering if that tree in the Lion King movie was real. I can recall playing with my toys and thinking about Rafiki. And that tree. Would I ever be able to visit it in real life? Now writing as an adult, the obvious answer is no. There are no talking monkeys and no real Simba. There is also no Santa Clause. All I am left with is the harsh reality of a Tuesday afternoon, and the weariness of to-do lists, projects, deadlines, appointments, meetings, texts, emails, bills, and phone calls. Oh, and let’s not forget about the Friday night cocktail when it’s all over. Rinse. Cycle. Repeat.

GROWING UP

But what am I supposed to do with that part of my heart? Is it just supposed to resign to something called ‘the real life?’ What about adventure, enchantment, a growing evil, heroes and villains? I think that is why Halloween is so enjoyable - even for adults. For one special night, it allows us to step back into the *mythic trajectory* that is our lives. Adults dress up as Batman, Luke Skywalker, Cinderella, Wonder Woman, or one of my favorites, Aragorn (from Lord of the Rings). And if we are being honest, I think we feel more like ourselves during that time of the year. Halloween gives us access to that part of our hearts that is sensitive to story and imagination. Which character seems more filled with enthusiasm for life, you as a 9-year-old on Halloween, or you right now, as you read this? I rest my case.

OUR FATHER IS YOUNGER THAN WE

Why do we experience so much joy when we watch little ones play around in their imaginary worlds? Jesus is trying to teach us something through children,

“And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly, I say to you, *unless you turn and become like children*, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”¹

G.K. Chesterton also writes,

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that He makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.”²

Children experience awe and wonder, a freshness, a particular curiosity and sensitivity to the world around them. And perhaps for sake of this article, we can highlight a common phrase they repeat on the daily; “*tell me a story.*” Chesterton writes,

“Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed.”

When we sit back and just observe, children appear to spend their days lost in stories. They are in touch with a reality many of us have lost, that is, that we are part of a story arc; a narrative. And so it is with our Father in Heaven. Except, the story He spends His time in is absolutely true and is unfolding around us every second, of every day, of every month, of every year. But back to The Lion King. How do fictional characters and plot lines intersect with ‘the stuff’ of Christianity?

REAL LIFE

I have come to find that the tree in The Lion King actually does exist! It was constricted with fiberglass and plastic and is planted in Disney’s Animal Kingdom in Bay Park, Florida. Sadly, the tree doesn’t actually exist. And I have yet to see a talking monkey filled with wisdom. But

what *does* exist are sages, elders, and storytellers – that is the icon that Rafiki represents. Although Rafiki isn't real, *what we want to be real* is someone who knows our story, someone who knows where we come from without our explanation. And above all, we want someone to be real who has the ability to understand and hold our pain. Rafiki's character represents elements of God the Father's personal care and concern. Let's take a look at some of those other elements that awaken our imagination and draw us into story.

Good and evil, high stakes moments, pivotal decisions, setting out for dreams, battles, adventures, big risks, enchantment with beautiful things, allies, romance, saying goodbye, letting go, adversity, rising to the occasion, a Father, and...a Kingdom.

You see, all of these things *are* real. They *do* exist. At a movie or while reading a book, what actually is unfolding, is the real drama of our lives in the context of the story arc of the Gospel. All stories borrow their energy from the one, true story. Frederick Buechner writes,

“It is a world of magic and mystery, of deep darkness and flickering starlight. It is a world where terrible things happen and wonderful things too. It is a world where goodness is pitted against evil, love against hate, order against chaos, in a great struggle where often it is hard to be sure who belongs to which side because appearances are endlessly deceptive. Yet for all its confusion and wildness, it is a world where the battle goes ultimately to the good, who live happily ever after, and where in the long run everybody, good and evil alike, becomes known by his true name . . . That is the fairy tale of the Gospel with, of course, one crucial difference from all other fairy tales, which is that the claim made for it is that it is true, that it not only happened once upon a time but has kept on happening ever since and is happening still.”³

NOTHING IS ORDINARY

Brass tax – what all of this means is that Christianity and boredom are simply not compatible. The truth is that “*everything the light touches*” in a day's time is telling a story and all of the elements of our day that ‘get our attention,’ ‘attract us,’ or even ‘repel us’ actually matter. Emotions, events, circumstances, longings, desires, pain, people, music, sounds, taste, touch, smell and sight – *everything*, can serve as ‘departure points’ that launch us back into reality. Reality being the story of salvation, the real and definitive cosmic drama of good and evil. And at the end of each day, that is what we are left with as we hit our pillows; *the facts* or *the story*. This is why it is so important to pursue beauty as nourishment (poetry, music, good art,

literature, etc), because it actually has the ability to ground us. It also gives us access to a language that corresponds to the truth of what is actually happening. The Christian imaginative vision is all about perspective. *Things are not what they seem...*

WHAT IF?

What if, instead of *just getting your prayer time in*, you were **stepping through the wardrobe door into Narnia**? What if, *instead just trying to hold that sarcastic comment back*, you were **in the final death throes of Mordor – destroying the ring**? What if, instead of *just being a stay-at-home mom*, you were **behind enemy lines and leading a resistance movement in the midst of a spiritual holocaust**? You see? This is how God sees our lives. Your life matters. Your life is a drama of epic proportions. Because of the Incarnation, everything gets ‘taken up’ or ‘swept up’ into a mythic trajectory. Now the phrase ‘pray always’ doesn’t sound so bad. It simply means, ‘pay attention’ to God and to the story unfolding. Notice all of the great and terrible things happening around you. Enter in. Take your place. Things are more than what the seem! What if, instead of *just listening to music*, **you were listening to God sing you into existence**?

BY WAY OF EXAMPLE

A couple of years ago, I attended a Goo Goo Dolls concert with my best friend. The backdrop for the evening was a surprising and gentle October snow. I can remember walking into the Orpheum Theater in Wichita, KS, and feeling the coziness and warmth of being inside, as well as the warmth of so many local, smiling faces who were all happy to be together, celebrating the power of music. At one point in the concert, the lead singer, Johnny Rzeznik, told the story of their first big hit, “Name.” He said that in 1995 the band was at a low point, even considering closing up shop because success was lacking. During the middle of the night, sitting on his couch in Buffalo, NY, he put pen to paper and wrote the lyrics to the song that would launch the band into stardom. The song isn’t as popular as the famous “Iris”, but still a crowd favorite. After telling the story, he started playing the song acoustically, with no band. The crowd went wild. After the first chorus, right on cue, the rest of the band joined in. But there was a very special moment halfway through the song during a guitar solo where the three guitarists walked slowly towards one another and allowed their fingers to dance freely on their fretboards. It was 15 seconds of absolute bliss; the three men just played into one another. I found myself in tears.



This was an extremely personal moment for me, because God was showing me where I come from, that is, The Trinity. All three men on stage represented to me, The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. And as goosebumps ran up and down my arms, the Father verified that He was indeed giving me a peek into the origin story of His creation of...me. It brought about so much new life and emotion within me and remains a very sacred moment to this day. I can truly say that I fell deeper in love with God at a secular rock concert.

This is just one story among many of how God has initiated me into a very personal love story. And to this day, a guilty pleasure of mine is scouring YouTube for all of the live performances of *that song*, looking for *that moment*, of *that particular guitar solo*... where I was sung into existence.

The ancient mystic Meister Eckhart once wrote,

“Do you want to know what goes on in the core of the Trinity?

I will tell you.

In the core of the Trinity

the Father laughs

and gives birth to the Son.

The Son laughs back at the Father

and gives birth to the Spirit.

The whole Trinity laughs

and gives birth to us.

All things love God.”

Lewis also writes in his epic Narnian tale how Aslan literally sings Narnia into existence and that his song caused the stars to appear. They too end up joining the song.

I crave to know and experience more and more of God's particular care and joy that's set over my life. And so I look, I pray, and attempt to remain perpetually curious as to how that's playing out in my day to day - be it the movies I watch, songs I am listening to etc... God is waiting to be found, like a child playing hide and seek. And like a watchman on his watchtower, God gently invites us to be on the lookout, because He is eager to commune with us in a variety of ways.

STEPPING INTO YOUR STORY

To close, I want to boldly invite you to reconsider the life that you are living. I invite you to reclaim curiosity and wonder to the world around you. Allow your heart to be childlike again! The phrase "God loves you" will continue to remain overplayed, overused, and fall flat, *until* you have tasted that for yourself. And if you have, you know that it is the most addicting experience on earth, and it is worth selling everything for. There is a big difference between *watching a movie* and *praying with a movie*, of *listening to music* and *praying with music*, and *filling in* your day and *praying in* to your day. God never ceases communicating with us, but the question is, do we have the eyes to see and ears to hear? As long as we bring our hearts along for the ride each day, and we allow a holy curiosity to accompany us, we will start to see everything in a new light!

CONSIDER

Does the life you are living actually matter? Will it give people goosebumps, as it's passed down from one generation to the next? It all depends on whether or not you are living from a Christian imaginative vision - a life where everything matters and everything speaks. The other option is a functional vision of life (that is called survival, and it has yet to give anyone goosebumps). I will say it again, boredom and Christianity are not compatible. You get one or the other. The stories we love give interpretation to the life that we are living. So, how do you speak about your life? How do you see your life? What are the unique and particular ways that God has revealed his heart to you? What are your life's iconic moments? What are your battles and adventures? Where do you see good and evil taking shape in your own life? And most importantly, what character are you becoming?

**In order to give a visual for what I am trying to convey, please check out the following video clip. You can scan the QR code or copy the link below. Remember, what you are about to watch is your story!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAPV-LI4tWk>



May God give you the grace to step into your story!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tyler', with a stylized, cursive script.

1 - Matthew 18:3-4 - RSV; (*emphasis added*)

2 - Chesterton, G.K. - Orthodoxy Paperback – June 19, 1995 – Ignatius Press

3 - Buechner, Frederick - Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale Hardcover – October 26, 1977

4 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwXe676Msb4> - Goo Goo Dolls - Name | Live | The Venue | Lincoln Ca 4/6/24