

The Kingdom of the Lion.

The audience that I had in mind as I was writing this metaphor was elementary school aged youth and possibly Jr. high. I specifically wanted this to be a story that I could tell to my son one day soon. My aim was to convey a contrary message of atonement, rather than penal substitution that dominates Christian culture. I wanted to give an alternative way of looking at the power of the cross and the resurrection.

In a land far away, surrounded by water, there was a large kingdom called Hope. This kingdom was not like any other kingdom you have ever heard or read about. This kingdom did not have people like you and me. This was a land entirely inhabited by animals. There were elephants, tigers, birds, dogs, cats, mice, bears, zebras and many more animals both large and small. For the most part Hope was a land of peace where all the animals lived together in relative harmony. This was largely due to the king who ruled the kingdom. The king was wise, powerful, just, loving and gracious. This king was a lion. The king was bigger and stronger than any other lion you have ever seen. The king ruled from his palace and was loved, respected and feared by all who lived in the kingdom. In the center of the kingdom was a large throne room. In the center of the room was a throne where the king sat. This was a place where the animals could come and be in the presence of the king. If desired they could worship the king or if they had questions they could ask the king. One could also bring gifts or complain to the king. The throne room was a magnificent place for all to come and spend time with the king and each and every animal would be heard. At the entrance of the throne room was a large sign stating, "All are welcomed and all will be heard. Come spend time with the king." It was the King's intention to allow all to come and spend time with him.

From the outside it would seem like a perfect land. If a visitor would be walking through the kingdom they would not see anything wrong at first but if they would spend more time in the kingdom it would soon become clear that everything was not as it appeared. At the entrance to the throne room under the big sign stood two large elephants, two polar bears, two bald eagles and two lions. If an animal would desire to spend time with the King they first would need to walk through this sorting line. These animals standing at the entrance belonged to a privileged group of animals who believed that they and they alone had the right to interpret the king's words. They felt that the king was too perfect, too good, too just and too powerful and therefore could not stand the sight of anything that was not perfect or strong. These proud and noble animals stood at the entrance attempting to prevent any small, blemished, or diseased animal into the throne room out of concern for the king's nobility. These proud animals believed that since they were big and noble they, and they alone, needed to protect the king. This division caused there to be two sets of animals - those who guarded the king because they were big, strong, beautiful and powerful and those who were small, weak, lame and ugly. Another thing that this separation did was prevent the second smaller, less powerful group from allowing the king to reconcile disputes amongst each other. This increased the tension and anger amongst the less powerful group.

Things were not always this way. Many of the animals had heard stories of a time when the words on the sign actually meant what they said. An animal was allowed to see the king and any animal could enter the throne room no matter how big or small, strong or weak, healthy or sick. However that was a long time ago and many of the animals did not believe the stories to be true.

The noble animals were right in thinking that the king was proud, noble and strong. However they forgot that the king was also loving, caring and gracious. The king longed to have all animals come and spend time with him. The king did not want any animal to be turned away especially the weak, small, powerless, or lame.

The king had a young cub that he loved and respected dearly. The cub was also loved and respected by all the animals in the kingdom. It was well known that the cub possessed the power and authority as the king because the cub was the son of the king. Many of the outcast animals had great hopes for the cub

As the prince grew older he could see that the king was distressed by the activities outside the throne room. One day the king asked the cub to go outside and see why few animals were coming into the throne room. The king also asked the cub to invite all the animals who wanted to come inside to feel welcome to do so.

The cub was eager to invite the animals into the throne room, but as he ventured out of the throne room the cub was saddened by what he saw. The prince saw the proud and noble animals preventing other animals from entering into the throne room. The cub also saw the despair of many of the other animals. This angered the cub because these animals at the entrance were doing the complete opposite of what the king had intended.

Out of anger and compassion the cub went up to the line and saw a dog who was limping and trying to enter the throne room. The larger and nobler animals saw the dog and started their routine. They mocked the dog for being so small and weak. They stood in front of her, attempting to block her from entering. The cub walked next to the dog and stood next to her and assisted her as she was trying to walk into the entrance. When the other animals saw this young cub standing next to the dog, they were surprised. They did not recognize the cub as the king's son. The cub looked up at them with a look of defiance. The cub told them that they had been disobedient to the will of the king and that they had not been faithful to the message on the sign. He not only challenged their understanding of the sign, but he challenged their position of power. As this scene was taking place the word spread through the kingdom that the nobles were being challenged by a small cub and all the animals came to see what would happen. Despite the power of the noble animals the little cub seemed to have a great power because he was not afraid of them or their position. The cub went back to helping the dog to walk into the entrance. The nobles became furious at the stubbornness of this little cub.

It was unclear as to how it started or who threw it, but a rock flew through the air and hit the cub on the shoulder. A shock fell over the crowd of animals. Whether this was a blatant act of hatred or a clear threat to intimidate the cub, it did not work. The cub continued to encourage the dog to keep walking and the cub leaned over the dog to protect her as she walked to the entrance. As the prince kept walking, another rock landed just a few feet from the cub and dog. The noble animals mocked both the prince and the dog while other animals spat at the two. A few more rocks landed near the prince and the dog but none hit the pair. The cub was not concerned with who was throwing the rocks; his main concern was to protect the dog and get it to the safety of the throne room.

The tension in the crowd was great. As each rock landed near the two or hit the cub, it seemed to excite the noble animals closest to the pair. When they walked next to a big elephant he reached out his trunk and tripped the prince. The noble animals cheered as the cub lay on the ground. All the other animals could not believe what they were seeing. Many of them froze out of fear and a few yelled at the bigger animals but felt helpless to do anything.

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The prince slowly got up and continued the walk past the noble animals. Another rock flew through the air and hit the prince in the head. This time the blow from the rock knocked the cub on the ground. Blood started to flow from the gash on the cub's head. As the cub lay on the ground the dog leaned over the cub and started to lick the cub's face in hopes that it would revive the cub. The noble animals cheered as the cub lay on the ground. Then a hush fell over the crowd. With all the attention focused on the small cub and the dog, no one had been looking at the entrance to the throne room. The king had been standing there watching the whole thing. With tears streaming down his cheek he walked over to the prince and spoke something into the cub's ear. In that moment the cub began to move and started to rise. The king and the dog stood back as the cub stood on all four paws. The prince stood there looking stronger than ever before. In that moment the noble animals realized that the cub was the king's son. They had attacked the prince of the kingdom.

The prince walked over to the elephant that had tripped the cub a few moments ago. Everyone expected some sort of revenge or punishment to be pronounced over the large animal. But instead the cub invited the elephant to join him as he walked into the throne room. The elephant was shocked by the loving response from the cub. With tears in his eyes he followed the cub back to the king and the dog. The four of them all started to walk towards the entrance and as they did others started to follow. In that moment the fear that the smaller animals had of the noble animals began to disappear. Both groups of animals started to follow the four animals into the throne room.

Not all of the animals entered the throne room on that day. Many of the noble animals remained at the entrance but they had lost their hold over the other animals.

The End.

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