

### Sabbatical Reflection: Part 3 of 3 - July 8 - August 7

It's a simple grave, beside a tiny church, in a random neighborhood in Oxfordshire, England. Without the aid of Google and a random pedestrian we might not have found it. The engraving is simple: "In loving memory of my brother: Clive Staples Lewis, born Belfast 29<sup>th</sup> November 1898, died in his parish 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1963," and then a line from Shakespeare, "Men must endure their coming hence." Below you find the engraving for Warren Hamilton Lewis, C.S. Lewis' brother who died in 1973. In nearly two weeks in Scotland and England, Carrie and I saw several castles (even Highclere Castle, A.K.A. "Downton Abbey"), two palaces, and millennia old ruins. But that little grave in that random cemetery stands out to me.

Yes, C.S. Lewis' books have shaped me as much as anything outside the Bible. Yes, I've read more biographies on this man than any other person. But that's not it. I'm not really a star-struck sort of person. What got me was the understood inconsequence of a single human life. The world might want to make C.S. Lewis big, but his brother Warnie knew better. He surmised, *a simple grave, in our humble parish church will do just fine*. That God chooses to use a single life is God's affair. We may be a big tsunami in the world of human history or a little wave here and then gone again. The Lord gets to decide. The most glorious human (not Jesus) ever to live is probably someone we've never met and long forgotten.

Greyfriar's Cemetery is a common must-see in Edinburgh, Scotland. You can find the gravesite of the first editor of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a famous cop dog, and even Thomas Riddle (did you catch that Harry Potter fans?). As you walk through it, you'll see ample engravings of skulls and the Latin phrase *memento mori* ("remember death"). Reflecting on all we saw on this trip, that phrase rings ever more true. Death is coming. Great saints have lived and died. But the greatest saints live with death in mind and yet not afraid of death.

This is why while two Protestant heroes were burning at the stake, Hugh Latimer could turn to his friend Nicholas Ridley and cry out amid the flames, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out." Today, you need a tour guide to find the spot where these two heroes died. It's a random X in the middle of a cobblestone road in Oxford. There's only a small plaque on a nearby wall. I fear in a few years their sacrifice will be forgotten. But it won't be forgotten by God. Remember death; God will remember you.

Another location struck me as well. It's a small parish church in the middle the financial district of London. Over 90% of the buildings were bombed out in this area during WWII, but God spared this little church. It's name is St. Mary's Woolnoth. You would have to work to fit two hundred people inside. Why is it significant? Well from 1779 to 1807, John Newton (of "Amazing Grace" fame) served as its pastor.<sup>1</sup> History says many filled that small church. It was there that William Wilberforce resolved to remain in parliament and fight the slave trade. On the wall reads the obituary Newton penned prior to his death. It reads: "JOHN NEWTON, CLERK, Once an Infidel and Libertine, A servant of slaves in Africa, Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, JESUS CHRIST, Preserved, restored, pardoned, And appointed to preach the Faith, He had long laboured to destroy..."

With death just around the corner, might we labor long to preach the faith we previously sought to destroy. O, what a Savior we have, Jesus Christ, our Lord.



<sup>1</sup> I enjoyed the *Letters of John Newton* compiled by Josiah Bull in my final month of sabbatical. Others include G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy; The Warden & the Wolf King* by Andrew Peterson, *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman, and C.S. Lewis' *Surprised by Joy*.