

**Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost. 14 October 2018. Someone who knows you.**

“Winnie the Pooh, Winnie the Pooh, Tubby little cubby all stuffed with fluff”

Who loves Winnie the Pooh?

It is hard not to. And the other characters as well. Piglet. Eeyore. Tigger. Not only are they great characters but I feel like all of them at times. I have my Eeyore days. And my Tigger days. You may have noticed. I hope I also have days when I am like Winnie the Pooh as well. Even though he claims to be a ‘bear of little brain’ he is actually a bear of great heart and complete honesty.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing the latest part of the whole Winnie the Pooh narrative, the movie ‘Christopher Robin’. If you have the chance go and see it. Take children or grandchildren if you really need an excuse to be there, or just go and enjoy.

There is frank honesty and unconditional love which flows from Pooh bear, especially when he is talking to Christopher. Christopher, in that movie, has slipped into a long phase of forgetting. He has lost something of himself as he has drifted into a seriousness which is not just about growing up. It is a pattern which has come from forgetting what is truly important.

Winnie the Pooh brings Christopher back home to himself. He does that with honesty and with love, unconditional love. Pooh just tells it like it is, even if Christopher doesn’t want to hear what he has to say.

We all need someone like that in our lives.

Do we surround ourselves with people who only tell us what is comfortable? Do we only have people in our lives who say what we like or what we agree with? Do we only have people around us who say what they think we will want to hear? And it could be that we haven’t done that deliberately but it could be that whenever anyone says anything which makes us feel challenged or uncomfortable or rattles our particular perspective then we give off such a negative reaction that people become afraid of telling us the truth about life or themselves or ourselves.

That happens in community. It happens in friendships. It happens even in our most intimate relationships. If we lose the capacity and the openness to be able to speak the truth, in love, then we become closed in. If we lose the capacity and the openness to be able to hear the truth, in love, then we become as disconnected as the supposedly grown-up Christopher Robin.

How much better is it to have connections in our lives where people can be honest, open and truthful? Not brutal. The truth should be spoken in love, shared with compassion and with openness. Love, unconditional love, needs to be the starting point. And commitment to the person. Truth, even uncomfortable truth, is a gift. It lets us see ourselves with the invitation to grow, change, develop. If there is one thing that we can hope for from those who are closest to us, those who know us the best, it is that they will be honest with us in this way, speaking the truth, in love.

Not only Winnie the Pooh speaks truth in that way.

We heard about the same committed approach to openness and honesty with love in two of our readings from the Scriptures this morning.

In Hebrews 4:12-16 the way that approach is described might sound confronting. The word of God for us is described as being like a sword. Well I know how thick my defences can be when there is something about myself that I may want to hide or which I might not even want to face myself. Maybe the image of a sword, cutting through the defences, is actually appropriate. Being 'laid bare' in our lives, our attitudes, our actions can feel like being dissected. That is why it is vital that we can trust whoever helps us to see ourselves honestly in that way.

Trust is at the heart of the image. The sword is more like a surgeon's scalpel. It is wielded with care and hope and healing. Essentially, as we see in the second part of that passage, the honesty and the words which bring us to a place of vulnerability come from one who sees us as we are. Jesus sees us without our masks, without our barriers, without the defences which we like to put around ourselves. He sees us as we are, and understands, and loves us unconditionally.

That love means he wants the best for us, not for us to stay just stuck or mired in ways of living and being that drag us down. The point of being brought to a place of vulnerability is to be able to change, grow and move forward.

The other way in which this theme is explored in the readings today is in the Gospel reading from Mark (10:17-31). Jesus was confronted by an enthusiastic young man who seemed to have it all together, he seemed to know what God was wanting and he was eager to get on board. But Jesus saw that there was something in him which was holding him back. He wanted to make commitment with part of himself but not all. He was keeping part of himself back as if that part was not relevant to making a complete commitment.

In medieval times, it has been said, when Knights were baptised they held their sword arms up out of the water. They were prepared to commit their lives to God, except for the sword which belonged to the ruler who could order them into battle. I have heard it suggested that in modern days (echoing the hesitation of the rich young man) we might come to be baptised with all of ourselves except that our wallets or purses are held up out of the water.

Is there any part of ourselves we do hold back? And if there is some part like that then do we think that God doesn't know? We are known, and loved, and challenged to be able to be the best we can be, not limited by our own imagination of what we can get away with.

The disciples of Jesus seem just as shocked as the rich young man at Jesus' suggestion. Anything about God seems ok so long as we don't talk about money, or real change, or stepping up to real responsibility in our thoughts and words and actions, confronting our prejudices or being prepared to speak out against those words and actions in others which are life-denying.

Who would you rather have in your life, someone who just says what you want to hear or someone who, in love will say honestly when you are off track, when your life is wrapped up in selfishness, when there are things that need to be confronted and addressed?

What DO we want from God? Just comfort? Just to be told we are loved and accepted? (Which of course we are). Or do we want that honesty in which we are loved so much that the hard things can be said and heard?

We come here for honesty, for the truth offered in love. May we always be open to hear.

Amen.

**Paul Mitchell**

