

St. Catherine's Episcopal Church
Sermon – December 5, 2021 – Second Sunday of Advent
The Rev. Allen W. Farabee

Not long ago I gave my grandson, Liam, a book entitled *Children of God*. He doesn't go to church as much as I wish he did; so I resolved to share with him the stories of the Bible. This book is a gorgeous collection of Bible stories, retold by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, with illustrations from all cultures and races. Every day, Liam and I read one the stories. Just the other day we were reading about John the Baptist. Liam, ever observant, said, "all John ate was grasshoppers and honey." I agreed that John's diet was not what I normally eat. Then Liam said:

I know somebody else who loves honey.

Who?

Winnie the Pooh.

Realizing that I was in the presence of great wisdom, I said nothing more.

But, when I went home, I asked my friend, Edward Bear, who sits on the chair next to my desk, about this marvelous coincidence and he told me the most astonishing tale.

One day when Pooh was out walking, he came to a winding river, and near the banks of the river there was a large sycamore tree; and from the top of the tree came a loud buzzing noise.

Being the sort of bear he was, Pooh sat down beneath the tree and tried to sort things out. He said to himself (Pooh often talked to himself, because he was the nicest bear he knew):

There's a buzzing noise coming from somewhere, and it means something.

It can't be a storm, with the sky so blue. It can't be my friends. I'm the only one here. But it must mean something.

Then Pooh looked around and, seeing nothing that would cause a buzz, he lay back to think harder about the noise he heard. Then it hit him: only bees make buzzing sounds. And if there were bees around there must be honey being made. And looking high up into the tree he could tell there was a beehive at the top, and a beehive meant honey, and Pooh meant to have the honey.

So, up he climbed and climbed and climbed – a little further, nearly there – he stood on that branch and reached out *Crack!* Down he went. "Oh, help. Oh, no. I only

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wanted....” as he bounced from branch to branch, falling gracefully at last into a mustard plant.

“Oh, bother,” said Pooh, as he wiggled out of the plant, feeling foolish *and* hungry, which is worse than foolish or hungry alone.

“Hallo,” said a voice from high above Pooh’s seat on the ground. “Hallo, are you all right?” Since the fall had dazed him and he couldn’t yet see straight, Pooh listened hard to a voice he’d never heard before. It was too old to be Piglet, and not melancholy enough for Eeyore. It wasn’t playful like Christopher Robin. Pooh didn’t recognize the voice; and while he was the bravest bear he knew; he was always braver at home *after* adventures than he was facing a creature he’d never seen before.

But, being the brave – if foolish and hungry – bear that he was, he stood up, close to the honey tree, shook his head to clear his eyes and looked up. It wasn’t a Huffalump. Piglet made that one up. It was covered with skin, but Pooh didn’t recognize whose it was. Pooh was sure that if you were nice to anybody they wouldn’t hurt you, so he resolved to be nice. He was also sure that the best thing to do was to ask a question nicely:

Who... Who are you?

*I hear that question a lot, smiled the creature. My name is John,
John the Baptist.*

Pooh wasn’t sure he was happy with that answer. He tried again:

What’s a John the Baptist?

“I’m a preacher,” answered John the Baptist, noticing that Pooh asked straight questions and seemed to expect straight answers. “I tell stories of God. I tell people to change the way they live because the Messiah is coming.”

Pooh’s head began to spin, as much from the strange things this “John the Baptist” said as from his fall out of the tree. He was still hungry for honey. But John, who was more used to talking than listening, kept going, “Just this morning, down at the river, I reminded people that God will soon change this world and make it a place where:”

*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat
straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent’s food.*

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“I also told them that God will fill every valley, make every mountain and hill low, and make every crooked thing straight and every rough way smooth”

Pooh could hear John vaguely. He didn't know if he wanted the world to change. He liked it pretty well the way it was. Oh, sometimes things were a bother. A flood almost drowned Piglet; Eeyore lost his tail once; and Tigger was frightened a good bit. But they had splendid parties, and they went on terrific expeditions. Yet – at the same time – Pooh, who was both smart and kind, thought that the world was just right when all the animals were together. And if that tall hill could be flattened, their walks would be so much nicer.

By this time, Pooh and John were sitting in the shade of the honey tree. Then John said, “Tell me, who are you?” Pooh realized that he had forgotten his manners and had not introduced himself. “My name is Edward Bear, but my friends call me Winnie the Pooh, and they usually just call me Pooh.

“You're the first bear I've ever met,” said John. “Have you been baptized?”

“What's baptized?” asked Pooh, none too sure this John could be trusted.

“It's like a bath – in the river,” continued John. He was proud of his work. Getting people baptized seemed to be what he did best.

“Well, Piglet once had a bath” said Pooh with a little sniggle of pleasure. “He had a bath meant for Roo; and everybody thought he came out a different color and Piglet got mad and ran home. When you baptize, do they become a different color?”

“Not a different color,” replied John, “but different, yes, and clean inside.”

Pooh didn't know how a bath could make you clean inside. But he was already mystified by John the Baptist. And he realized they'd been talking quite a while. And, though he was feeling quite brave now and less woozy, he was hungry and he wished he had gotten some honey.

Just then John reached in the bag he carried and pulled out a package of what looked like a snack.

“Are you hungry?” John asked Pooh.

“Oh, yes.”

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“Well, I’ve eaten all the grasshoppers,” (which relieved Pooh no end) “but I’ve got a little honey left. Would you like some?”

Before he could stop himself, Pooh was telling John about his climb up the very tree where they sat, and his fall, and the honey just out of reach, and how honey was his favorite food in all the world. And then they were sharing John’s honey and chatting about their friends and where they’d been and the exciting and frightening things they had done. And, afterward, they lay back in the shade and enjoyed the breeze off the river, before Pooh had to return to Pooh Corner, and John had to go back to the wilderness.

But, before they parted, John, who had grown to like Pooh – as everybody did who met him – and who hoped there would be room for bears, along with the wolves and lambs and oxen in the Messiah’s world – John asked, “What do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?”

“Well,” said Pooh, “what I like best…” and then he had to stop and think. Because although eating honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were eating, but he didn’t know what it was called.

As John left Pooh there by the river and walked back to the desert, he felt, in his own gruff way, like a new man. He knew just what Edward Bear was talking about. This was the moment just before the Messiah was to come. And this moment was as sweet as honey. He also didn’t know what it was called. What a funny bear, thought John. What a great God. *Amen.*