

Preached by the Rev'd Canon Ken Boullier
Christmas 1 **31 December 2017**
St Mawes & St Just in Roseland

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 148

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:15-21

Galatians 4:4-7

*⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive **adoption** as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, '**Abba! Father!**' ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.

Alleluia.

Luke 2:15-21

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to

*Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.'*¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child;¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

*21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and **he was called Jesus**, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

The Christening by AA Milne

*What shall I call
My dear little dormouse?
His eyes are small,
But his tail is e-nor-mouse.*

*I sometimes call him Terrible John,
'Cos his tail goes on -
And on -
And on.
And I sometimes call him Terrible Jack,
'Cos his tail goes on to the end of his back.
And I sometimes call him Terrible James,*

'Cos he says he likes me calling him names...

*But I think I shall call him Jim,
'Cos I am fond of him.*

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

*and **he was called Jesus**, the name given by the angel
before he was conceived in the womb.*

Our names are so important. They link us to all whom we love and all who love us. They are with us from the very beginning and stay with us all through our lives to the very end.

Today, as well as being the First Sunday of Christmas it is also New Year's Eve and tomorrow we start another new year, 2018.

I was prompted to use the AA Milne poem, The Christening, when one of our family was reading from "*When we were very young*". It was part of a 4 volume collection given to one of our grandchildren. This sparked off a series of readings by adults and children in turn from the Winnie the Pooh books and "*Now we are Six*" as well. I was struck by the fact that Milne's childhood philosophy, as expressed in these 'oh so familiar' sayings, poems and exchanges is so life affirming, profound and spiritual, I felt I should be

sharing some of them with you today as we reflect on 2017 and prepare for 2018.

Our Epistle today reminds us that God calls us into a parent child relationship where to be a child is to be fully human. Jesus himself taught that *'unless we can become like little children we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven'*, no wonder another author, CS Lewis wrote children's stories to communicate the most profound and theological themes. AA Milne does the same.

*"What day is it?"
"It's today," squeaked Piglet.
"My favourite day," said Pooh.*

And there was I, trying to communicate through adult sermons and a Quiet Day the godly concept of the Sacrament of the Present Moment.

As we look back on 2017 we all need to savour the good in each day. As the New Zealand Prayer Book Night Prayer has it.

*What has been done has been done;
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.*

Our media, especially the news media and political commentators, would have us believe that the be all and

end all of a successful year is to be measured in material wealth and glossy magazine health.

Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* tells us that “GOD’s poverty is his real sign”. The shepherds had been told that the Christ-child would be wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger (*Luke 2.12*), and it is in this poverty that they encounter their Lord. In his focusing on both the manger and the shepherds, Luke is emphasising key themes, already introduced in Mary’s Magnificat.

Fred Craddock, in his commentary on Luke, puts it like this, the shepherds “*belong on Luke’s guest list for the kingdom of God: the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame*”. Jesus’s earthly humility echoes his heavenly nature: self-giving love is at the very heart of the Trinity.

This theme is taken up in our Epistle today. Christ enables us to join him as children of the Father. Because we, too, are children, “*God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba, Father!’*” (*Galatians 4.6*).

Out of the mouths of babes...and children’s storybook characters:

“Sometimes,’ said Pooh, ‘the smallest things take up the most room in your heart.’”

*“How do you spell ‘love’?” - Piglet
“You don’t spell it...you feel it.” - Pooh”*

The sacraments are for all five senses. ‘God is Love’ is not confined to a theological construct, in fact it does not belong there.

Angus Ritchie, writing for Christmas in the Church Times puts it like this:

As Christian disciples we are made “partakers of the divine nature” — drawn into the flow of love and adoration of our Triune God. This intimacy is one we are to savour, as we do in every Eucharist when we pray to God as Father in the words Jesus taught us: gathered around him, present with us in the Sacrament.

The intimacy in Jesus’s earthly family goes beyond the biological. As he will later teach, everyone who hears the will of God and obeys it is his “mother and brother” (Luke 8.21). The shepherds represent the first extension of that family into a wider Church. Thus, today’s post-communion prayer refers to Jesus’s sharing “the life of an earthly home” in

Nazareth, before asking for grace for the Church to “live as one family, united in love and obedience”.

The Christmas season, at its best is a time for families and the wider family of the Church and communities to appreciate one another.

Winnie-the-Pooh again...

“Some people care too much. I think it's called love.”

“You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes.”

*“I don't feel very much like Pooh today,” said Pooh.
“There there,” said Piglet. “I'll bring you tea and honey until you do.”*

“Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.”

Being together, however briefly, is more about being than anything else...

Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

"Pooh!" he whispered.

"Yes, Piglet?"

"Nothing," said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw.

"I just wanted to be sure of you."

I think ever grandparent can relate to that one!

As Craddock observes, this scene of adoration is described with some of Luke's favourite words: "*wondering, pondering in the heart, making known the revelation, praising and glorifying God*". This gives us an early image of the Church: the family of disciples, gathered around Christ, offering worship to the Father.

Social status is of no help in joining this family. Indeed, it is those of low or no status who are at its heart. In this passage, and throughout his Gospel, Luke is clear that the Church is not just *for* or even *with* the poor. The worshippers who gather first at the crib, like the infant Lord inside it, *are* the poor.

As we reflect back on 2017 we have to do so with humility, recognising that it has not been as great as it might have been. And we have to bear some responsibility for that. So too, as we look forward into 2018, we must admit our poverty, our inabilities, our limitations, our humanness.

"I'm not lost for I know where I am. But however, where I am may be lost."

“Did you ever stop to think, and forget to start again?”

*“I don’t feel very much like Pooh today,” said Pooh.
“There there,” said Piglet. “I’ll bring you tea and honey
until you do.”*

Neither Luke’s Gospel nor the rest of the New Testament depicts a Church with “a heart for the poor”: they, rather, portray a church with the poor *at its heart*.

We have to enter 2018 with the ability to admit our weaknesses and limitations and to embrace fellow wounded and weary travellers to embark on the adventure of another year. Mind you, Some of us might rather things were calmer with a bit less adventure...

“Later on, when they had all said “Good-bye” and “Thank-you” to Christopher Robin, Pooh and Piglet walked home thoughtfully together in the golden evening, and for a long time they were silent.

“When you wake up in the morning, Pooh,” said Piglet at last, “what’s the first thing you say to yourself?”

“What’s for breakfast?” said Pooh. “What do you say, Piglet?”

“I say, I wonder what’s going to happen exciting to-day?” said Piglet.

Pooh nodded thoughtfully. "It's the same thing," he said."

The simple things, the silence and just being will be the most important part of this year to come

"What I like doing best is Nothing."

"How do you do Nothing," asked Pooh after he had wondered for a long time.

"Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it, 'What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?' and you say, 'Oh, Nothing,' and then you go and do it.

It means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering."

"Oh!" said Pooh."

So being a good listener could be our Resolution for the New Year

"Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That's the problem." Says Winnie-the-Pooh

Then there is putting others first, another candidate for a New Year's Resolution...

“Just because an animal is large, it doesn't mean he doesn't want kindness; however big Tigger seems to be, remember that he wants as much kindness as Roo.”

“A little Consideration, a little Thought for Others, makes all the difference.”

*“I don't feel very much like Pooh today,” said Pooh.
“There there,” said Piglet. “I'll bring you tea and honey until you do.”*

We starting thinking about names and who we are, maybe some further discovery in that direction might also be part of God's plan for our new year...

*“Hallo, Rabbit,” he said, “is that you?”
“Let's pretend it isn't,” said Rabbit, “and see what happens.”*

Just in case the woes of the world seem too overwhelming for you:

“Supposing a tree fell down, Pooh, when we were underneath it?”

'Supposing it didn't,' said Pooh after careful thought. Piglet was comforted by this.”

Here's a final challenge for 2018 written by AA Milne in 1940 in a piece entitled War with Honour:

“The third-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the majority. The second-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking with the minority. The first-rate mind is only happy when it is thinking.”

“And by and by Christopher Robin came to the end of things, and he was silent, and he sat there, looking out over the world, just wishing it wouldn't stop.”
— A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*

Years ago in an American Christian produced a cartoon strip entitled *The Gospel According to Peanuts*. Well today we have had a perspective of the Gospel according to Winnie the Pooh and friends.

To close I want to change gear so that we end this year well with a blessing by John O'Donohue entitled:

AT THE END OF THE YEAR.

The particular mind of the ocean
Filling the coastline's longing
With such brief harvest
Of elegant, vanishing waves
Is like the mind of time
Opening us shapes of days.

As this year draws to its end,

We give thanks for the gifts it brought
And how they became inlaid within
Where neither time nor tide can touch them.

The days when the veil lifted
And the soul could see delight;
When a quiver caressed the heart
In the sheer exuberance of being here.

Surprises that came awake
In forgotten corners of old fields
Where expectation seemed to have quenched.

The slow, brooding times
When all was awkward
And the wave in the mind
Pierced every sore with salt.

The darkened days that stopped
The confidence of the dawn.

Days when beloved faces shone brighter
With light from beyond themselves;
And from the granite of some secret sorrow
A stream of buried tears loosened.

We bless this year for all we learned,
For all we loved and lost

And for the quiet way it brought us
Nearer to our invisible destination.

John O'Donohue (Benedictus)

Christmas 1

- 24 Good Christians all, rejoice
- 23 Infant Holy
- 20 Good King Wenceslas look'd out
- 6 The first Nowell the Angel did say

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