

Scripture Lesson: Philippians 4:10-14

Sermon: The Gospel According to the 100 Acre Woods

In October 1926 the story collection *Winnie-the-Pooh* was released in England. It's author, Alan, Alexander Milne was inspired to write these stories based on the times he spent with his young son, Christopher Robin, in the woods outside their home. During those times, Christopher would often take his stuffed animals with them in the woods, and they developed stories that to this day, many can relate to as they remind you of childhood innocence and wisdom to hold onto. Here are some of those thoughts of wisdom: "*How do you spell 'love'?*" – asked Piglet "*You don't spell it...you feel it.*" – replied Pooh"
"*A little Consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference.*" – Eeyore to Winnie
"*You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.*" – Christopher Robin to Pooh "*The things that make me different are the things that make me ME.*" – Piglet "*Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That's the problem.*" – Winnie the Pooh "*You can't save time. You can only spend it, but you can spend it wisely or foolishly.*"- Winnie the Pooh "*Always wear a smile, because your smile is a reason for many others to smile!*"

Well, the Disney company thought this story was wonderful, in fact the book was one of Walt Disney's daughter's favorite books, so he always wanted to create a movie based on the book. He first released *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* in 1966, prior to his passing. But the studios continued to work on the AA Milne stories that eventually were put together for a full-length animated movie, released in 1977, titled, "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh". And in my opinion as you watch this movie there are a few lessons that the 100-acre wood inhabitants learned that you and I can relate to, and in particular relate to this passage from the Apostle Paul, regarding contentment. Which I believe is something we all struggle with, isn't it? I'm not talking about being submissive or even passive. I'm talking about finding a peace of mind in a challenging situation. There are times when we cannot change what is happening, there are times we face problems and troubles, and in those instances, we like Paul, may need to learn to be content. Paul writes, *I have learned to be content with whatever I have.* ¹² *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.*

In this movie, we see 3 distinct times where the characters are facing new and challenging situations. How do they get through them? They learn to become content through troubled times with the help around them. In the first chapter, Winnie the Pooh is hungry for his favorite food- honey. But he is out of it, so he has to go get some. Pooh knows that to find honey, you go to their maker, you go find bees. However he doesn't take this task on by himself. He seeks the assistance of Christopher Robin. Christopher Robin is the little boy who lives in the 100-acre woods, and he is the one all the characters turn to for assistance. He is, our Savior figure, if you will. For this time, Pooh seeks the help of Christopher Robin to help the bear be transformed into a little black rain cloud. The idea is if Pooh is covered with mud, and floating in the sky with the assistance of a blue balloon, that Christopher gave him, he can float near the bees and get some honey. As you can imagine, it doesn't work really well, and so in the end, Pooh bear's balloon is deflated, and Christopher steps in to catch the bear when he falls. What I love about Christopher Robin, and where we can see the gospel in this story is Christopher Robin, helps Pooh get where he wants to go. He releases him, with the balloon, watches it all unfold, as this is Pooh's adventure, and yet Christopher will be there to aid and offer assistance when called upon. The gospel teaches us that Free Will occurs, God does not direct every little thing in our lives, because this is our life. In Luke 13 Jesus is asked about who sinned the most that caused a disaster for certain people. And his response was, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered this fate?... 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam collapsed on them: Do you think that they were more sinful than all the others living in Jerusalem?" Jesus' point was accidents occur, tragedies occur, they are not a judgement call from God, but free will. And yet, with that freedom comes the promise of the presence of God. Earlier in this letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, *The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* 1st Lesson we see in this movie to help us learn to become content in troubled times is: God is always near and will catch us when we fall.

Second story in the movie is when Pooh is continuing to seek honey and he finds some at his good friend's Rabbit's house. But he eats so much that when he tries to leave he gets stuck in Rabbit's door. Right away, Rabbit seeks the aid of Christopher Robin- they discuss what to do- and decide Pooh will have to wait it out. Sometimes that is all anyone can do when they find themselves stuck in a difficult situation. Wait it out. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes of a thorn given to him, he call it "*a messenger of Satan to torment me*" – *2 Corinthians 12:7* Now we never are told what or who that thorn was, but Paul writes, ⁸ *Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,* ⁹ *but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."* Paul recognized that while there is free will, there are times we get stuck with difficulties due to our actions or the actions of others, and there may be no quick relief in sight. Yet when all we can do is wait, at least we know we can wait with the grace of God. Meaning the love of God will not leave us during those difficulties, and so we need to learn to lean on that grace, rely upon God and God's generosity in our lives, because with that grace will come relief of our burdens. In the story you see Christopher Robin hold an umbrella over Pooh's head when it's raining and tie a blanket around his head when he sleeps. Grace is like that, protecting us, keeping us warm, holding us through whatever surrounds us. And eventually Christopher is able to pull Pooh through the hole and set him free. So that the second lesson in this movie to help us learn to become content through troubled times is: God's grace is sufficient, it will cover us, surround us, and relieve us when we are stuck in difficult situations.

The third portion of this movie has a variety of stories combined, but what it comes down to is Owl loses his home, due to a windstorm, and so Eeyore sets out on a quest to find him a new home. And due to a flood that displaces everyone, Eeyore does not realize that the home he finds for Owl is actually Piglet's. And when offered the opportunity to defend his home or help a friend, Piglet chooses to give his house to Owl. Now the question is how is Piglet content- how is he ok with the situation? How does anyone handle the loss of something we love? Whether it's the loss of a home, a job, a loved one, we grieve what use to be, because that change is so difficult to face. So how do we handle the loss? *How do we become content with loss, accept the loss?* Paul writes, ¹² *I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.* What is the secret for Paul to choose to accept whatever situation he finds himself in, including situations of loss? He knows God will be there. Verse 13, ¹³ *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* The number one-way Paul can be content is due to the One who gives him the strength he needs to face whatever comes his way, not from begging God to increase his own abilities but by letting Christ live his life through him. *When Christ abides in us and we in him, we can do "all things."* *Paul knew every moment of life is precious. He refused to let setbacks steal his joy* In this story, the characters have Christopher Robin, their creator, their savior, their friend whose kindness, generosity, and strength, helps them to be content. Even when it means giving up a home for another friend, because it's not lost, it's shared with another. And in this case, Winnie the Pooh invites Piglet to move in with him, to share his home with a friend. Friends, we have a creator, a savior, whose kindness, generosity, and strength is always there to help us be content no matter the difficult situation, because through the gospel of Jesus Christ even our losses can become gains. The loss of a job can mean the answering of a calling from God to do something else with our gifts and graces. The loss of a home can mean the recognition of what one has and what *one needs*. And the loss of a loved one for us, will mean the blessing of eternal life that is pain free for that loved one, with Jesus. What Paul wants the church of Philippi and you and I to recognize is that, no matter the setback, the frustration, the struggle, the fear, we can get through them, we will get through them, if we know, trust, believe, God's sovereign goodness works to turn our sorrows into joy.

So this week, According to the Gospel of the 100 Acre Woods may we find peace of mind, body, and heart when we: Learn to become content through the challenges of free will, recognizing God is always near and will catch us when we fall. Learn to become content knowing God's grace is sufficient, it will cover us, surround us, and relieve us when we are stuck in difficult situations. Learn to become content believing that with God even our losses become gains with Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Holy God, help us be full, help us be empty. Help us have all things, help us have nothing. No matter what you want, may we do, and recognize that to be content with you is to be truly blessed in this life and in the one to come. Amen.