



What Winnie the Pooh character are you?¹

Tigger - bouncy and with endless energy and cheerfulness.

Piglet – Pooh’s steady companion, quietly intelligent and yet timid.

Eeyore – quietly glum but if asked to describe himself, would say he is merely realistic.

Owl –mentor and teacher

Pooh – the friendly, thoughtful and sometimes insightful

Or maybe one of the others such as Kanga, Roo, or Christopher Robin.

Or we could shift stories and ask who we are in the Wizard of Oz. Glenda the Good Witch, Dorothy, Toto, a flying monkey, a munchkin or maybe even the Wizard- and let’s not forget the Tin Man, the Lion or the Scarecrow.

In more contemporary terms we could use Harry Potter and the various characters in that series for this same purpose. Whatever story you use to think about the qualities and characteristics of any group you work with, remember that all are needed. If everyone was a Tigger, I doubt that the administrative tasks would get done. If everyone was a Kanga, the team would say “yes” to every possibility that came along and nothing much might get done due to pure exhaustion.

These stories can be ways by which we learn about ourselves and our world. About our gifts and talents that God has given us for the benefit of God’s world. We can use these stories to help us understand our team and how we can best work together to bring the realm of God to earth. We can use our understanding of who and whose we are to help bring the light of the world to all the world.

I’m glad those who put the Revised Common Lectionary together for today paired the reading from Numbers with this passage from the Gospel of John. It helps us put into context the Gospel

¹ <http://recruitloop.com/blog/understanding-your-team-whos-who-in-your-hundred-acre-wood/> (March 10, 2018)

Numbers 21: 4-9; Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2: 1-10; John 3: 14-21

reading. When we think of snakes, I suspect we think first of the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Adam and Eve. The one who got blamed for the human decision to defy God and eat of the forbidden tree. The snake is the one we too often forget was also created by God and named as good in Genesis – who was more clever than any wild animal God had made (Genesis 3:1). And yet, a few verses later that same serpent was cursed to slink on its belly and enmity between humans and serpents was begun.

In the passage from Numbers, the people have been wandering in the desert and grumbling and impatient, as rather seems to be their regular practice. God gets frustrated and send poisonous snakes to bite and kill the people of Israel for their failure to see God's grace and mercy in the middle of their trials and tribulations. Well, the snakes that bite and kill bring the people up short and they go to Moses and confess their sins. God and Moses confer and God tells Moses to make a poisonous serpent, set it upon a stick and thereafter anyone who is bitten can look upon that stick, held up high by Moses and be healed.

Notice that God did not make the snakes go away- rather, he provided a way to be healed. Look up and focus upon what God has done for you and you shall be healed of the snakebite. Look up and see that this thing that brought you to grief has been transformed into the thing that can bring you to health. Refocus your life on what God has done for you. Quit your grumbling. Stop being impatient. Reconsider how God is calling you to look up and look out- stop focusing on yourself.

As a side note, in the New Revised Standard Version, the serpent made by Moses is made of bronze- in the paraphrase The Message, the serpent is made of copper. I wonder if this is where we began to think that copper might have some healing properties!

Our Scriptures, liturgy and hymnody are filled with images of lifting. Sometimes it is "lift high the cross." For Christians, that cross is often a crucifix- a cross with the body of Christ hung on it. Sometimes it is a cross that is empty reminding us of God's great action of resurrecting Jesus so that we do not have to remain mired down in our human condition. Look upon Jesus held high on the cross and know that your sins are forgiven. Lift up your hands and your hearts in praise and worship to the Lord our God, who offers eternal life. Lift your eyes and stand straight and know that you are beloved of God. Lift up your hands and be open and vulnerable to God, the source of all that is.

John 3:16 is often quoted and has caused quite a bit of pain when used as an exclusionary test. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." Too often we stop there when the verses both before and after this one are so important to a fuller understanding of the text. Too often this one verse has been used to beat people over the head with an attitude of believe in Jesus or else. Believe as I believe or else. Believe in a God of punishment, judgment and anger- not a God who loved the whole world. Not a God who provides a way out of sin and suffering. Not in a God who offers up what is most dear so that others may come to life.

We are our brothers' keepers. We are responsible for what we say and what we do – and how we say what we do and what our attitudes are surrounding our actions. Notice that Jesus did not minister alone. Jesus gathered men and women around him to help spread the Gospel. Jesus did not always keep them close and tied only to them. Jesus gathered them and sent them out two-by-two. Yes, Jesus gave them instructions but not so many that they wouldn't be called upon to

Numbers 21: 4-9; Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2: 1-10; John 3: 14-21

work together and be adaptable to the circumstances in which they found themselves. Jesus sent them out in teams so that they could learn to work together and so they wouldn't be alone when facing challenges and disappointments.

Using my idea that we might see ourselves in the characters of well-known stories, we might say that Jesus was a model for Christopher Robin. According to Bernadette Eichner, Christopher Robin is “compassionate ... and is someone that Pooh and the others look up to. He is much wiser and more mature than many of the other characters. He displays intelligence, literacy, cleverness, helpfulness, modesty, humor, compassion, diplomacy, sensitivity, courage, physical and organizational competence. ... He is able to inspire and motivate others, encourage collaborative problem solving and calmly get things done. He understands that everyone has something to offer if they are given the opportunity.”²

Every one of us – inside this building and outside this building has something to offer. Everyone is loved by God: for God so loved the world. Everyone is offered the chance to see and to know the light that chases away the darkness of sin and doubt. Lift up your hearts – and your hands – and your eyes – and see what God has done. And see that it is good and that you are part of God's holy realm, now and forever. Amen.

² Id.