

**“A Return to the Hundred Acre Wood” (website)**  
**Matthew 11:16-19 & 25-30**  
**Rev. Karin Kilpatric**  
**Jun 29, 2014, First United Church of Arvada**

When we listen to the tales of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, by A.A. Milne we are invited to enter a different world –a world, which has brought hope and happiness to so many people, young and old, for over 80 years. We are permitted to pause in our busy adult lives and romp through the forest or play a quick game of pooh-sticks. We can float among the clouds holding onto a bright balloon. We can join a parade on an expedition to the North Pole, or just stop in at Owl’s tree house for milk and a bit of honey. In the 100 Acre Wood, we can share some time with Christopher Robin as he plays among his friends Pooh and Piglet, Eeyore and Tigger, Kanga and Roo, Rabbit and Owl. These woodland creatures, who innocently and honestly live out who they are, offer us the possibility to honestly look at who we are in our most simple un-adulterated selves. In the 100 Acre Wood we can, for a time, which becomes a time out of time, whine with Eeyore, pontificate with Owl, bounce with Tigger, organize with Rabbit, sing dreamily with Pooh, and skip along with tiny Piglet.

The 100 Acre Wood is a place where even the very grown up ones among us can return to childhood’s rhythms and dreams. These inhabitants of the 100 Acre Wood teach us about ourselves and about each other and if we believe the words of scripture, “Truly, I tell you unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” we might find a depth of faith that has previously escaped us.

In the Chinese philosophy of Taoism when someone is seen as a master of the art of living, a spiritual giant, a suffix is attached to their name, “tse.” Master Lao or Lao-tse was the author of the major Taoist classic the *Tao Te Ching*. The interesting and paradoxical thing about this suffix “tse” is that it literally means “child.” As another Chinese philosopher Meng-tse wrote, “Great man retains

child's mind” The great truths of the major religions of this world so often echo each other. ‘Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

Most of us have our favorite character in the 100 Acre Wood—one we love and relate to best—in whom we can see ourselves or others. I see a bit of myself in each of them— Pooh’s openness and simplicity, Piglet’s feeling of insignificance and insecurity, Tigger’s impulsive actions, Eeyore’s gloomy melancholy, Owl’s feigned intellectualism, Rabbit’s “in charge” attitude, (read, “bossiness”) and need to organize life and everyone in it, and Kanga’s nurturing motherliness, At the risk of being too candid, I see a bit of many of you as well, but I will, wisely, keep that to myself for now.

First and foremost of course, is that warm and pudgy familiar little bear, **Winnie the Pooh**. He is simple of mind and heart and ever loveable. If you are, by nature, a bit impatient, as Eeyore, Rabbit or Owl can be, Pooh may frustrate you at times with what appears silly and daft--even idiotic. Yet, it is Pooh who welcomes each of us most warmly and openly into the 100 Acre Wood and into our better selves. If you can unwind and enter the welcoming innocence of his perspective on life, every day will be full of wonder and possibility. In unadulterated feeling, like Pooh’s heartfelt expression of wonder and love, we sense the power of the small. Feeling, in its humbleness, is the origin of all values. Feeling is the tiny center of the wheel from which all thinking of any importance radiates out into the world. Things worth thinking depend upon the feeling at their core. Feeling is thinking’s inspiration, its living, breathing source. Pooh, “the bear of little brain” with his access to this is most certainly a wise being.

One of the most important principles of Taoist thinking is something called “P’u”, or the Uncarved Block. According to Benjamin Hoff in his little book, *The Tao of Pooh*, the essence of this principle of life “is that things in their original simplicity

contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when the simplicity is changed.” The readers of Winnie the Pooh, begin to see the wisdom of the “still, calm, reflecting mirror-mind” in Pooh. When Pooh’s friend, Christopher Robin, refers to his friend as, “you silly old bear,” he says it endearingly and with a bit of awe. In a way, Pooh, is a powerful image of this ancient principle, “P’u” or “Uncarved Block.”

And then, there is little **Piglet**, who must be brought into the spotlight of our attention because he can be, all too easily, ignored. Can you see Pooh’s little sidekick walking with his friend, hand in hand (or paw in cloven hoof)—a tiny pink creature with ears sticking up, taking comfort in the warmth and contentment of his fast friend? Most of us can identify with Piglet’s humble perspective on life, at least at times. He says in his squeaky nervous voice, with its halting speech, “It is hard to be brave when you are only a very small animal.” Who doesn’t frequently feel like just such a small animal—struggling for courage to meet the ordinary demands of our days? Piglet’s relationship to his size is a big stumbling block for him. He cannot imagine his own power, strength or competence so he turns to others to defend him against the world. Yet, even Piglet, with the support of his community of friends, is able to find his “usefulness”. In one tale a storm topples the house, trapping the animals within it. Piglet is the only one small enough to escape, which he manages to do by exiting through the letterbox to go get help. He becomes a hero, when for the first time he sees his smallness as a gift. Piglet helps us recognize that sometimes it is in our limitations that we can realize our strength.

If Piglet is too hesitant for his own good, at times, **Tigger’s** temperament and actions fall at the opposite end of the spectrum. There is nothing subtle about Tigger—he is big and boldly striped and blustery—and he relates to the world, and to others in it, almost by means of attack. At least it can feel like it to those around him. He bounces high and often, and frequently lands in places that cause pain to those he loves because, as he says by way of explanation,

“bouncing is what Tiggers do best.” He isn’t as confident however, as his aggressive behavior might indicate. He acts first and thinks later and often suffers the shame of recognition of the damage or discomfort he has brought to those around him. But this Tigger exuberance and energy, if tempered just a bit, can be wonderfully contagious, waking us up from lifelessness and passivity and inviting us to use our bodies and to play with life.

Dear Kanga, the mother of little Roo is ever the nurturer and caretaker. She is the only female character in the books and with her kind words and gentle manner of discipline she plays something of the parent to all the others. Roo’s welfare is her main priority but her capacity for nurturing love extends beyond just her own offspring, and she brings comfort and a sense of security to all the animals. In one tale, when the blustery but vulnerable Tigger first comes to the wood, she sort of ‘adopts’ him and invites him to live with them.

**Eeyore, Owl, and Rabbit** play important parts in these tales. We adults can often more easily see ourselves in their nature and behavior.

The little grey donkey, **Eeyore**, approaches us with his head hanging low, almost to the ground. Life is a disappointment to him much of the time. In contrast to Pooh’s contentment, Piglets anxiety, and Tigger’s impulsivity, Eeyore expects little from life and of course, because of this, that is exactly what he gets. Piglet’s voice squeaks in anxious excitement, but Eeyore speaks in monotone with a voice that is low and full of misery. He is resigned to his melancholy and his disappointed state of mind. This resignation to the poor state of things may be a kind of unconscious strategy to defend himself against the worry that it might be too painful to have expectations that the world can often not meet. Yet, there is something quite lovable about this little creature. He isn’t a loner. He needs his friends who, in their simplicity, wake him up to the joys of life. His woebegone presence brings out their compassion, teaching them of their own capacity to care and their ability to offer helpfulness to another.

**Owl** has a need to complicate matters by feeling the necessity to verbally express everything in the most high falutin' ways. His verbosity is his way of entering the world and he over-expresses. His stories are long and circuitous and his listeners grow weary with them. Even more than wanting to truly know something, he wants to appear knowledgeable. Anyone who comes near Owl automatically becomes a "listener." That is how Owl relates to others. Sometimes the "listener" wonders if it really matters to Owl who he or she is sitting next to him, because it seems that Owl really just wants an audience, to hear himself talk. This becomes habitual because it is in his talking that he seems to feel most real to himself, whereas, if he could trust the silence he would discover the deeper more wonderful being that he is and a real delight in knowing others.

**Rabbit** often appears more "grown up" than his friends, because he seems to have things under better control, or at least he desires to. He is organized and efficient and functions well. Once, when Pooh visited him in his rabbit hole and ate too much honey and got stuck getting back out, Rabbit made the functional best of the situation. With Pooh's head and upper body outside the hole and his legs and feet inside, quite stuck for awhile, Rabbit asked if he might use Pooh's legs for a towel rack for the time being. Rabbit is more clever in the ways of the world, but so busy in his cleverness, that he allows it to block any true wisdom that may be right in front of his face, waiting for him to understand. In one of A.A. Milne's tales we hear Pooh and Piglet talk of this.

"Rabbit's clever," said Pooh thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit's clever."

"And he has Brain."

"Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit has Brain."

There was a long silence.

"I suppose," said Pooh, "that that's why he never understands anything."

In *The Tao of Pooh*, author, Benjamin Hoff asks,

...Why do the enlightened seem filled with light and happiness like children? Why do they sometimes even look and talk like children?

Because they are. The wise are Children Who Know. Their minds have been emptied of the countless minute somethings of small learning and filled with the great wisdom of the Great Nothing, the Way of the Universe.

Pooh, as an image of Taoism's "Uncarved Block," lives wisely in his simplicity. From the state of the Uncarved Block comes the ability to enjoy the simple and the quiet, the natural and the plain. Along with that comes the ability to do things spontaneously and have them work, odd as that may appear to others at times. As Piglet said in today's story, "Pooh hasn't much Brain, but he never comes to any harm. He does silly things and they turn out right."

From the scripture, which is the foundation of our faith, the Psalmist cries out,

My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. Israel put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.

So that is the end of my story. I am rather tired after all this *thinking*, so I *think* I shall stop here.