

Hearts Made New

MARK 7:14-23

Pentecost 15, Proper 17-B -- September 2, 2018

Many people here this morning, I'm sure, are familiar **WITH THAT VERY FAMOUS BEAR!** No, I am not talking about "**SMOKEY THE BEAR**" whose chief motto has always been: "**REMEMBER, ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES!**"

Nor am I talking about that cartoon character **YOGI BEAR!** Yogi Bear lived in that fictional "**Jelly Stone Park!**" Together with his sidekick "**Boo-Boo,**" **THEY HEISTED** as many "**pick-a-nick**" baskets as possible from visitors to the park.

Nor am I talking about **FAMOUS FOOTBALL COACH BEAR BRYANT** at the **University of Alabama.** When he retired in 1982, after 25 years of coaching, he held the record for the most wins ever of any collegiate football coach **IN HISTORY:** Some 323 wins!

No, the famous bear I have in mind this morning is "Winnie the Pooh" that first appeared in a series of children's books written by the British author Alan Alexander Milne in 1926.

Do you know that **A. A. Milne** had a real-life son named "**CHRISTOPHER ROBIN**" and "**Winnie the Pooh**" was Christopher Robin Milne's favorite teddy bear? Milne marveled as he watched his young son, with a very captive imagination, play with **Winnie the Pooh** for hours.

In his first book, Milne tells about **Winnie the Pooh, being very hungry one day! Therefore, Winnie the Pooh set out** to hopefully obtain some of his most favorite food in all the world: **honey.** **Winnie the Pooh did this, first, by disguising himself as a cloud. Then secondly, he grabbed ahold of a helium-filled balloon that lifted him high into the air, next to a very high tree, that housed an enormous honey bee hive; just loaded full of that sweet nectar called "honey!" But guess what? The bees became so highly suspicious of that "funny-looking" cloud that they immediately began to fly circles around their honey beehive. Therefore, they made it completely impossible for Winnie the Pooh to abscond with some of their very precious honey.**

Nevertheless, I want to tell you that **honey bee hives are very fascinating and exciting places! There is so much activity going on**

within a single honeybee hive that as many as 50,000 bees can inhabit one beehive at the same time!

BUT PLEASE KNOW THAT HONEYBEES, THEMSELVES, ARE NOT INSTINCTIVELY MEAN OR PREDATORY INSECTS. They would never try **to sting any human being unless that human being first made the mistake of trying to disrupt their beehive.**

When this happens, then the bees will swarm out immediately and try to protect their hive by stinging the person (or persons) who are taking their honey.

You know, as I studied our Gospel lesson for today, it dawned on me that the human heart may be paralleled to a honeybee hive!

WHY? BECAUSE TWO DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT THINGS MAY COME OUT OF A HUMAN HEART, JUST LIKE TWO DRASTICALLY DIFFERENT THINGS CAN COME OUT OF A HONEY BEEHIVE.

The bees can come out of that honeybee hive with a **potentially-dangerous sting** that sometimes **proves itself to be fatal; certainly to those human beings that are allergic to bee stings!**

BUT, CONVERSELY, OUT OF THAT SAME HONEYBEE HIVE, WHEN HARVESTED BY A SKILLED BEE-KEEPER, MAY COME ONE OF THE SWEETEST, MOST DELECTABLE FOODS EVER TASTED BY ANY HUMAN BEING ANYWHERE: HONEY!

Friends, let me remind you that one of the greatest promises God made to his chosen people during the years of their Exodus wanderings, in connection with the PROMISED LAND, to which Moses was leading them, was that the Promised Land would be a land: *“Flowing with milk and honey!”*

This phrase is found 21 times in the Old Testament.

And one day the PROPHET EZEKIEL said: *“God gave me the scroll of his Word one day and told me to eat it! I opened my mouth. I ate it and it was sweet like honey in my mouth” (Ezekiel 3:3)! Similarly, in PSALM 119:103, the psalmist says to the LORD God: *“Your words are sweet like honey in my mouth!”* And in Jeremiah 15:16, the Prophet Jeremiah says: *“The LORD God gave me this scroll to eat. I opened my mouth and I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth!”**

Nevertheless, the human heart, spiritually speaking, in its natural state, JEREMIAH TELLS US: *“Is desperately wicked, and deceitful above all things: who can tame it” (Jeremiah 17:9)!*

And our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in our Gospel lesson this morning, who always stood in complete solidarity with the Old Testament prophets, who prepared the way for his coming, confronts us again today with this very same divine truth.

You see the scribes and the Pharisees were again **criticizing Jesus and his disciples for not eating only kosher foods**; but Jesus says that it is not what goes into a human being that defiles a person, but what comes out of a human being:

Listen to the words of Jesus again this morning, won't you?

"Hear me, all of you, and understand. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.

For from within, out of the heart of man, comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person!"

But because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the **very Bread of Life** come down from heaven to give life to the world, by giving to you and me and to all who will but freely receive it, a **"SECOND BIRTH INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD"** it is now possible for each one of us to become blessed with human hearts that are made radically new; hearts that are totally transformed hearts; changed and made completely new by our God!

God wants our hearts to be a places that he longs to fill with his own **JOY AND LOVE**; even as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said on the night before he died on the cross to save us of our sins: *"These things I have spoken with you while I am still with you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full"* (John 15:11)!

Friends, you and I are willing to admit that we are living in a "messed up" world and that we are living in a world full of problems. Most of us are also, only more than happy, to point out the sin and wrongdoing that becomes so easily visible to us in other peoples' lives. But one of the anomalies, one of the unique characteristics of a Christian's life is that we are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to take stock of our own lives.

Why? Because sometimes the really big problem is not only out there, but inside here; inside each of our human hearts that like a honeybee hive may be filled with the potential to severely wound, damage and sometimes even mortally wound another human being.

This is why, St John, reflecting Jesus' own understanding of our human dilemma teaches us to say: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us! But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7-10)!

This is why, Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount asks us: "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's or sister's eye but cannot see the log that is in your own eye? You, hypocrite! First remove the log that is in your own eye and then you will be able to help your brother or sister remove the speck that is in their eye" (Matthew 7:3-5)!

The Apostle John one day wrote: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (I John 4:7-12)!

In the opening chapter of the Book of Revelation, the Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Son of God, Jesus Christ, gives the Apostle John some personal letters that he wants John to deliver for him to seven different churches.

Listen to our Savior's words to the Church at Ephesus: "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance! You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary! Yet, I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love! Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. Let him who has an ear, let him hear! To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:2-7)!

Brothers and sisters, let me close this morning by telling you about a young married couple whose fifth wedding anniversary was just 2 months away, therefore this husband made plans for a special weekend away together with wife; a getaway to New York City; a place they had always wanted to go but had never been there before!

Because his in-laws had graciously promised to care for their two young children, he made the airline reservations and booked a hotel. They toured the sites and even took in a Broadway play. But how do you

think this weekend would have ended, if on their flight home, this man's appreciative wife asked him: "Honey, why did you do all of this for me?"

Hopefully, her husband, who seemed to be batting 1000, so far, would continue to make this trip an opportunity to strengthen their marriage! Hopefully, he would say: "Honey, I did all of this for you because I love you! I'm crazy about you! You are even more beautiful today, than the day we were married! Besides that, I adore you!"

But imagine how quickly the whole nature of this memorable trip could have changed if in response to his wife's question, "Why?" he answered her question something like this: "I did it because this is what I was supposed to do! If I didn't do something special with you on our fifth Wedding Anniversary, I was afraid that you would really get angry and be upset with me!" Suddenly, the whole weekend could have been ruined and therefore meant nothing to this young man's bride! Why? **Because a person's actions, no matter how great the sacrifice, are meaningless unless they are rooted in love!**

Put please notice that this is where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ now totally and abruptly stops his dialogue with his opponents. Jesus is teaching these people that they, like you and me, are all by nature evil. Then he drops his microphone and walks off the stage!

He doesn't offer them a solution on that day because he was very purposefully on his way to become their solution. He became their solution and our solution when he freely laid down his life for us with his sacrificial death on the cross.

Listen to what St Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has passed away! Behold the new has come! All of this is from God who through Christ has reconciled us to himself and committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ, not counting peoples' trespasses against them and committing to us this ministry of reconciliation. We are God's ambassadors; God making his appeal to us! For God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God through him. Amen