

Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm 27:1, 5-13
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23

Elizabeth Bloch
1/27/08
Epiphany 3
Year A

Jesus, Winnie the Pooh, and the Annual Meeting

What does your old copy of Winnie the Pooh look like? This is what mine looks like – very tattered and raggedy - and this isn't even my first copy. It looks like this because it had so much truth in it, I had to hear it over and over and over again. And then, when I could read it for myself, I had to read it over and over and over again.

From the very first page and the very first paragraph, it's clear. (*describe Ernest Shepard illustration: 2nd flight – the way down is pretty easy for Christopher Robin, brutal for Pooh*). We read

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as [Pooh] knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it.

You and I know just how Pooh feels much of the time, I think. There really must be another way, if only we could stop bumping long enough to think of it... There really must be another way to get from where we are – on the way to somewhere, like Pooh, dragged along by a force that is stronger than we are (though probably not as benevolent as Christopher Robin), bump, bump, bumped along by something that seems to be in control of our lives, but is not attentive to how increasingly battered we are feeling.

There really must be another way to *live and move and have our being*, as St. Paul would say: a way to get from where we are – barely coping most of the time – to living in that kingdom Jesus is always talking about. A way to get from the incredible potential for our lives we hear about at our Baptism, and we heard about at Jesus' Baptism. A way to get from that *promise* of living in God's kingdom to the *reality* of living, beloved, in that kingdom every day from this day forward: a reality of *proclaiming that good news, and curing every disease and every sickness among the people*. There really must be a way to get there from here, if only we could stop bumping long enough to think of it...

Jesus found the way in today's Gospel. He had to. He *had* to find the way on that day when he heard that his cousin John had been arrested. Jesus knew he had to stop and think, because John's arrest changed the way everything looked to him.

His Baptism in the Jordan had been a time of such elation for both of them, for Jesus and for John. They had been filled to overflowing with hope and promise, and confirmation of their vocations. And now, so soon after, John had been arrested. It was a blow that sent Jesus reeling down the stairs of his life, with Pooh and with us. Matthew tells us that when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee, leaving behind his family and his life in Nazareth for good, and making his home far away in Capernaum on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The news about John's arrest battered Jesus more than a thousand trips down the stairs on the back of his head. It sent him shying into Galilee as if he'd been hurled by a catapult. His mind and his heart were in chaos. Would all his plans have to be jettisoned? His life seemed to be spinning out of control. All he knew was that he had to find someplace where he could stop and think. Apparently he didn't stop bumping down the stairs and come to rest in a thinking place until he got

all the way to Capernaum – all the way from Judea, through Samaria, and deep into Galilee. Jesus withdrew, big time...

To think, to pray, to fear, to grieve, to ask himself: what did that Baptism of his really mean now? He needed time to re-group, to reflect on the launching of his ministry under a very different set of circumstances than he had imagined: circumstances that were certainly not his first choice, but were, nevertheless, the ones he'd been dealt. It seemed more than clear now that the master plan to heal this broken world was not going to be a mighty, evangelical crusade by the man of the hour, God's Beloved.

So Jesus pulls back – for the first of many times in his story – he pulls way back to reflect, to gain a new perspective, to be restored by the Spirit. And we hear today where that restoration of the Spirit's wisdom brought him: his call to kingdom ministry was not to be done by him alone. Just listen.

From that time, Matthew writes, from that time... As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As Jesus went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

And so it continued. *Follow me. Follow me.* He was going to need everybody – all the ways of walking with Jesus, all the different gifts, all the different opinions, all the different backgrounds, all the mistakes and all the repentances. It was going to take ALL of our broken pieces to put creation back together again, a whole communion of saints to become fishers of people.

What Jesus had needed to know - when he retreated all the way from Judea, through Samaria, and deep into Galilee - was: what that Baptism back in the River Jordan had really meant *after* he had seen how things were in the world he found himself in. What *we* need to know *now* is what *our* Baptism really meant, exactly. Like Jesus, we need to find out how sons and daughters of God are meant to live and minister and bring in the kingdom. What comes first for us? What comes after first??? What is the calling and how are we meant to answer it? What kind of power has God given us for *the work we have been given to do*? With Jesus in the Jordan River, we too have been ordained for ministry. But how do we get there from here?

When Jesus withdrew into Galilee he found the answers, even though everything around him was threatening to destroy who he was and who he was called to be. There he could collect his thoughts and prayers, and see what was to be done. From there he could make new plans to call fellow workers – fishers of people – gathering all the *energy* of God in the *people* of God. That's where he found out that we are meant to convert and heal the world into Kingdom reality *together*.

Follow Jesus. Follow Jesus to the Annual Meeting today. It's a place to stop bumping down the stairs, if only for a moment, and think *together* about who we are and who we're called to be. It's a time to re-group, to reflect, to find out how to do what we've been called to do next – how to get from where we are to the kingdom of heaven, how to be called out of our old way of fishing to follow Jesus and Peter and Andrew and James and John, *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people*.

Follow me, he said. We're going to be doing this together.

