

Generosity, Joy and Pleasure

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Texts: Psalm 16:5-8, 11; Matthew 20:1-16

As any of us think back on our lives, we realize that there are moments of particular choice that change our fate. We choose, often in ignorance or perfect luck, to turn onto a path that changes the whole course of our lives. As Robert Frost said,¹

***Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.***

Walking the road is a powerful religious tradition in all faiths. “Making a Pilgrimage” is to choose a road of special challenge but also of potential blessing. People everywhere take pilgrimages:

Hindus travel at auspicious times to where three holy rivers meet in Allahabad, India.

Tibetan Buddhists go to Lhasa measuring the distance by the length of their bodies.

Muslims travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia to make the Haj;

Christians to Rome, Italy;

Sikhs to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India.

Husband, Will, and I took a pilgrimage to Taize in France.

These pilgrimages raise the question “How do we know which path to take?”

Psalm 16 tells us that we can make God our choice, our portion, our cup. We can claim God and come to know and live as people who belong to God who has first chosen us. We can turn to God and ask for guidance.

Pastor Steve gives sophisticated and wonderful illustrations from C.S. Lewis and Les Mis and Bonhoeffer and Frankl ... (pause)... and **football!**

My level is Winnie-the-Pooh. Pooh, as you will remember, is the stuffed teddy bear belonging to Christopher Robin. In the stories Pooh becomes a living, naïve, simple, loving, generous, loyal, brave little bear.

Pooh loves honey so much he can hear a honey pot calling him. Pooh can hang under a balloon, pretending to be a cloud, hoping to float next to the honeycomb. He can eat so much he can't get out of Rabbit's door. He is the best friend of the easily frightened Piglet. He is brave in spite of Hephalumps who might eat his honey.

Christopher Robin loves Pooh and calls him “*Silly old bear.*”

It is clear in all the stories that Winnie-the-Pooh is ultimately Christopher Robin's bear. Pooh knows he is Christopher's bear – he knows he belongs to Christopher. It is a great joy and comfort for Winnie-the-Pooh that he belongs to Christopher Robin.

Deuteronomy in Bible tells us that we are given a choice about which path our lives will take. *Deuteronomy 30:19* **Moses said, “ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you: life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.”**

Today, you and I are given a choice to walk God's path of life. When we choose God's path we know we belong to God. And, if we listen to scripture, we rush to

be one of God's people – for us it is a matter of joy! As we walk God's path we are surprised with the pleasures of good and perfect gifts – gifts like Pooh's pots of honey. If we were Pooh, we would sing a little song about it but, because we are ourselves, we sing the great hymns and anthems of joy and gratitude.

Let me get directly to the points I am trying to make.

Point one: It is God who **shows** us the path of life and it is God who gives us joy and pleasure on the journey. As Psalm 16:6 says when we follow God's path and belong to God,

“The boundary lines (fall) for us in pleasant places.

We have a goodly heritage. ... (and)

We shall not be moved. ...”

Walking God's path of life does **not** mean we have no fear and no disappointment. It does **not** mean that everything is easy. Even on the path of life we may, in our humanity, feel uncertain. Jesus did. My hero, Winnie the Pooh, gets lost and hungry. He eats until everything is gone and he falls out of trees. Yet Pooh still finds joy and pleasure because, while he is “a bear of very little brain,” he knows who and whose he is. Let us be “Pooh-like” and know we belong to God.

Point two: As we choose to walk in God's presence on God's path, we must trust that God wants good for us. We must see that our lives are part of a larger story. That larger story is THE STORY OF GOD'S LOVE AND BOUNTIFUL GENEROUS GOODNESS to humankind. We must trust in God's gift of life.

Despite the disappointments, Winnie-the-Pooh knows that the person who matters most - loves him the most and wants good for him. We know that God – to whom we belong and who loves us most – wants what is good for us. The Apostle Paul

tells us, Romans 8:28, **“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”**

This is where the Parable of the Laborers (Matthew 20:1-16) comes in. As you remember, the Vineyard owner hires people at different times during the day. Some work a full day, some part of the day, and some just one hour. He pays them all the same.

The story seems to focus on the unhappiness of those who worked the full day and did not get more than those who hardly worked at all.

What catches my attention in the story, this time, is that those who worked one hour wanted to work the whole day, but no one hired them. The owner (God) knows that their financial need; the hunger of their families; their bills coming due are just as great for the last hired as it is for those hired first.

God’s compassion and God’s desire is that every worker receive what they need to have a life full of joy and pleasure. As the parable tells us God is **amazingly generous** in order to make that happen.

When God invited us to choose the path of life and to belong to him, we are called to be abundantly generous in return. The jealousy of the first workers takes away their joy for they have departed from the path.

Winnie the Pooh is amazingly generous not only towards his sweet friend Piglet but also towards the grumpy Eeyore. Like Pooh, we get the chance to be generous with others out of the abundant generosity we receive from God.

God also promise us that we will not walk alone. In God’s presence we will experience joy and pleasures all along the way.

Let us listen again to the words of Psalm 16:11

¹¹ You show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy;

in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

See before you the table of our Lord's abundantly generous grace and love. In a few minutes we will break the bread and drink the cup of God's mercy poured out for us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

¹ Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*