

Saint Thomas' and St Thomas' of the Air Church
Trinity XV
September 12, 2021
rmcneely+

But seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness
And all these things shall be added unto you.

We resume today, the Trinity Summer Survey of Christian
Doctrine:

--With the last of a three part study from Paul's Epistle to the
Galatians that the Church has presented to us over the last three
Sundays,

--And with the last Trinity Gospel taken from Jesus' Sermon on the
Mount.

Both Jesus and Paul present us with a choice.

A choice that we are free to make
Between God and Mammon as Jesus presents it
Or, between the flesh and the spirit as Paul presents it.
But a choice nonetheless.

Let us begin with Paul:

Paul is uncharacteristically adamant in this writing.

He adds a postscript to the letter he has dictated
Something he has never done and will never do again.

And it is that post script that is our Epistle for the week.
He even hand wrote it, that is, he wrote it with his own hand.
In order to emphasize what he has to say

Paul wrote in large letters.
Something he never did before or since.

Papyrus was expensive
and large handwriting consumed expensive space.
All of which underlined the high importance that Paul placed upon
his message, which he saved for the conclusion of his letter.
The part he hoped the Galatians would remember
and take to heart.

In Galatia, Paul faced the nagging problem of false preachers
Swooping in when he was gone
To try to convince the people of false doctrine.
In this case, they were advocating that eternal salvation
Was dependent upon the people first becoming good Jews
Before they could worship Christ.
The emblem of Judaism was circumcision
the symbol of the covenant God offered Abraham

Paul was terribly worried that his beloved people were being
misled. He knew that
Salvation had nothing to do with the Jewish Law
or with circumcision.
It had only to do with the Cross
With the Sacrifice of Jesus
With the crucifixion.
Jesus alone was the source of all salvation.

Paul saw the presentation of the requirement of circumcision
And Judaism as the sin of the flesh
Paul had preached that it was the spirit that brought salvation.
And that the Jewish law was a distraction.

He presented it as a choice between the flesh and the spirit.
The flesh represented by the false circumcision requirement
And the Spirit by the love of God

evidenced by the sacrifice of Christ.

Paul told the Galatians that if they sought salvation
 The only thing to do
 Was to follow Jesus and the Cross.
 To prove the point Paul's last verse
 Reminded the Galatians
 That he too, bore the marks of crucifixion
 The scars of his punishment
 From the beatings, the whippings, the canings.
 And that it was only the crucifixion that brought redemption.

Jesus cast the choice between God and Mammon.

First of all, who or what is Mammon?

His Jewish audience of 2000 years ago knew exactly what Jesus meant when he put it bluntly:

“You cannot serve both God and mammon”.

But 2000 years later it is not so clear to us.

The word mammon comes from both the Greek and Aramaic.

Both words refer to wealth,

money,

but in the sense of avarice and all consuming greed.

Materialism is nothing new to the human condition

and the ancients had personified the allure

and the quest for wealth in a pagan statue

that some bowed before

and worshiped.

They called it; Mammon.

Our society seemingly directs us to define ourselves by our material wealth.

We are pushed to believe
that more is better,
bigger is better
and our value as human beings is graded
by the size of our portfolio
or the wages we earn
or the car we drive.

If you follow social media,
You see the amount of time that many spend
In malls and shopping centers
And you will see almost every mercenary purchase
Portrayed in pride and vanity.

Have we gone too far?
Sociologists say that many parents spend more time shopping
Than with their children.

By the time our children are 21, they will have been assaulted with
over a million advertisements.

Have we, as a people
Become more devoted to our materialistic gods
Than to Our Lord?

Have we come to worship our material goods
to the exclusion of the worship of God?

Has Madison Ave been that successful?

What is important to us?

He who made us knows us so well,

knows that we can be distracted by the quest for monetary
 wealth,
 knows that for some the quest would be all consuming;
 knows that for some, money is the greatest contestant for the
 place of God in our lives,
 knows that for some the quest for wealth
 would replace the quest that God intends for us
 —the way to the Kingdom of God.

In times of economic plenty

We are content and complacent
 And forget all about where it comes from.

In times of uncertainty

it is our nature
 to become anxious
 to focus on money
 and to let money consume our hearts and minds as an
 immediate need.

But Jesus is telling us to do just the opposite in the Sermon on the Mount.

He knows how those needs can yank us from the pathway to God
 Divert all our time, attention, energy and strength.

He tells us

Be not anxious about those needs.
 “Your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need
 of all these things.”

By some analysis, one sixth of the parables Jesus gave us, deal with aspects of money or wealth.

It is not that Jesus had it in for wealth

or had it in for money.
Jesus did not hate rich people.
But He knows that since creation
and since the fall in the Garden of Eden,
our lot is to work for our living in this life.
Jesus knows the important role money must play
in our secular lives
and in our Christian lives.
He who made everything from nothing
is telling us how to keep money in balance
and in perspective.
He knows that there will be times
for all of us
and there will be those
for whom all time is devoted to mammon.

The section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in today's Gospel
is His instruction
to not let Mammon
draw us away
from the central purpose of our lives
—the search in this life
for the Kingdom of God in the next.

The instruction is that
we cannot serve
both God and Mammon.
They are pathways that lead away from each other
and will never cross.
If we seek Mammon
we will not find God.
He is not there.
But there is some startlingly good news in the service of God.

God knows of all the things we need in this life
and Jesus is telling us
that if first we seek the kingdom of God,
all of what we need will be added unto us.

Today's Gospel is not an invitation to quit working,
quit paying your bills, run up your credit cards
follow God
and He will miraculously provide for your needs.
Doordash will deliver all our meals
and Amazon Prime
Will appear daily with everything else we need.

It is a statement that He has already done so.
In providing for us,
God does not treat us in the same fashion
as the birds and the lilies.

Instead of feeding and clothing and sheltering us directly;
God provides us with our talents,
our minds and an opportunity to labor.
Some say that we got work not worms to eat.

He gives us all that we need to prosper in this life.
But we need to put them to good use,
to use those talents
and qualities
in the service of our Lord,
to keep our hearts
and minds and lives
focused on God, not Mammon.

The second message of this Gospel
Concerns worry for our lives

Worry of loss
Worry from the fear of uncertainty

We are, by our nature
prone to become anxious
about where our next meal is to come from.

And in times of want
that anxiety
is all too genuine
for all too many of us.

But Jesus tells us three times in this short Gospel, be not anxious
for your life.

Trust in God.

Read what it says on our money,
“In God we Trust”
(not Mammon).

Jesus reminds us that the primary objective of this life is to seek
the Kingdom of God, and His Righteousness.

So there is a choice to be made.

In Paul's terms

We can either choose the flesh and its temporary delights
Or we can choose the crucifixion and eternal life.

In Jesus' terms

We can revel in the material goods of our lives
Or we can seek His Kingdom and His Righteousness

The choice is ours.

