

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Trinity VIII
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rmcneely+

Beware of false prophets, which come to you
In sheep's clothing.
But inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Jesus has led the multitude to a mountain in Galilee.
On its gentle slopes He preached what has become known as the
Sermon on the Mount.

It was a lengthy sermon and we join it again this Summer.
We are near its end.

Jesus has one remaining thought
One last warning.
One important word of advice
And takes one last opportunity to arm them
And arm us
With His critical advice.

Beware of false prophets.

In a sermon that was radical and alarming
Jesus set new ground
For a new religion
Actually, a new way of life.

But if His work was to have legs
To survive into the future
His people needed to be forewarned—forearmed
to be able to withstand the wiles of the Devil.

He was particularly concerned that some smooth talking
Charlatan could divert, dissuade and distract
The newborn infant Christians
With false doctrine, illusion and deceit.

And so, near the of the Sermon
 where it had the best chance of being remembered
 and would have the greatest impact
 He warned them of the false prophets
 That He knew would come.

The Old Testament was full of them.
 It was a familiar tactic.

Do we see them still?
 Are we beguiled by them
 As Eve was beguiled by the snake?

They come in all sizes shapes and colors.
 They profess to be women and men of God
 They appeal to our senses
 We want to believe their easier and more pleasant doctrine
 As St Paul says: they tickle our ears with what we want to hear.

They appeal to our senses
 They are handsome women and men.
 With sonorous voices
 They attract us.

Like sheep we follow them
 Admire them
 Emulate them
 We want to talk like them
 Walk like them
 Look like them
 Sound like them
 Live our lives like them.

And we thereby empower them
To change the fabric of our society
The moral fiber of our lives.

Somehow, these people whom we would never dream to elevate
Have become the leaders of our lives.
These people who have nothing to recommend their philosophy or
ideals
We blindly follow.

Some are obvious religious figures
Who speak one thing
But live lives of moral decay
The Jim Jones,
Jim Bakkers
and L. Ron Hubbards of religion.

Some are entertainers, actors and actresses
People who make a living
fooling us into believing they are someone else
with words written for them by others.

But we revere them
Give them respect
Give their opinions deference
and think of them as people to model our lives after.

Professional Athletes, of all people
Who's God given talent
And their own hard work
Has rewarded them with millions
We somehow elevate beyond their games,
Their stadium, field or court
To places of eminence

Where their words and deeds lead us and alter our society.
We follow
Without thought or analysis
We follow them.

Are they too the false prophets that so concerned our Lord?

Beyond people,
Are there ideas and philosophies
Social causes
And movements
That do the work of these false prophets?

Are we swept away by the wave of social change
And become separated from the Great Commandment
Of our Lord:
Love each other as Jesus love us
Love thy neighbor?

Are we so easily diverted by the appeal of the moment
The political or social goal of today?

How very much different those causes become
When they are the product,
The result of Christian doctrine
Of Christian Love.

So how are we to know the false prophets from the genuine article?

Jesus foresaw that question too.
He gave us the tool by which to separate the false from the true.

Don't look at their beautiful or attractive appearance
Don't listen to the smooth talk and slogans

Jesus told us to look to the fruit of their works.
 What has been the result of their lives?
 Apart from what they said
 What have they done?
 How have they lived their own lives?
 Has what they have done been consistent with what they have said.

Do their words rule their own hearts?

And what good
 Or fruit
 Has come of their works?
 If God has appointed them,
 Then surely the results of their efforts
 Have glorified God.

When the Church uses the term glory
 It does not mean the adulation
 The applause and cheering of the crowd
 Glory is the reflection of the light of God
 From you.
 God's light is abundantly shed on all of us
 But there is only glory
 When we reflect that light like a mirror.
 Glory is when we take that light
 And we live a life in God's will.
 You see, our lives and the way we live them
 Are beacons to all who see it
 Leading them to God by our examples.
 That is the Glory of God.

So we judge the truth or falsity of these modern day prophets
 By the Glory they bring to God.

By what they accomplish

By the results of what they are preaching.

He who created us knows our nature

We are forgetful creatures

And need simple tools by which to live our lives

And govern our free will.

So Jesus gave us two analogies:

He spoke of a wolf in sheep's clothing

And the agricultural metaphor of the fruit trees.

Things so familiar to our Jewish ancestors

Whose very survival depended upon the fruits of the land.

But even though we are substantially removed from the land

The metaphors hold true

And we know them.

The wolf in sheep's clothing:

It may look like a sheep

It may sound like a sheep

It may smell like a sheep

And walk like a sheep.

But be wary.

The wolf is cunning and clever.

All may not be what it appears.

We know from the tree that bears fruit

That good fruit

The sweet stuff that is nourishing and wholesome

Comes only from good trees.

If the fruit is good,

The tree is a good one

And can be relied upon, propagated.

But if the fruit is bitter
 Provides nothing
 May be even poisonous or deleterious to our health

That tree is an evil one.
 To be cut down and ignored.

Today's Collect prays that God put away such hurtful things.

Today's Epistle continues Paul's thoughts
 of the last two Sundays
 in his Epistle to the Romans.
 He writes of the substance of Christianity
 and how we are to live our lives.
 What it means to be a Christian.

He tells the fledgling church in Rome
 And reminds us
 That we who are led by the Spirit of God
 Are no longer in bondage to sin
 No longer slaves to sin,
 No longer owned by the devil.
 Instead, are led by the spirit of adoption
 By virtue of our baptism
 And are endowed with the spirit of God.
 We are His children by that adoption
 And as His children,
 Heirs
 Co-heirs with Christ
 And have every right to call Him Father
 Or "Abba" in the Aramaic of Jesus' day.

If Jesus would have us judge the false prophets by their fruits
 Will He judge us
 By the fruits of our works? Our lives?

If we are the truly adopted Daughters and Sons of God
 If we call Him Abba;
 What is the expectation of our Father for our lives?
 What is the fruit that we bear
 By which He will know us?
 What is there about our lives that distinguishes us
 From the false pretenders of God's Children?

What in our lives has reflected the light of Christ
 And Glorified God?

How have we lived so as to be worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus?

The Love of God is a gift of God.
 It pours down upon all mankind as does the rain.
 We can do nothing to earn it.
 Nothing to make it fall from the skies.
 It is without price
 And without cost.

Life itself is a gift of God.
 A gift we did not earn.
 A gift without price
 and without cost.

What we do with it
 is what distinguishes us.
 Sets us apart
 from those who have not accepted the Gift.

We of this little miracle Church
 This oasis in a wasteland of desolation
 Seemingly have an abundance of God's Love.
 What will we do with it?

How will our lives reflect that love
that light of Christ,
back out into the world today?

Can we even imagine what the fruits will be?
What goodness will be wrought
in the lives of those
upon whom we bestow the Love of God?

