

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Third Sunday after Trinity
July 6, 2025
rmcneely+

But the God of all grace,
Who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
After that ye have suffered a while,
Make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

So a clergyman dies and is standing in line at the gates of Heaven before St Peter. The guy in front of him is dressed in dark glasses, a loud shirt, jeans and a leather coat. St Peter says: "Who are you that I may know whether to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven?" The guy says I am Farouk Said, taxi driver from New York City. St Peter consults his list and after a time, smiles and says: Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The taxi driver enters in to Heaven and when it was the clergyman's turn, he stood erect and in a loud voice declared: I am Richard M McNeely Jr. Vicar of St Thomas Church, San Francisco. St Peter consulted his list and says Take this polyester robe and this plastic staff and enter into the kingdom of Heaven. The clergyman says, there must be some mistake, I was a priest for many years. That man was a taxi driver and you gave him a silken robe and golden staff.

St Peter says Up here we work by results.

While you preached, people slept.
While he drove, people prayed.

Nothing at all to do with today's sermon.
Just thought we needed a bit of humor.

Today, Peter's Epistle and Luke's Gospel
Evoke thoughts of lost and found
Search and find.

Second Century historians and early Church Patriarchs
Knew of Peter's letters.
They wrote about them
and confirmed Peter was near the end of his life
when he wrote them.
He was imprisoned in Rome
At the hands of an Emperor that many today conclude
Was insane.
Nero.

He had days to live,
Days before he was brutally crucified, head down.
He took the time to set down what he knew in his last hours.
What early Christians
And Christians of today
Must know.

In this section of his letter
He dramatically warns of evil
The devil and how he works in our lives
And what we must do to be protected.

In the days of Christ's earthly life
The Apostles knew evil and could see it for what it was.
They wrote of Jesus casting out the demons that vexed
people.
It was a small but dangerous part of their lives.

Consider our Christian ancestors over the centuries
How the learned among them
spoke openly of the devil.
The days of Shakespeare and the Victorians.
They were admired for their intellect and acuity.

But in our time, the self-appointed effete intellectuals
 Allow such talk only among the ignorant.
 The primitive tribes of Africa and the Amazon.
 They are not “enlightened”
 And cannot be expected to know any better.

In our time, the devil and his works is a touchy subject.
 If we say too much about the evils of our day,
 The acts of the devil
 Eyebrows rise
 And the men in white coats are summoned
 To take us to confinement . . . for treatment.

Whether then or now
 It serves Satan’s purposes either way:
 If people recognize the evil and spend their days in terror
 Spend a disproportionate time
 Of every waking hour in fear of him;
 Or if, as in our time, we ignore him for fear of being
 ostracized in our society:
 Does not the devil win either way?
 In the case of pre-occupation
 People are not following the will of God
 And in the other,
 The devil works freely
 Unseen
 And unopposed . . . to unseat God in our lives.

So, is there evil at work in our lives today?
 Does the devil walk among us seeking whom he will devour?

I cannot answer that question for you.
 But I see it as I walk the streets in collar.
 Satan’s sacraments at work
 Drugs and alcohol; ruining lives.

I saw it in my law practice.

Civil litigation that served only destruction.

Destruction, the sign of the devil.

Occasionally there were cases in which there could be no winners.

No benefit to anyone.

Cases that leave behind only ashes.

The jury or judge gave the only judgment

Against the plaintiff and in favor of the defendant.

The defendant was declared the winner

But was ruined by the cost

In money,

Effort and emotional trauma.

Even the court system that must host the trials.

Precious resources that were needlessly consumed

Could only rule and watch the destruction

Even the Courts were diminished.

In criminal law there are those criminals that are different from the rest. Most crime is driven by a purpose;

Money, revenge, or some other end.

But every now and then there are those criminals that commit

The most heinous crimes, for which there is no purpose.

Senseless acts of depravity whose end

Is only to destroy

And move on to the next victim.

The Charlie Mansons of our time.

Can there be any considered doubt that the devil

Either personified

Or working through his captives

Lurks among us?

Is not Peter right?

Does not the devil as a ramping lion

Walketh about seeking whom he may devour?

However, we are not left in despair.

St Luke comes to the rescue with the account of the three

“Lost and Found” parables from Jesus.

We get two of them today in the Gospel.

The third one we know as the “Prodigal Son”.

Which we will visit in six weeks.

Jesus had been preaching to the publicans and sinners.

The refuse of Jewish society.

The Pharisees, already concerned about His power and success

Publicly criticized Jesus.

Noting that he sat at table and dined with the worst of the worst.

A sign of acceptance or affirmation.

That He was at least one of them. Or worse.

Jesus put them in their place with the three “Lost and Found”
Parables.

I want to focus this morning on the first one

The shepherd who sought out his one stray sheep.

The shepherd does his daily count but finds there is one sheep
Missing.

He immediately goes out searching for her

Until he finds her.

And joyously walks her back to the flock on his shoulders.

If we think of the shepherd as Jesus

The lost sheep as any of us

And the flock as the church

The parable begins to yield its meaning.

In the parable, the sheep becomes vulnerable as she strays from the flock.

In the flock there is the safety in numbers
and most importantly,
there is the shepherd for protection.

But on her own the sheep is soon in danger,
has no protection or defense
and the lion may easily devour her.

The word “lost” in the parable
not only suggests that she does not know where she is
and does not know the way back;

It also means that she is ruined or destroyed;
that she is perished.

Note also that the sheep wandered away all on her own and at her own fault. She put herself in the eminent peril.

Isaiah said it best: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray”. It is our sins that have led us from the flock,

our own pursuits
and our own faults
that have run us astray.

And like the stray sheep,
on our own we are defenseless.

And that roaring lion
walketh about seeking
whom he may devour.

But God is not one
to allow the consequences of our sin
to leave us vulnerable to the ruin
and destruction of the devil,
to leave us on the path to hell.

He knows that we are sinners
 because we chose to be one.
He knows where we are
 and where the pathway leads,
 even as we do not.
And He will not ignore our plight,
 even as we ourselves may ignore it.

For the shepherd in the parable,
the search for the single lost sheep,
was dangerous
and could even mean his own death.

For Jesus,
 His death was a certainty.
He came into the world
 to search for the lost sheep
 and to save them.
 To die
 that the lost sheep may live.

God searches for even the unrepentant
 The least significant
 Even the despised and hated sinners
 Such as the publicans in Jesus' day.

The self righteous Pharisees could not comprehend
 As God who would search out the lost
 However degraded they may be.
Every individual is of infinite worth
 Because he is the object of God's redeeming love.

How comforting it is to know that
 no matter how badly we are lost,
 no matter what we have done to get there,

no matter what the extent and gravity of our sin,
we are still precious to Him
and the shepherd,
Jesus
will still come looking for us, to save us from ourselves.
Such is the love of God.

And when He finds us,
we ride back to the life He intends for us
on God's shoulders.

And then there is the celebration and joy in Heaven for the one
sinner that repents.

Is it that the one soul that repents is the reward for His sacrifice?
Is the joy in Heaven
because another soul is rescued
by the sacrifice of the cross?
Is all the agony of the cross made worth it,
for the soul that is saved?
Could Jesus endure the agony
for the joy that He knew would follow?

So when we "come to ourselves" one day
and recognize that we don't know where we are; when life
has become confused and forlorn,
when our sins have taken us dangerously astray,
when that roaring lion seeking whom he may devour
is so near you can feel his foul breath on your neck,
when the pathway is obliterated
and we can't figure out how to get back:

It is so comforting to know
that Jesus
like that shepherd

is always looking for us
and will never give up the search.

And when we are rescued, all Heaven will celebrate.
We are precious to Him
and such is the love of God.