

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Ninth Sunday after Trinity  
 August 17, 2025  
 rmcneely+

*it is meet that we should make merry and be glad.*

Today the Summer Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine brings us to one of the most famous of Jesus' parables:  
 The Prodigal Son.

There have been many interpretations of the parable.  
 Modernists have focused on the father's decision  
 To reward the prodigal with half the estate  
     And found it lacking, poor parenting;  
     Before it's time;  
     Before the young boy was prepared to manage it.  
 Some say the father was lacking in appreciation  
     Of this elder son's long and faithful obedience.

Some have looked to the older son  
     And found him surly and selfish, unforgiving.  
 Some have found he had just cause for complaint.

Of course, all of this superficial thinking  
     Is to miss the very import of the parable.

In order to gain the message, we need a short bit of context.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the third  
     Of three parables that Jesus told to the Pharisees.  
 You see, Jesus had ministered to the sinners and even the publicans  
     He had said that the physicians tended to the sick  
     not the healthy.  
 The Pharisees took notice of it.  
     They murmured against Jesus in the temple

Seeking to rile the people up against Him.  
 The Pharisees drew upon the Jewish custom of shunning  
     Sinners and the lower classes of their society.  
 It would make sense to the people of the temple  
     At the time,  
     That Jesus so received and mingled  
     with the refuse of Jerusalem  
     that He must be one of them.  
 The message of the Pharisees was that people should ignore Him  
 as just another sinner.

In response, Jesus told the three parables:  
 Each concerning lost and found.  
     The first was the story of the shepherd  
     Who left his flock of 100  
     To search for the one that was lost.

    The second was the story of the woman  
         Who lost one of her 10 coins  
         And searched diligently until she found it.

    The third was the story of the prodigal son  
         The youngest of two sons  
         Who abandoned his father  
         And squandered his inheritance  
         While his father mourned and hoped for his return.

In each parable there was something lost.  
     One of 100 sheep  
     One of 10 coins, and  
     One of two sons.  
 That which was lost increased in number,  
     Percentage and value  
     As Jesus told the three stories.  
 1%; 10% and 50%

One sheep, one coin and one son.  
In each story, there was great rejoicing  
As each lost item was found.

We can only wonder whether the Pharisees  
Understood what Jesus was telling them.

But let's dig into what Jesus is telling us today.

The Prodigal Son story, the final story of the 3 parables  
Is the most elaborate  
Involves the greatest number of people  
And is the most hard hitting of the three.

In the story, the father stands in the place of God.  
The youngest son represents a sinner  
And could be any of us.  
The older brother is often equated to the Jews  
Who failed to comprehend the message of the story.

First let's examine the sins of the youngest son.

He is rude  
demanding  
Greedy  
Unloving  
Has no respect of love of his father.

He all but wishes the death of his father  
So that he can get his hands on his father's wealth.  
Rather than live a life of love and respect for his father  
He all but wishes his father's death so he can get his hands  
On the inheritance that he believes he is entitled  
And deserves.

Without comment,  
    Without betraying a broken heart,  
    The father divides his wealth and gives the young son his  
share.

The Prodigal has lived an idyllic life with his father  
    With God.  
    In a heaven like state of peace and grace;  
        All his wants and needs provided by God.

The Prodigal's first sin is to turn his back and walk away  
    He literally turns his back to God  
    And takes the wealth  
    And walks away.

Not a word of gratitude or thanks  
    No appreciation  
    No parting sentiment.  
He turns his back and he walks away.

He then commences a life of depravity.  
    Firmly in the devil's clutches  
    And squanders his father's assets.

His second sin is rooted in the fact that he gave no thought of  
glorifying God,  
    He did nothing with his new found wealth  
    To reflect the grace he had been given.  
    Nothing to exhibit the life of a Christian  
    For all to see.

Instead, he turns inward and attempts to satisfy  
    His own lusts  
    In riotous living  
    Without a thought of his father and brother  
    And became fodder for the devil.

The young man soon exhausted his money  
 And sought employment.  
 In the end he worked for low wages as a farmhand  
 Serving the needs of pigs.  
     The animals the Jews thought of as unclean, forbidden,  
     Unfit for any purpose.

He was hungry and ate of the food he gave the pigs.  
 Filthy.  
 Despondent.

He came to himself (don't you love that phrase)  
 He resolved to return to his father.  
 The sinner repented and returned to God.

Now here is where the parable took on a meaning that would shock  
 the Pharisees.

Up to now the Pharisees would have been fully on board.  
 This sinner had been punished  
     The law fulfilled  
     Albeit not by their court but punished and returning for the  
 judgment.

They might have expected it to go like this:

We pick up the story of the Prodigal son from the point where the  
 prodigal has returned

The Father fell on his neck  
     And smacked him round the ear  
 And said "Where the devil have you been?"

The son says: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against  
 you and am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me as  
 one of your hired servants

And the father says: Yea right. Too true my son, too true.  
 I guess you think you can waltz back here  
     Without as much as a by your leave  
     And con me with your little rehearsed speech.

Do you think this is Little House on the Prairie or something?

Do you think I was born yesterday?  
 No my son  
 You will work for me cleaning out the toilets  
     Until you earn back

The squandered fortune that you have lost  
 So the son says; does that mean that there is no chance of lots of  
 presents

    Instant forgiveness  
     A big rave party for all my friends  
     Banquet of fatted calf  
     Anything like that?  
 In your dreams, Bozo, in your dreams

And the Father took him by the ear and hauled him off to the farm

And it came to pass that the fatted calf saw them approaching from  
 a long way off

    And summed up the situation  
     And threw a big cow party  
     His family and friends rejoiced  
         A little disco dancing  
         Gourmet hay  
         Oat, barley and rye cocktails  
         The whole mugilla  
 And they mooed sarcastically  
     As the prodigal son passed by.

And as evening fell the elder brother heard the distant sounds  
     Of his brother still cleaning out the toilets  
 So after dinner he took a large brandy and lit a big cigar  
     And strolled over and said  
 I see your back  
     How do you like your progress from affluent to effluent  
 And walked away feeling quite satisfied with himself.  
 The prodigal said to himself  
     Screw this  
     I wish I had never come back  
     I am just as hungry  
     Twice as guilty  
     4 times more smelly  
 If I ever get a day off  
     I know what I will do  
     It'll be a day out with the pigs.  
 (Credit to Adrian Plass for this story ending.)

That, or something like it is what the Pharisees might have expected.

So the ending that Jesus gave them was shocking.  
 Up to this point His story closely follows that of a Jewish folktale  
     based upon the law set forth in Deuteronomy.

The folktale reflected the justice required of the Old Testament  
 strict legalism of the Jews. It ends the way I did a few minutes  
 ago.

Here Jesus gets their attention with the fundamental message of the story; We resume:

There is a subtle sense that the Father has been hoping for the return of His son.

He is not sitting home conducting the affairs of the home or enjoying his life.

He is outside where he can look for the boy; when he was yet a great way off.

When finally He sees the boy, He is overjoyed. He gleefully runs to the boy and hugs him, falls upon his neck and kisses him.

Such is the greeting of God to the repentant sinner.

The boy begins to say the speech he has planned: I have sinned and am no longer worthy to be thy son. But the father cuts him off before he can beg to be a slave.

The Father summons

Ring, restoring the symbol of the family authority  
Robe, sandals

Major party

Fatted calf

Music

Dancing

Celebration akin to a wedding feast

Notice there is no retribution

No reminder of the sinful past

No "I told you so"

No lecture

No punishment

God's forgiveness is

absolute

immediate

seemingly automatic

to the son who is

contrite

repentant, who has amended his life



The sins are forgotten. Gone.  
Such is the forgiveness of God to those who repent.

Jesus tells the Pharisees: I say unto you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Such is the Joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.  
What of the older son? The Pharisees, you and me in the story:  
He is now the one on the outside (literally)  
He has excluded himself and will not join the celebration.  
The Pharisees have excluded themselves and will not participate in the celebration. Will we?

How like him we are sometimes.  
We consider only ourselves. We think, what about me:  
The older son says:

I have been always with you  
I have been faithful to the law  
I have served you always  
You didn't as much kill me a goat or invite my friends to a celebration.

He could not see beyond his own ego.

Could not get past jealousy,  
Anger  
and self sense of what is fair to him.

He could not see as his father saw that his brother was once lost and now is found, dead and is now alive.

He could not see the parallel of  
lost and death,  
found and life.

This wonderful parable must have left the Pharisees walking away scratching their heads.

It teaches us the nature of God.  
It shows us that the pathway of forgiveness

And love  
is truly the pathway to God.  
And the tremendous joy in heaven when one sinner is saved.