

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Eighth Sunday after Trinity
 July 26, 2026
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This week, The Summer Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine
 Again takes us to Paul's Epistle to the Romans and
 For the second time this summer
 to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Three of the last four Epistles have come from Paul's epistle to the
 Romans,
 and Paul has been describing
 what it is like to abandon Satan and a life of sin,
 in exchange for binding ourselves to God
 and a life of righteousness and forgiveness.

The Epistle for the day begins with Paul's declaration that we are
 debtors.

Immediately our 21st century minds think of financial debt;
 The money we owe to the credit card company
 Or to the mortgage holder of our homes.
 However, Paul is reminding us of a very different kind of debt.
 Not one that we took on by a contract or by the law,
 But our moral obligation to God.
 In return for our very lives,
 Our salvation in eternity
 For the grace He bestows upon us in this life,
 For His forgiveness
 For His love.

Paul immediately contrasts this debt, this moral debt
 With the debt to the flesh.

"Flesh" is a term Paul often uses that also seems uncertain to us.

We perhaps immediately think of our bodies and the various ways
 We can misuse them for our selfish pleasure.
 But here, I think Paul is referring us to the, oh so human,
 Tendency toward our failings,
 Perhaps even our human nature toward sin.
 Sin of all kinds.
 Not just those involving our bodies
 But the overall encompassing self-interested hostility to God.

Paul gives warning:

If we live after the flesh, follow our sinful human nature,
 We will die.
 Perhaps in this life, but with certainty in the next.
 But if we live through the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost
 We shall live in eternity.
 In paradise.
 Paul reminds us that we did not receive the spirit of obedience
 to God, just to fall back to the slavery of sin.
 Rather, by adoption, we, have become children of God,
 And if His children,
 We cry to Him the endearing Aramaic term “Abba”.
 And are joint-heirs, with Christ.

We have been liberated from the forces of sin and death.
 All has been changed.
 God broke the power of sin and pronounced the sentence on it
 at the Cross.
 Christians still retain the flesh,
 but it is alien to our new being
 which is life in the spirit
 namely the new life
 that is self governed by the Holy Spirit.

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit
 Christians are able to fulfill the divine will.

The same spirit who enlivens Christians for holiness
 will also resurrect our bodies at the last day.
 Christian life is therefore the experience of a constant challenge
 to put to death the evil deeds of the body
 through the life of the Spirit.

But with today's Gospel,
 St Matthew injects the sobering words of Jesus
 From the Sermon on the Mount,
 That not all of our new life will be sweetness and light.

Jesus balances us out with the warning that there will be deceivers
 Among us:
 People posing as prophets, pastors, priests and messengers
 From God.

Jesus is concerned and has a warning for us:
 Those wolves in sheep's clothing are clever deceivers
 Sometimes even reciting scripture,
 Spouting doctrine that sounds as though it could or should
 be right.

St Paul famously wrote that we will endure unsound doctrine
 After our own lusts,
 When false prophets tickle our ears
 With the words we would like to hear;
 But which are false and deceptive.

Jesus knows us well
 Knows that we are vulnerable,
 Gullible,
 And occasionally ignorant.

You know, our "enlightened" society has developed
 A dangerous proclivity:

We are dazzled by celebrity.
By people with the appearance of fame,
Wealth,
Style,
Success.

And we become followers of those that we perceive others admire.
We find celebrity among the entertainment industry
Actors and musicians
Among athletes and politicians.

We are dazzled and beguiled by them
By beauty
A handsome face
Or an attractive figure or physique.

We are like the mouse
Which encounters the snake
And watches it, mesmerized as it bobs its head
Back and forth
Back and forth
Edging ever closer and closer
Until . . . SNAP!
The mouse becomes a tasty lunch for the snake.

Perhaps He who made the mouse and He who made us
Knows of our limitations
Knows we need a way to identify
The frauds;
Knows we need a way to tell the true from the false
To recognize the imposters.

And so, near the end of the Sermon on the Mount
Jesus gave us guidance
A way to spot the frauds
A way to spot the snake
Before we become its lunch.

He give us this practical advice:

“Ye shall know them by their fruits”.

To be sure that we can comprehend,

Jesus gives us the metaphor of the fruit tree:

A good tree can only produce good fruit

A corrupt tree can only produce evil fruit.

So look to the fruit of the tree to know its truth.

Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

Ignore all the glitter and glamour of celebrity,

The artificial trappings of Hollywood

The handsome face

The deep English accented voice

The transitory allure of the makeup artist

The clever electronic embellishments, the AI.

Instead, look to the fruit of their works.

When the cameras and the teleprompters are turned off

When the big screens grow dark,

When no one is looking;

What are the fruits of his or her works?

Examine the results of the work of the new prophet.

Are those whom he motivates, His followers,

Leading lives reflecting

The light of Christ?

Lives of righteousness, adherence to God’s commandments?

Lives seeking to imitate the life of Christ?

And what of the new prophet

Is that life consistent with a life lived in the will of God?

Is the fruit of that life everything Jesus commanded?

False prophets
Will seek to deceive
Not only by a show of orthodoxy
But also by “wonderful works”
And unless their faith has produced
In themselves and in others
An inward change of life
Consistent with God’s will
They can be a menace to true religion.

To our Lord’s mind
There was no more dangerous enemy
Than the hypocrite
That wolf in sheep’s clothing.

So Sons and Daughters of God
let us beware of false prophets.

Judge those who would proclaim God
Not by their outer appearance
Not by a sonorous voice
Not by the glitz and glitter
The trappings of success.
All that can be illusion and deception;
Judge them by the fruits of their works.

So as leave these hallowed walls in a few minutes,
And we walk back out into the fallen world outside those doors
Enthused with the notion that by virtue of our new life
Free from sin
We are the children of God,
Are able to call Him, Abba, Father
Are joint heirs with Christ
Of the kingdom of God

And are forewarned of false prophets
The works of the devil.

Life is pretty good in this little miracle Church of God.