

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
The Ninth Sunday after Trinity
August 2, 2026
rmcneely+

There is joy in the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth

Today, the Summer Survey of Essential Christian Doctrine
Presents what is probably Jesus' most famous parable:
The Prodigal Son.

But first, to fully appreciate its significance
A bit of context:

St Luke reports that the Pharisees of Jerusalem
Had recognized that this man Jesus
(about whom they were concerned
for their continuing position of power and wealth)
Was spending a good deal of time with the poor
The loathsome
Even the Publicans
And the very lowest of their society.

They went about to use that situation to discredit Him
And mumbled among those of the Temple
That a man who spent so much time
And even sat at table with the malcontents
Was surely one of them.

Jesus became aware of the rumors being spread about Him
Gathered people together and, in response,
told them a series
Of three parables.

The first two we considered 6 weeks ago, in the gospel of the 3rd Sunday after Trinity.

The one about the shepherd who lost one of 100
Sheep and left the flock to search for her.

The second about the woman who lost one of her 10 silver
coins and searched, swept and garnished her floor
until she found it.

The third is today's story of the Prodigal Son.

Each parable was about things lost and found.

Each concluded with the joy of the recovery
of that which was lost.

And each parable told of the increasing value
of that which was lost.

Each parable told of an increasing percentage
of that which was lost:

One of 100 sheep; one hundredth

One of 10 coins: one tenth

And one of 2 sons; one half.

All three parables were directed at the condemning Pharisees

To demonstrate to them Jesus' redeeming mission.

To affirm the notion that a sinner who is found

And who repents

Is the cause of great joy in heaven.

We can only guess whether any of the Pharisees got the
message.

But do we understand the enormity of the message?

It is common for scholars to overthink the story of the Prodigal Son.

They focus on the minutiae:

Analyzing the decision of the father to allow the son

His premature inheritance.

Criticizing his parenting

The prodigal was not ready for the responsibility

And only a poor father would enable the boy

To abandon the life

And squander the inheritance.

They focus on the older son and say the parable is about

Him and the injustice of the father

In taking his loyalty for granted

And favoring the prodigal.

All of this misses the point and the power of the parable.

The parable of the Prodigal Son tells us to freely seek

God's forgiveness

To freely seek His Absolution.

It is only natural that we have trepidation

when we consider those things in which we have failed Him.

There is guilt and shame.

Nothing that we want to re-experience

And it's easy to put it off.

But, Jesus is here to show us a completely different side to our discomfort.

In each of these three parables

He emphasizes the joy in heaven

each time a lost soul is recovered and brought home to God.

But let's take a deeper dive into what Jesus is telling us today.

In the parable, the father stands in the place of God.

The youngest son represents a sinner

And could be any of us.

Let's take a hard look at the youngest son.

He is rude

demanding

Greedy

Unloving

Has no respect for the love of his father.

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 to which 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 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 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
But now, he was their servant.

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.

Up to this point in the Parable, the Pharisees would have been fully on board.

You see, so far Jesus' story closely follows a Jewish folktale
 That was based upon the law set forth in Deuteronomy.

This sinner had been punished
 The law fulfilled
 Albeit not by their court but punished
 and forced to return for the judgment.

The folktale reflected the justice required of the Old Testament strict legalism of the Jews.
 It is here that 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.

He is searching for the boy.

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.

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 it teaches the tremendous joy in heaven

in the return and penitence of every sinner

and it teaches His gracious readiness for forgiveness,

however far we may have wandered from Him

and however much

we may have abused His goodness towards us.

