

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, May 17, 2026

The Seventh Sunday Of Easter

Festal Evensong

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Mark Schultz

on

2 Samuel 23:1-5; Ephesians 1:15-23

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Telling Jesus' Story

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

One of the things we're about as human beings One of the things that shapes us, forms us,
Is story.

We think of our lives, for instance, we think of our experiences, our memories,

And we generally what we tend to do is we generally extract, refine, distill all of that Into a narrative
A coherent narrative, that's important A story: who we are.

More than anything else, how we think of ourselves, approach ourselves, feel about ourselves Has a lot to
do with whatever story we're telling ourselves about ourselves.

We're doing it all the time.

And it's not a fixed story: the details change How we tell it changes, experiences change
Memories come and go, some of them assuming more weight than others. And even though it may seem
like we're telling one story, one coherent story, That story includes, encompasses, multiple narratives,
multiple stories: Stories about our ancestors that become part of us
Stories of the places or cultures we come from that are part of us

Sometimes stories that others have told us about ourselves, whether they intended to or not,

That we take on board as our own, for good or ill

And we start telling a slightly different version of our story We make it our own.

A good word of praise, of kindness, of gratitude

Can do wonders to positively shape or inform our story.

Sometimes our experience of a circumstance, joyful or doleful it doesn't matter, Sometimes it affects our
story or how we tell our story—

Our story changes and we change with it. We change, our story changes.

Now of course, the story we tell isn't really us—it's an imperfect reflection of us.

We're the storyteller: the story is an image, consciously or unconsciously honed, crafted, That, more or less asymptotically,
Seeks to address the question:

Who am I?

Still...our story will always be far more coherent than we often feel we actually are. It will always be smaller than we actually are.
However fond we are of it, it will never really be, will never truly correspond, To who we really are.
Nonetheless, the story we tell about ourselves, the story we believe about ourselves Is incredibly powerful.
And incredibly tender, precious.

We entrust our story to many people, and not everyone will return it to us intact Or tell it the way we intend.

Still, it's one thing, for another person to tell our story and get it wrong

It's another thing, and often catastrophically disastrous

For someone to tell our story, get it wrong, only for us to start telling that wrong story Only for us to become that wrong story.
Our story is powerful and precious.

We don't know the story the Ephesians were telling themselves about themselves. We know very little of the context to which Paul was writing.

But this much seems clear given what we read from Ephesians earlier this evening: They were in danger of telling the wrong story.

Now, from a cosmic perspective,

Humanity has been telling the wrong story about itself for a very long time. We don't need each other
We don't need God

We can invent ourselves from ourselves and for ourselves

We can be like God by going our own way, doing our own thing We can be good on our own terms

We can shape the world into our image

We can build heaven on earth by destroying inconvenient creation

We can be most fully who we are by putting others down or destroying them

We have no responsibilities—only desires needing fulfillment, only wills needing to dominate This is the story we've been telling ourselves about ourselves,

But it's not entirely a story we invented

This is the story whispered in the ears of our first parents, the serpent's vision of us

Death's vision of us Sin's vision of us.

And we took it on board and started telling it, too... With disastrous consequences.

It is the wrong story. And it does not tell us true.

But for so long, it's been the only story we've known. We've forgotten any other.

More than anything, this shows: we don't actually invent our stories:

We cobble them together from what we receive from others, from our experience. If we're to truly remember ourselves, know ourselves

It's important to discern from whom we receive our story. Important to discern who remembers us truly.

And this is Paul's concern here for the Ephesians Paul's concern for us, too.

The Ephesians are in danger of forgetting their true story. So he reminds them: they will only know who they truly are We will only know who we truly are

In the light of the revelation of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. We will only know ourselves when we know ourselves in Jesus The one who took on our humanity in order to gift us his divinity

The one who trampled down death by death and rose from the dead Having, as St John Chrysostom affirms, destroyed death and hell for When "it took a body" it "met God face to face"

When "it took earth" it "encountered Heaven

When "it took that which was seen" it "fell upon the unseen" and was "abolished." We will only know ourselves when we know ourselves in Jesus

Who in his ascension, seated our humanity, our human body, on the very throne of grace Far above all principality and power and might and dominion.

We will only know ourselves when we know ourselves in Jesus And then we will know ourselves even as we are fully known.

The German mystic, Meister Eckhart, in his sermon on spiritual poverty Wants to disabuse us of the notion that

What we possess, what we cling to, what fills us up, are simply material, physical things. He says, even someone who gives away all that they have, if they're proud of their action They are rich in pride, and therefore cannot be said to be spiritually poor.

If someone has little or nothing and resents it, they are rich in desire, And consequently not at all spiritually poor.

The one who is spiritually poor, Eckhart says, will have nothing at all By which he means, in part: not even a story to tell of who they are. The upshot of this, for Eckhart, is: God himself will be their story God himself will tell God's own story in them

God himself will speak them true by speaking his Word in them.

God will remember them to themselves by unfolding in them his knowledge of them Whatever our memories, thoughts, experiences, history, past, present, future

It cannot truly tell our story until:

All of it illuminated by God, all of it redeemed by God,

All of it held by God, remembered by God, and compassionated by God Our lives become the vocabulary through which God's story is told in us And we discover, we know, the key, the fundamental feature of our story: We are deeply Beloved.

I don't know what story you tell yourself about yourself.

But I know, one way or another, we all tend to tell the wrong story. Some of us may cling to an overestimation of ourselves

Some of us may cling to a story of ourselves as a failure, as unworthy, unlovable, powerless In truth: there

is only one story of us that is always already true. Always already truly us.
And the one who tells it is Jesus. And the story is Jesus.

And if the church is truly the body of Christ, the fullness of him that filleth all in all Then we have got to
tell that story

We have got to have that story tell us

And it's not enough to cling to that story or possess it: We must consent to be it.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
