

How many of us have something we remember

- not because we actually recall the events,
- and not because we have seen photos of the event,
- but because we have heard stories about it?

My mother had a story about my encounter with a Mack truck at age 2.

My father had a story about a barn door and floating down the creek.

Stories are important to our sense of identity. They tell us who we are , where we come from, what influences have shaped us.

It is no coincidence that the term “history” contains the word “story”.

History comes from the Greek word for a wise and learned man. People would go to the *histor-* to seek knowledge.

This process of searching and the material learned were called *historia*.

The wise and learned man told stories to those seeking knowledge and wisdom;

those stories were passed down and eventually written down. These recollections of the past were then known as history.

It all comes down to story

– the narrative of interacting forces, people, interests and ambitions.

We are intrigued by ancestry research and DNA analysis

we seek to know our story,

the story that gives us identity.

...

While DNA testing might give us clues to our physical origins and identity,

It cannot tell any part of the story

of who we are as the children of God.

But this week – no cheek swab or fees necessary

– **this Holy Week, we get to hear the story of who we are ..**

And especially, who we are to God.

As we reflect upon this story, and move through the events of this week, it is like our own version of the tv show “This is Us”.

Today, we heard the best part of that story from Mark’s Gospel

– a man sent from God named Jesus,

filled with the Holy Spirit of God,

emptied himself completely

to share our human experience and destiny.

Episode 1 is the nameless woman who extravagantly anoints Jesus’ head.

She could have used plain ordinary olive oil for this customary act of hospitality,

but instead chose to use the most expensive perfumed nard

– and was criticized for wasting money that could have helped the poor – or greedy Judas.

Who was this woman to Jesus?

- A friend of Simon's to help him host this guest?
- Mary or Martha, sisters of Lazarus?
- One of the disciples who supported Jesus in his ministry?
- Or as another Gospel suggests, a sinful woman who owed her life to the forgiveness and mercy Jesus showed her?

Why did she pour out herself and her money on Jesus?

Was she indebted to him?

Or In love with him, as Jesus Christ Superstar suggests?

Was she trying to prove herself in some way?

Or anointing him as her king?

Perhaps she remains unnamed so that we can see ourselves in her.

- Are we ever criticized for how much time, money, effort or energy we spend in service to Jesus?
- Do we serve him in love?
- In expectation of something in return?
- Do we give him the respect due him, even when others make fun of us or think we are crazy?

Who are we to Jesus?

We are the ones Jesus stands up for against the critics

– the ones Jesus accepts

– the ones whose offerings are received in joy and gratitude by the Savior who gave up himself for us.

We are the ones whose story will be remembered simply because we are unafraid to give all we are to show our love for Jesus.

And the critics run off in greed to betray him for money.

In the remaining episodes of this story, we discover ourselves as

- betrayers, deserters, deniers,
- incompetent watchers,
- bearers of Jesus' cross,
- defenders, false witnesses,
- condemners, liars,
- torturers, mockers, executioners.

Not the flattering story we prefer to believe or tell about ourselves.

The truth is often painful.

But there are other roles, too; other discoveries to make in this Story of Us.

We are the disciples Jesus invites to eat with him

- to sit at his table,
- where he entrusts to us the truth that he is the Passover Lamb,
- and his blood seals the covenant of life for us.

We are also the confessors of the truth that he is the Son of God.

And we are those who bury him in our own grave.

But of all the roles in this great Story of Us,

it is that of **Jesus himself on the cross,**

surrendering to the finality of death,

that is the most important.

For there – in his crucified human body – **is *our* body**

– or, as Martin Luther put it – our stinking bag of maggots

– our hardened hearts and stiff necks,

our blackened souls.

There on the cross, *we* are put to death

and all our unholiness is destroyed in the lifeless body of Jesus.

In the moment Jesus takes his last breath,

– all the sin and evil that separates us from God is rendered powerless,

– as the temple veil that hides the Lord's most holy presence is torn in two, giving humanity access to God.

The barriers of sin and evil have been torn down

– there is no more wall keeping sinners out

– for in Jesus' death, all sin is convicted, sentenced, and executed.

And we sinners go free.

We who deserve death like Barabbas, are set free like Barabbas.

...

Because our bodies are united with Jesus on the cross,

God the Father no longer sees us in those other, unflattering roles.

He only sees the face of his beloved child,

who – like the unnamed woman -- gave everything in love.

This is the true Story of Us

– created in God's love,

freed from sin by God's love in Jesus,

saved for new life in the Holy Spirit as followers of
Jesus.

And that's why it is important to hear it and know ourselves as God
knows us.

Earlier, I said today was the best *part* of the story.

There is indeed more to the story

– it begins with the book of Genesis and ends with the Revelation of
Jesus to John and includes all the episodes in between.

During the Great Three Days,

Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil,

we get to hear some of the most dramatic and significant
episodes in the Story of Us

– stories of perseverance and survival,

daring rescues and miraculous escapes –

stories of transformation and love

You don't want to miss any of it!

This is our story because it is first God's story – God's love story –
shared with us in Jesus.

And there is no truth,

no reality worth living,

except this one,

given by our baptism

in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen