

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

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*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, September 24, 2023**

The Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

**Festal Evensong**

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate Priest for Pan-Asian Ministry*

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## **Welcome to thin place**

Greetings to all who have gathered for Evensong at St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue.

As we come together for Evensong, I want to share a story that has a special place in my heart. It's the story of Dr. Jinman Kim, a remarkable individual who was the foremost authority on medieval English literature in Korea. Dr. Kim passed away a decade ago, but his legacy continues to inspire.

In an intriguing twist of fate, Dr. Kim's journey to faith began in a rather unexpected way. Back in the 1960s, when he went to England to study, he was not a Christian and had even sworn off ever attending church. However, one day in the street he heard the enchanting voices of a boys' choir singing a hymn on their way to church for Evensong. Without realizing it, his steps began to follow the sound, leading him towards the church. This chance encounter marked the beginning of his spiritual journey, and he went on to lead a life of immense contribution to Korean churches and the Anglican Communion as a dedicated layman.

Dr. Kim played pivotal roles in establishing several parishes, representing the Anglican Communion, participating in translating the Bible by Protestant with Catholic church in Korea and shaping the clergy at the theological seminary as a dean. Personally, I had the privilege of being interviewed by him twenty-five years ago when there was no woman priest in Korea.

The story of Dr. Kim reminds us that every individual's encounter with Jesus is unique. We've just heard about the transformation of Paul, who once vehemently opposed Jesus but later became a passionate proclaimer of Christ. Such radical shifts in belief might seem unbelievable to those who witness them. Our own journeys of faith vary, and not all of us experience dramatic conversions like Paul's. Some of us, like me, were born into Christian families or in countries where Christianity is the majority religion. But we know that even in this era there are individuals who face great hardships to maintain their Christian faith.

In today's world, where fewer people automatically attend church and participate in Sunday worship, being a Christian who openly professes Jesus as their Savior can present a different kind of challenge. It's not necessarily about battling against obvious external opposition; instead, it often involves a more subtle and internal struggle.

This internal battle can be just as challenging, if not more so, than facing external forces. It's about contending with doubts, societal pressures, and personal conflicts that may try to pull us away from our faith. In a way, it's a conflict within ourselves—between the values and expectations of the world around us and our deeply rooted beliefs.

Living as a Christian, confessing Jesus as our Savior, can be a silent battle against not just external opposition but also inner struggles. Each of us is here today because we've had moments in our lives when we encountered the living Jesus. These moments may not be as dramatic as Paul's, but they have changed us, given us clarity of mind, and allowed us to live authentically. To navigate this world with truth and integrity, we must constantly revisit and draw strength from those pivotal moments.

Living authentically as followers of Jesus might often lead us to be seen as unconventional by the world. St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, gave up his family's wealth and even his clothing to follow Christ—a decision that many considered insane. Yet, he did so with a clear sense of purpose and who he is in Christ. Similarly, the desert Fathers and Mothers left everything behind to pursue a life of solitude in the desert, a choice deemed radical by society. But they did it to find their true selves in Christ and reject the false identities imposed by the world.

How should we live in today's world as the ones who have encountered God and found our true selves? A believer's life often goes against the currents of the world, akin to a salmon swimming upstream. We must understand that the world's definition of success is not always true success, and its view of failure is not necessarily accurate. Truth can only be discerned and spoken by the authentic self in Christ, not by a world that values only what can be commodified.

Like the desert Fathers and Mothers, our pursuit should be to live as our true selves—authentic and in communion with Christ—while remaining separate from the values of the world. We need "thin places," sacred moments that bring us closer to the Divine and reconnect us with our true selves. These moments can be part of our regular spiritual practice, whether it's daily meditation, weekly church services, monthly reflections, or annual retreats. These seemingly small moments can be like a gentle rain that gradually soaks our clothes, helping us resist the world's control.

To consistently stand before Jesus as our true selves, we need a supportive community, and that's the very purpose of the church. Within this community, we can open our eyes to the light, turn away from the darkness, and shift from the power of Satan to the embrace of God.

So, welcome to this sacred moment, this "thin space" where we are reminded of the presence of the Divine and called back to our true selves in Christ. May this Evensong serve as a beacon of light in our journeys of faith.