

Ann Bonner-Stewart
 Saint Mary's Episcopal Church, Newton
 Easter 2A; John 20:19-29
 12 April 2026

Doubt. The week after Easter, and we're already hearing about doubt.

Interestingly, we hear this exact same Gospel passage from John
 every single year the Second Sunday of Easter.

Not different versions of the same story, but this exact one,
 Often called "doubting Thomas."

As if this poor guy provides a good example of how NOT to be.
 Bless his heart.

I say that because if we give Thomas
 the **benefit** of the doubt,

We see a far more complicated,
 Far more interesting story

About how experience informs and influences our responses
 and about Jesus' compassion and consideration of that very human reality.

First off, Thomas may have had a particularly good reason for questioning
 whether or not the other disciples actually saw Jesus, more so than many of his peers.

In the Bible, Thomas is **never** called doubting Thomas, not once.
 that's a nickname given to him later on.

In the Gospel according to John, Thomas is called "the twin,"
 not only in today's passage
 but also in other places in John.

Occam's razor suggests Thomas is a twin.

Being a twin would have been a distinguishing factor for anyone in Jesus' time
 As for twins to both be born alive & survive childhood would have been unusual.
 So calling him "the twin" would have easily clarified which Thomas
 Someone was talking about.

Biblical scholars have also floated the idea that
 Thomas looks so much like someone else –
 perhaps even Jesus himself–

that he is nicknamed "the twin."

In any case, I'm willing to bet
 that being mistaken

for someone else is
 or was a big part of
 Thomas' life.

To make it a bit more concrete, my cousins Whitney and Kayce are fraternal twins.

They're forty now, so they now have their own separate personalities,
 along with their own separate fashion sense and hairstyles,
 So they're easy to tell apart now.

However, when the twins were little,
 their mom used to dress them alike.

Their beautiful auburn hair was cut in a pageboy
 Many people couldn't tell them apart
 though, again, they are not identical.

They patiently corrected even family members when we would call
 Whitney Kayce or Kayce Whitney.

From an incredibly young age,
 they were constantly mistaken for someone else.

No one just forgets constantly being misidentified,
 particularly by people who are supposed
 to know the difference.

I'm betting nearly all of us could tell similar stories
 About twins in our family or that we know.

In other words, because of his life experience,

Thomas has good reason to question if the other disciples have confused Jesus
 for someone else, since he, Thomas, likely has been confused
 for someone else on the reg.

No wonder Thomas the twin is comparatively slow
 to believe Jesus had really appeared.

In addition to the twin nickname, there's definitely something else going on
 Here too that informs how Thomas reacts, something far more universal,
 Something we have all experienced to one degree or another.

Thomas has been left out.

I've always read the disciples: "We have seen the Lord" as being laced not just with excitement
 but also with a sneaky streak of implied snide: "and you didn't!"

I mean, it's not as if the other disciples are able to believe without seeing.

They have the chance to see and to touch
 and to be with the resurrected Jesus.

Thomas is the only one of the 12— well, 11— who does not.

We never know where exactly Thomas is;

We do know that everyone else is terrified
 enough to be hiding behind locked doors.

One very likely reason is that Thomas
 has been sent on an errand
 on behalf of the group—
 for food?
 for water?
 And this is the thanks he gets?

Thomas cannot share in a experience he did not have, and he's incredibly disappointed.
 He just wants Jesus to treat him the same as the other disciples.

In that light, Thomas doesn't seem so much a doubter
 as someone asking to be let back in,
 as someone seeking equitable treatment
 after having been excluded from a powerful experience
 The rest of his close friends got to have.

We've talked about Thomas and how his experiences,
 being nicknamed the twin, being left out, shapes his response.

Let's turn our gaze towards Jesus' response to Thomas.

First of all, Jesus does not chide or shame Thomas.

Jesus instead comes to Thomas and invites Thomas to touch his sides
 and his hands, just like he did with the other disciples.

Jesus brings Thomas back into the loop;

He reassures Thomas; &, even more importantly,
 Jesus reintegrates him.

After Thomas calls Jesus Lord and God, which, not for nothing,

is one of the most startling confessions of faith in the New Testament,

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Jesus does NOT say, "Woe to those who need to see to believe,"

which is how this verse is often interpreted.

The Gospel according to John actually includes no woes at all.

Jesus almost seems to be thinking aloud, not so much talking to Thomas:

"Oh, man, what about the people who won't get to see me, talk to me in this exact way?

Ya'll, that's the experience of Christians for nearly 2000 years now.

It's a blessing for not only our Christian ancestors in the faith

But for us too, here, now, not a curse for Thomas.

"Blessed are those who have not seen
 and yet have come to believe."

Like Thomas, our own experience inform our responses to God.

God being compared constantly to a parent is hard for some folks
with particularly complicated relationships with the parents.

Jesus responds with compassion, with consideration
for the human experience.

Like Thomas, doubt can be a possible path
towards relationship, a chance to come closer
to an encounter with the divine.

It was for Thomas;

might it be for us

this Easter season, too?

Amen.