

Thomas has a nickname, doesn't he? A nickname that he gets from this story. It's not the Twin, which is the nickname that John says he already has. He's not Pragmatic Thomas, who asks the right questions and just wants to see some evidence.

In spite of his powerful confession, we don't call him Confessing Thomas, do we? In John's gospel, Thomas has the singular distinction of being the one and only person in the entire story ever to correctly identify Jesus as God's Son AND show that he knows what that means. John's gospel lacks Peter's confession on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and it also lacks the Gentile centurion who, after Jesus' death, correctly figures out who he is. Instead, standing in place of both of them, there is Thomas, exclaiming, "My lord and my God!" But we do not call him Confessing Thomas.

What do we call him? Doubting Thomas. Why is that? Why not The Twin or Pragmatic Thomas or Thomas the Confessor? Why, with all that is going on in this story—not one but two resurrection appearances by Jesus, the commissioning of the apostles, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Thomas' incredible confession, among others—why is "Doubting Thomas" the detail that sticks with us?

Having been in the Church as long as I have, I wonder if doubt—or skepticism—frightens us. Why else would we spend so much time comparing ourselves to the people "out there" who don't believe as we do, wondering 'how they could possibly get along without faith?' What else besides fear would have us wringing our hands and shedding our tears over spouses and children who have left the Church behind?

I wonder if we use this story of "Doubting Thomas" as a kind of cautionary tale to warn against doubt. Maybe in this story, we can let Thomas do our doubting for us so that, when he is 'corrected,' we can stand with the disciples and pretend that we were certain all along, as they were. Maybe when Thomas is brought back into the fold, we can imagine all the other "doubters" out there being brought back in, as well, and that gives us some comfort.

I can't help but notice, though, that if that's what we're asking this story to do, it fails us. Jesus never scolds or reprimands Thomas for doubting; in fact, he indulges him.

Jesus comes back a second time specifically to give him what he says he needs to believe: the opportunity to put his hands in Jesus' wounds.

In fact, I wonder if Thomas could have made his incredible confession without having first doubted. All the others were there the first time, but none of them shows the kind of faith Thomas does at the end. If anything, I wonder if maybe this is a story in praise of doubt. Maybe doubt is something we in the Church ought to celebrate and encourage, trusting that it is a resource God can use to great effect, as with Thomas.

I wonder if we might be so afraid of Thomas' "doubt" that we miss the truly amazing thing that is happening to Thomas—and to all the disciples. In order to see that, I want to draw your attention to three words in this story—three words that, I think, might all be describing the same thing.

The first is what Jesus says when he somehow comes in despite the locked door. He says, "Peace be with you." In Aramaic or Hebrew, the word he used would have been *shalom*. Now, "*shalom*" is a typical greeting in Hebrew or Aramaic. To this day, people in Jews still say "*shalom*" to one another as a way of saying "hello."

But our storyteller, St. John, is not a reporter or an ethnographer. He's a poet and a theologian. He chooses each and every word he uses very carefully. When he says that Jesus, in his first appearance after the resurrection to his friends, says "*shalom*," he means more than "hello." In Hebrew, *shalom* means *peace*, but it's much more than the English word *peace*. *Shalom* is not just the absence of conflict, or an easy calm; it is wholeness, it is wellness, it is perfection.

*Shalom* is a puzzle with the last piece fitted into place. *Shalom* is the moment when you greet your family in the airport after a long separation. *Shalom* is the sense that, to borrow from Robert Browning, "God's in his heaven, and all's right with the world." *Shalom* is the word used to describe how everything will be when Messiah returns and God's kingdom is established. This is what Jesus wishes his friends.

The second word comes after Thomas' confession, when Jesus points out to him that others (like us) have not seen, and yet have come to believe. "Blessed are they," Jesus says. Once again, the English word falls short. The Greek word is *makarios*, and it means

something like blessed, or happy, or fortunate, but also something beyond each of those. Blessedness and happiness and fortune or luck all have very specific meanings in English, but this word covers parts of them all. It's the same word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes when he says, "Blessed are the poor."

The third word comes from the narrator's explanation of why he's sharing these stories with us. St. John says that his explicit purpose in recording this and all the other stories is so that, "you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name."

There are two Greek words for "life." You already know them both, even if you don't know any Greek. The first is *bios*, which is the root of our word biology. *Bios* refers to the mechanics of being alive. To have *bios* means that your heart is pumping, your lungs are breathing, and your synapses are firing. The other word—the one St. John uses—is *zoe*. *Zoe* is the root of the words "zoology" and "zoo," and it refers to life in the sense of "life on earth" or "to be fully alive" as opposed to merely surviving. This is the word Jesus uses when he says in Chapter 10, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."

Each of these three words—*shalom*, *makarios* and *zoe*—are hard to define by themselves. They sort of exist in the crevices between our English words. But together, I wonder if they define one another—and what happens to Thomas and his friends in this story.

At the beginning of this story, Thomas—like his friends—is grief-stricken and afraid. Maybe he's angry, too. I wonder if there might be some anger in his declaration that he will not believe. But by the end, he is falling down in worship. I don't just hear joy or relief or excitement in his confession; there's something more there. I think something in Thomas has changed. I wonder if, at some level, the man who exclaims "My lord and my God!" is a different man than the one who says, "I will not believe."

There is a word that captures what I think Jesus and John are talking about. When we put *shalom* and *makarios* and *zoe* together, I think what we end up with is resurrection.

Because, you see, Easter isn't just about the resurrection of a single person—not even if that person is the Son of God. Easter is about the resurrection of all humankind, all

creation. The Greek word can mean “uplifting,” causing a “change for the better.” Easter is the uplifting of all creation, just as Thomas is uplifted. In the story, Thomas receives new life and John hopes that, by hearing this story, we, too, might become *makarios* like him, that we might receive God’s *shalom* and experience *zoe* that is abundant and eternal.

What might that look like? How does this story change us? What promise does it hold for us? For others? For creation? I have to believe it is a promise that transcends just the promise of life after death, that it includes some sort of transformation now, like the transformation that Thomas experiences.

Doubt may be the least interesting part of this story; and yet, I wonder if we have locked ourselves into one way of hearing or understanding it for fear of that doubt. But this is Easter. Even if we have the doors of our minds and hearts barred for fear of doubt, it won’t stop Jesus from coming in, inviting us, too, to put our fingers in the nail marks on his hands and our hands in the spear wound in his side; inviting us to see that our fear can’t prevent him from sharing his *zoe* with us, blessing us with *markarios* and *shalom*. I believe we tell this story to remind ourselves that the same resurrection that Thomas experiences in the risen Christ is for us, too.