

Whose Twin?
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Friends, sing along with me if you know it...

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Were you there, when they crucified my Lord?

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You know, it's a funny thing...none of *us were* there. But we sing it as though it is a firsthand experience. Not only were *we* not at the crucifixion, but in half the gospel stories, *none* of Christ's first male disciples were there either. Only John and Luke report *any* men, and in John it was only the beloved disciple. *Were* you there...probably not!

Let's try the *third* verse from that hymn...

Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

Again, none of *us* were there... and very few in his company were either. Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned in all four gospels as having helped to bury Jesus. John's gospel adds in Nicodemus. A Mary or two—or possibly a company of more women—also get mentioned in some telling of the story. Yet we sing the hymn as though many people were there, and we somehow stand among them.

Let's skip ahead to the last verse...

Were you there when he rose up from the dead?

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Well, here's where it gets really odd—because *no one* was there at the moment of the resurrection. Everyone arrives after the fact, and has to piece together what happened. Usually there was an angel to help explain things, but no one—*not one single disciple* was watching as Christ returned to life in the tomb.

Much of our faith comes to us through the witness of a few. This seems especially true about the resurrection. Only a few people got some kind of experience of it early on. Everyone else in the early Christian community had to trust those few experiences. And some lucky individuals had

experiences of the resurrection in their own lives. But most of us receive the stories through faith rather than direct experiences.

In this morning's reading, when Jesus appears to the disciples on the evening of the first Easter Sunday, Thomas is *not* among them. He is understandably a touch skeptical about the story they tell him later. Dead people don't just get up and somehow move through locked doors and show off their wounds; much less offer peace in God's name before disappearing again. So it is easy to understand when Thomas makes his famous statement: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, *I will not believe.*"¹ We can understand his being a little skeptical. We can understand when he doubts the fantastic story of his fellow disciples. From a modern perspective it is easy for us to doubt right along with Thomas.

But I don't think it is just us moderns who might stand with Thomas in his doubt. I think the good news of the resurrection has always been hard to accept, which is part of why we take almost fifty days through Eastertide to experience it. And I think Thomas actually stands in *our* place in the story. Have you noticed the way Thomas is introduced in the story? We all call him *doubting Thomas*, but he is never actually dubbed that in the text. But he *is* called "...Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, (who) was not with them when Jesus came."² There are three important points in this way of naming Thomas. First, he is called "the Twin," and it is not just a nickname, because the name Thomas actually means "twin," too! As to whose twin Thomas may be, I think the answer is most Christians, even since the earliest times. Thomas is my twin, and your twin, too. Second, he is called "one of the twelve," which is to say a disciple of Christ. Third, we are reminded that Thomas "was not with them when Jesus came." So, even in his absence from the first appearance of Jesus, Thomas remains part of the disciples. Not being at that event doesn't keep *anyone* from being Christian. That was good news for Thomas, and it has been good news for every Christian since.

Were you there when he rose up from the dead?

No! But that doesn't keep us from being able to know Christ in our lives. Like Thomas, we were *not* there when Jesus first appeared to the disciples. But *also* like Thomas, we can call on God to appear in our lives. We can knock and be answered. We can search and find. We can know God fully in our lives. Our good and loving God has gifted us with many ways in which to vitally experience Christ's presence. We have the word of the Bible—amen? We have the witness of one another—amen? We have the practices of prayer and meditation—amen? And today we have the added grace of the Lord's Table, laid out for any who would come and taste and see that the Lord is good—amen? Jesus wants to know us and be known by us. There are

¹ John 20:25c.

² John 20:24.

many ways we can know his grace. And if we miss out on one, he is sure to offer us another. And that's the good news of the resurrection on this second Sunday in Eastertide.

Can I get an Alleluia!?

John 20:19-31

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.