

Thomas speaks from the gut

By [Martha Spong](#)

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Last year I took a class to determine my Enneagram number. I'm an old hand at Myers-Briggs, with its 16 types, but this nine-number circle with all sorts of arrows going back and forth was a new system for me. Thankfully the teacher, Suzanne Stabile, had a teaching style I understood well. It turns out we are the same type.

Some of us reside in the heart (or feeling) triad, as Suzanne and I do, and some in the head (or thinking) triad. My guess is Thomas would belong in the third triad: the gut. He says the thing or asks the question that emanates from his gut. Sometimes I think Thomas's problem isn't *doubting* so much as *blurting*. He says things that nobody else dares to say.

Thomas insists that he will only believe his friends have seen Jesus if and when he sees Jesus and Jesus' wounds himself. He creates tension not only in the upper room with the other disciples, but down across the centuries as we take his story apart and put it back together, trying to find some new way to approach it because the lectionary gives it to us every year.

If you are preaching about Thomas yet again, take a look at his conversations with Jesus in John 11 and 14. Do these scenes really portray a person who doubted?

In chapter 11, Jesus gets word that Lazarus is very ill and his sisters want Jesus to come and do something, anything. The trouble is that their home in Judea is a dangerous place for Jesus to go. His disciples fear they will be killed. Thomas shows no doubt or unfaithfulness—he is ready to go and die beside Jesus. He is the one who puts it into words.

In chapter 14, the beginning of the farewell discourse, Jesus speaks of going to prepare a place for his followers. It's a passage we often read at funerals. But we don't go on to read the part where Thomas chimes in with a question when no one else will: "Lord, I don't know where you are going. How am I supposed to find the way?" His problem is not a lack of desire to follow Jesus; it's being too literal-minded.

This week, in chapter 20, his gut has one more opportunity to speak for him.

I'll confess that one of the things you're not supposed to do with the Enneagram is tell someone else what number you think they might be. I hope people of biblical times are beyond the reach of that warning. Thomas sounds to me like an eight—a strong and instinctive type, prizing loyalty and inclined to shut people out when they feel betrayed. Think of Thomas as a person whose chief trait is loyalty. He is ready to die with Jesus; he admits he does not understand where Jesus is going precisely because he wants to go there.

How would it feel to be that guy and then not be in the room when Jesus appears? Thomas reacts on instinct, and his instinct is to think it couldn't have happened the way his friends said it did.

Both in our churches and outside them are people who react on instinct, deciding whether they are safe in our communities or whether they can trust our teaching, and sometimes deciding against. I understood my Enneagram teacher very, very well because we perceive the world in a similar way. If we want to reach people who don't respond to our cool-headed intellectual interpretations or our touchy-feely piety, we might think about how we would relate to Thomas.