

April 7, Easter 2B (John 20:19–31)

## **Thomas's experience with the risen Christ is a testament to the possibilities Easter creates.**

by [Josh Scott](#) in the [April 2024](#) issue

In 1997 I went to New York City for the very first time. I had been enamored with the idea of the place for as long as I could recall, so getting the opportunity to go with some classmates from my high school was a dream come true. As you can imagine, we hit all the touristy hotspots—the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, Times Square. Each one felt surreal. My 16-year-old brain could hardly process it all. The memory that I think of most, however, is about something I *didn't* see. The details are foggy now, but here's what I know: while I was briefly wandering off to see some site, some of my friends had a close encounter with Will Ferrell.

Yes, that Will Ferrell. Of *Anchorman* fame.

At the time he was just taking off on *Saturday Night Live*, doing bits like the Spartan Cheerleader, and I was a huge fan. The idea of even brushing past him on the street was more than I could fathom. And I totally missed seeing him. I regret it to this day. Couldn't the hot dog or whatever have waited?

Now, I know meeting a celebrity isn't the same as an appearance of the risen Jesus, but something about my own missed encounter makes me resonate with the character of Thomas in John 20. Mary Magdalene is the first to encounter Jesus after he is raised on Easter morning. That same evening he appears to a group of disciples who are in a locked room, hiding in fear of experiencing the same fate that Jesus has. He appears among them, speaks peace to them, and—like God in the creation story in Genesis 2—breathes the Spirit upon and into those disciples. They are new creations, part of a new humanity that will join God in the work of creating a new kind of world. It is John's version of the Pentecost story.

Thomas is absent for this expectation-exploding moment. And because of his absence, he just can't buy what his fellow disciples are saying. The idea that the

Jesus he has known and loved is alive again—and appearing to his friends but not him—must feel like a cruel joke. For him to accept this shocking turn of events as reality, he will need more than their exclamation that they “have seen the Lord.” Thomas demands proof. “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands,” he says, “and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

For 2,000 years, as the result of this one line, readers of the Bible have looked back on Thomas as an example of failure and unfaithfulness, as the epitome of doubt. In these moments I feel fortunate to have two millennia separating me from the action of Easter because, to be honest, I would probably have felt the same as Thomas. I respond similarly when someone makes an outlandish claim and expects me just to accept it without any kind of proof, and I’d wager that you do, too.

Further, the other disciples got to see the risen Jesus, which is why they believe. Thomas didn’t, and all he’s asking for here is to have a similar opportunity. That isn’t all that unreasonable, is it? We’ve perhaps been a little too hard on history’s most famous doubter.

And when we focus so intently on Thomas’s doubt, we miss or ignore what happens next. A week later, behind closed doors, Jesus appears to his followers again, and this time Thomas is in the room. Jesus offers what Thomas has wanted, has needed: the opportunity to touch his scars. This is no longer necessary, however, because Thomas knows in his bones who is standing before him. “My Lord and my God” is his ecstatic response.

Thomas experiences a kind of resurrection here—a resurrection of hope, faith, and possibility. This encounter with the risen Jesus powerfully reshapes Thomas’s life. Legend has it that he spent his remaining years sharing the message of Jesus in India. While we have no way of knowing if that is actually the case, it is still a testament to the possibilities Easter creates. We should not condemn or disparage Thomas. Instead we should see ourselves in him. Our journeys are lived on the same continuum between doubt and faith, between skepticism and belief.

Thomas discovers that Easter means our worst moments and our worst days do not define us. We can learn, our trust can grow, and we can be transformed. Our stories are not determined by our failures. Guilt, shame, and regret do not get the final word over us. The risen Jesus comes to us, again and again, inviting us to experience resurrection right here and right now.