

## EASTER II

*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.* John 20:31

Say I'm a guy named Thomas, living in first century Palestine. I know you've heard a little about me, but I want to give you some backstory on myself.

Like Jesus, whom I came to follow – that's what you've heard, I know – I was born in a small town. And also like Jesus, I had a father who was a carpenter. Some say Jesus had a twin brother – I don't know, I never met such a person– but I did have a twin brother myself.

My brother was born a few minutes ahead of me. He was always first: quicker, smarter, better with his hands. And people called him by his name, while generally I was known as “The Twin.”

In the way of our people, we both trained to be carpenters, like our father. Carpentry was a struggle for me at first. I was not a natural like my brother. I seemed always clumsy and slow. I felt my father and my brother watching my work with critical eyes – and under their scrutiny I became self-conscious and more maladroit than ever.

But then I married and moved to my wife's village, and set up shop on my own. Suddenly my work improved! On my own, working at my own pace, without being compared to my brother and always coming up short, I was comfortable. My hands seemed more agile, my eye more true. I was able to apply what my father had taught me without feeling constantly inferior. People began to seek me out, and for the first time in my life I felt successful and confident.

But then Jesus came along, and turned everything upside down. The brief period of ease and contentment was over – shattered. For reasons I couldn't explain, his teaching seized my heart in a painful grip, and would not let go. I had to follow him. I left my shop, left my wife and children alone for long periods while I followed Jesus around Palestine with his group of constant companions.

And those guys became like brothers to me, but not like my own brother, always ahead of me, always winning. We were all in the same boat, really – equally compelled, equally mystified, equally loyal. Sure, there was jockeying for power, but Jesus always put a stop to that pretty quick, I can tell you. He kept insisting that power was not what he was about, and not what we should be about. At least, not power as the world understood it. And what other way was there to understand? I always wondered.

Peter was clearly his favorite in certain ways, but he was not immune from criticism and displeasure. Once Jesus called him Satan to his face. And at the end Peter let him down badly – but I know you’ve heard about all that.

In some ways, though, that time with Jesus was like being at home with my father and brother. While Jesus was around, leading us and teaching us, I just couldn’t seem to get anything quite right. I always felt bewildered, wrong-footed, slow-witted. But we were all in the same boat that way, too. No one could understand Jesus altogether. And no one had his power.

No matter how often he repeated his teaching to us, we always missed something essential. And when we tried to duplicate his successes – his healing, his preaching, we always came up a bit short. And none of us had his courage, either. No one else dared to confront the authorities the way he did. He seemed fearless, even reckless. He was driven by his convictions in ways beyond our comprehension, even as we were in thrall to him ourselves.

And then he began to talk all the time about going away. He talked about God’s house having many rooms, and that he was going to prepare a place for us. And that sometime he would come back and get us all to go with him. Now he had really lost me. We didn’t know where he was going, so how could we know the way? He said he was the way. But how could a person be “a way.” I didn’t get it.

And then he died, cruelly, miserably, shamefully. And we were shameful too – we all ran away to escape a similar fate. We were in danger, and we were cowards, to a man. We didn’t even stay to see him properly buried.

But some of the women did go to the tombs to anoint his body. And they came back with news of even worse bad luck, trouble, and shame. His body had vanished. They talked some weirdness about an angel telling them that he had risen and that we would find him in Galilee.

I figured that was just denial on their part, they didn’t want to face the fact that he had been desecrated and disrespected even in death.

But then strange things began to happen. A couple of us said they saw him and talked to him on the road to Emmaus. And then that evening they sent me out for food, and everybody but me was locked in an upstairs room to hide from the religious police. They claimed Jesus visited them there and said God had sent him to bring peace to them.

And they did seem to be more settled in their minds after that. But not me. I was still totally confused and demoralized. But then next week he came back when I *was* there.

What do I mean when I say he *came back*? I'm not sure, even now, that I can explain. I felt his presence among us, as surely as if he were really there, still alive and present. I felt the power of his mind and heart, the power of his conviction. I felt as if I could reach out and touch him.

And then I was overcome with that same sense of peace and tranquility of mind that the others had gained when he'd come among them. I understood that in some mysterious way, Jesus was still among us.

He came and went a few more times in that way. Every time we sensed him among us, we became less afraid, more settled, and more certain about what we had to do. We came to understand that while he seemed to be with us, he was not our leader any more, not as he had been.

His work on earth was done. Now it was up to us. That knowledge grew on us gradually. It took a while to absorb such a profound loss, such a radical change. But we did. By the time he told us that his visits to us were over, we were ready to accept that. We were ready to go ahead without him, without his physical presence.

And somehow, we had confidence that we could carry on his mission. The pieces of what he'd taught us fell into place, finally. Without him to instruct and correct us, we had to claim the work as our own, and carry it out in our own way, with our particular gifts and strengths. And we did.

For me, it was like when I left my father's village and went into business for myself. For all of us, I suspect, it was like that. On our own, we could apply what Jesus had taught without constantly feeling that we were falling short of his expectations. We were in charge now, and we gained strength and courage.

As you know, we took that mission all over the world. I myself – Thomas, the Twin! – traveled to India to teach the good news Jesus had taught, the good news of God's love of justice, God's forgiving heart.

People say now that Jesus was God. Or part of God. Some say that he knew he was divine all along.

I don't know. I'm not sure. What I do know is that after he died, he did not seem gone. He lived among us, somehow. Even after we no longer sensed any bodily presence,

we felt his power and passion in our midst, and we were inspired to go forth and preach his good news to all people.

And what I wonder is, *isn't that enough?* Does all this wonderment about divinity really matter all that much? *Isn't what he did, and we did, enough?*

Alleluia! Amen