

STORIES OF FAITH

The Easter Challenge

Jonny Grant

KNOWING THE STORY

The Christian Story is full of surprises and unexpected turns, and Easter is the most surprising of all. The idea that a holy and pure God would absorb the fury of sin and death in order to overcome it, and then bind himself to our embodied existence forever is hard to fathom. And yet, that is what we celebrate at Easter. Another surprising aspect of Jesus' resurrection in John's Gospel is that the apostle chose to make a sceptical figure like Thomas such a central part of the story. Thomas famously refused to believe what had happened until he himself could touch Jesus' wounds.

One of the striking things about Thomas' journey in this chapter is that his faith accelerates from lagging behind the other disciples through to exceeding them. After touching Jesus' wounds, he is the first one to worship Jesus when he says: "My Lord and my God." Having missed the power and significance of Easter Sunday he suddenly grasps it and catches up. It's believed that Thomas later took the Gospel to modern-day India where he established churches and was martyred.

Thomas is also known as Didymus ("the twin") and it's as if we see two different Thomases in this scene: the doubter and the disciple. I'm thankful that John included Thomas' struggle in his Gospel because Thomas helps us with our own wrestle to grasp what Jesus has done, he (eventually) shows us how to respond (as a worshipping disciple), and he shows us that it's not too late to catch up. Easter Sunday is not just hope for the whole world, it's hope for each one of us.

READ: John 20

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

- These chaotic scenes show a range of different personalities and reactions as Jesus' friends struggle to understand what has just happened. Who would you most likely be in this story? Why?
- When Jesus finally appears to Thomas he says "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." We can sometimes take an "I'll believe it when I see it" approach to situations in our lives; places where our trust in God has waned over time or because of past disappointment. But trusting Jesus often involves choosing to believe him before we see his plans unfold. Is there a situation or an area of life where you need to rekindle your belief and trust in Jesus' provision and plans for you?
- Jesus' Resurrection is the beginning of God's New Creation, a reality that we will see fulfilled when Jesus returns. In the meantime, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on us as God's empowering presence and leaves us with a prayer of actualisation: "Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name, Your Kingdom Come Your will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven." Where do you most want or need to see this New Creation life take hold in your life right now (e.g. relationships, marriage, family, workplace, church)?

PRAYER

In pairs shape your responses to the last two questions into simple prayers.

