

One Twin

Sermon April 12, 2026 "One Twin" by Daniel Crump

Welcome to what the lectionary calls the "second Sunday of Easter." Did you know Easter had more than one Sunday? It's a ploy to trick CEO's (that's Christmas and Easter Only's) to pop in more than twice a year. Show of hands. Did it work? This scripture comes up every year in the three year lectionary cycle. So, don't stop me if you have heard this one. You have.

John, chapter 20, verses 19-31:

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. THEN the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them AGAIN, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was NOT with them when Jesus came. So 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." A 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." Then 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." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But 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.

One Twin

For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God within us, for the word of God among us. **Thanks be to God.**

A couple of notes at the start. First, a Surgeon General's warning - if you will - for a gospel proven to be harmful to the health of millions of Jews. The line in our holy scripture "the doors were locked for fear of the Jews," needs addressing. Everyone in this story is a Jew. As it is translated here, the disciples are afraid of themselves, and they have locked themselves in a room with . . . themselves! "Fear of the Jews" makes no sense. They would, however, likely be afraid of the ones they deemed responsible for Jesus' death, the Judean authorities who coerced the Romans into killing Jesus. They may have also reserved some fear for a resurrected Jesus come to avenge their abandonment and betrayal. But "fear of the Jews?" I mean, come on! Its not like they had space lasers back then! Or . . . did they?

Second, this from the Department of Redundancy Department. The King James Version refers to Thomas as Thomas DEE-doo-mus. Didymus, a Greek word, does indeed translate as twin, as our translation states. But the name, "Thomas," which comes from Jesus's own language of Aramaic, also translates as twin. If our translation had been consistent in translating the names in both languages, the phrase would have read "The Twin (who was called the Twin)." If that were not redundant enough, the gospel author uses the phrase three separate times, never once offering so much as a hint as to who the other twin is. What does it mean to speak of "one twin"? To speak of one defined by its relationship to another, when that other is never present? But I'm getting ahead of myself. This passage is well-known as "The One About Doubting Thomas." Thomas appears to be singled out for needing to see with HIS own eyes what everyone else HAS seen, the resurrected body of Jesus. But a careful reading reveals that Thomas is NOT saying that he doubts the resurrection. He is telling the disciples, "I doubt YOU!" And why wouldn't he? Jesus shows up behind locked doors, assures them that he holds no grudge for their betrayal, breathes the Holy

One Twin

Spirit upon them, and then, SENDS them. Out. As in OUTSIDE. Out from behind the locked door they have cowering behind for a whole week! Thomas is not even being accused of doubting here. Our translation, "Do not doubt but believe," is literally wrong. The Greek word that translates as "doubt," appears nowhere in John's gospel. The word the gospel author does use here is "*apistis*," translated, "unfaithful." Jesus is telling Thomas to be faithful to what he has seen. Belief is not a contest to prove that one statement is true and its opposite is false. We have created such contests to avoid the question of what matters, or in the original meaning of the word, "belief," what we love. I hear Jesus saying that he could not care less whether anyone "believes" that he has been resurrected. What matters is that they obey, that they go where they are sent, and do what they are told to do. Three days after Jesus is tortured and murdered, he comes back bearing peace, and forgiveness for the disciples' betrayal, yes, but also for the Romans and the Judean authorities who murdered him. And Jesus sends the disciples to do the forgiving. And he is not giving the church the power to withhold forgiveness. Rather, he is saying that if they do not faithfully do the job he empowered them to do them, there is no way for that forgiveness to happen. And they, so far, have not. Thomas sees the risen Christ for himself and cries, "My Lord and my God." The only time anyone refers to Jesus as "My God" in this gospel, Thomas is the one who says it. If there are doubters in this story, at this point, Thomas is not one of them! Jesus then tells Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe." We, who have not seen the resurrected body of Jesus, are the intended recipients of this blessing. But Jesus IS recognizing that a blessing is being withheld from Thomas. Experiencing something that upends the world we thought we knew is going to be life-changing, but just try to talk that life-change into someone else based on an experience you had and they didn't, and you might see it as more curse than blessing. Ask that guy in "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" who could only process his encounter by filling his living room with a dirt model of Devil's Tower. (Kamie. I'm sorry. I'll clean it up soon. I promise.) Whereas, receive that change through a community of people faithful to the life a new reality

One Twin

has called them to, and you have - along side the means to share it with others - the communal support to sustain and integrate that change into your own life. A blessing indeed. One that I pray every person who enters these unlocked doors enjoys.

But enough trying to butt heads with 2000 years of Christianity. I want to return to the matter of "the Twin who was called the Twin." One Twin. The phrase "One twin" implies that one twin is here and one twin is not here. It could mean the passing of one twin, and the half-a-life forced upon the surviving twin, lived in the absence of its other half. Or, it might mean the one who is a twin within himself. The singular Thomas becomes a twin to himself in these two appearances of Jesus, one who seeks meaning elsewhere, following the death of his beloved master, and another who is completely satisfied in the presence his living master. Seeing Jesus connects the Thomas who seeks and the Thomas who has nothing to seek except the community that forgiveness reveals. Thomas cannot deny or doubt, he cannot help but recognize his God, the truth of his life and the Truth of Jesus lived as one but perceived as two.

You might be thinking, "Alright, now Dan has stepped off the deep end. I hope he has a Zen koan to make some sense of this." I do. Thanks to Kamie. It is called "Sen-jo and Her Soul Are Separated." A Chinese legend tells of a young girl and boy, named Sen-jo and Ochu, who fall in love and believe they will marry one day. Sen-jo grows to be a beautiful woman, and her father promises her hand to another man. Ochu, broken-hearted, decides to leave. As he is leaving, he looks back and, rejoicing, sees Sen-jo following him. They leave together, telling no one, and settle in a distant village. Five years pass. They are blessed with two children. But she misses her family and regrets the pain she surely caused them. They hire a boat to go back and seek forgiveness. Sen-jo stays at the port while Ochu goes to her parents' house. He tells Sen-jo's father the whole story, to which the father replies, "Sen-jo has been sick in bed ever since you left." Ochu replied, "Sen-jo certainly followed me. Come to the port and see, for she is there waiting for me." An old servant is sent to check, and returns to report that it was unmistakably Sen-jo in the boat. The father then goes to

One Twin

her room and sees Sen-jo still sick in bed. He tells her the whole story, and, extremely delighted, she gets out of bed without saying a word. The Sen-jo from the boat has arranged a cart to bring her to her father's house, and the sick Sen-jo goes out to meet her. As soon as Sen-jo steps from the cart, the two Sen-jos become one. Sen-jo says to her father, "I myself am not sure which one was the real me - the one with you, sick in bed, or the one with Ochu as his wife. "The koan asks, "Sen-jo and her soul are separated: which is the true one?"

If we are honest - with ourselves - we might see that we have a lot in common with the other disciples. They didn't want to live in the world where Jesus was murdered by the powers they expected him to overthrow. They certainly did not want to be the sole channel of divine forgiveness in that world. And they don't get to live in a world where their betrayal of Jesus that made them complicit in Jesus' death didn't happen. Far better to stay locked in a room. Same with Sen-jo. What is worse: the pain of not living the dream, or paying the cost of making it real? Do I really have to choose? In a devastating interview with Ross Douthat last week, the former Republican senator Ben Sasse, who has been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, offers his diagnosis of the problem facing our times.

"What's really happening is these super devices in our pockets allow our consciousness to leave the time and place where we actually live, the places where we break bread, the people who are living next door to us, the people that you can physically touch and hug, the small platoons of real community, and we allow our consciousness to go really far away."

Maybe each of us should be called the Twin. Funny how you never see both twins at once. You know the old ventriloquism joke about the one who never talks when the other one is drinking a glass of water? One twin is lost doom-scrolling the woes of the world, tongue-clucking at the powers that be. The other one is . . . say . . . where is that other twin? Breaking bread somewhere? Touching, hugging? Building small platoons of real community? Which is the true one?

One Twin

Come together. Right now. The world you hoped for, the world you were given, the life that did happen, the life that didn't. There is no twin. There is only one in the presence of your Lord and your God, and that one is you. Live your life.