

Unlike most identical twins, Jim Springer and Jim Lewis share a first name instead of a last. The two were separated at birth and adopted by separate families who, by coincidence, named their respective sons James.

So began their parallel lives. Springer and Lewis shared not only a genetic code and a first name, but they shared more or less the same life, independent of one another until their reunion, 39 years after the initial separation.

Growing up in different homes, both were aware, barely, that they had a twin brother out there somewhere, but neither gave it much thought. Springer's mother told him his twin had died, while Lewis simply wasn't interested in meeting his brother.

That changed in 1977, when Lewis, then 37, decided to track down his brother. He found Springer's name through a local courthouse, and the two of them spoke over the phone, both of them nervous wrecks. They agreed to meet, and their bond was restored on February 9, 1979. Now, both consider their reunion the most important day of their lives.

Once they got to talking, they discovered the remarkable similarities they shared, similarities that went beyond simple genetics and almost into Twilight Zone territory.

Both were adopted by families living in Ohio and grew up within 45 miles of each other. Both had childhood dogs they named "Toy." Both were married twice — first to women named Linda, and then to women named Betty. Both had children — including sons named James Allen. Both lived in the only house on their block. Both were chain-smokers, enjoyed beer, had woodworking shops in their garages, drove Chevrolets, and served as sheriffs in separate Ohio counties.

To an outsider, it seems as if the Jim twins may as well have been the same person. However, Jim Lewis noted that there are, after all differences.

"The differences between Jim and me may be the differences between living in the city and country."

I wonder if the same thing happened with Thomas.

The Thomas we meet in the Gospels is at times deliriously clueless and zealously passionate, sometimes deserving of the moniker "Doubting Thomas" and sometimes faithful to a fault. But it is today's scripture passage where he is made most famous, or infamous. It's here where we shake our head, with Jesus' words ringing in our ears "Blessed are those who believe without seeing" that we pat ourselves on the back as good and faithful disciples. But I want to suggest that this might be missing the point. Belief, the way we describe it, is a state of thinking. We believe in the tooth fairy or we don't; we believe in global warming, or we don't. We believe in propositions that require our consent. But the phrase Jesus uses is different. *Pistos*, the Greek word that we translate as believe, carries more of the connotations of trust than the way we

use it today, and that light, I think we meet a different kind of Thomas. We meet a Thomas who displays a surprising abundance of faith.

Faith is a commitment to God's people, with all their faults and limitations.

Here's why I hate that this story is called the story of doubting Thomas. Because in view of the crucifixion, doubters scatter. When every instinct in your body says, what they did to him, they're going to do to me, non-believers turn and run. That's part of the reason the church should welcome the secularization of society: it forces you and me to ask ourselves whether our faith is really authentic, or whether it's just a cultural conditioning. But Thomas clearly has a view that even without their teacher and their leader, even without the one who had the power to call Lazarus out of the tomb, Thomas remains with the twelve. He doesn't do what Peter does and go back to his life before Jesus catching fish. He remains with the disciples, for better or worse because he is committed to their cause.

Even when he doesn't see the whole picture, Thomas trusts that he has seen God at work in this small community of believers and – for better or worse – he wants to be faithful to where God has placed him.

We don't tend to think of this as faith, but isn't it? Isn't it more than just pragmatism? Isn't your willingness to fight with your kids to make sure they're wearing clean clothes and, even if just for a little while, aren't covered in sticky based on your trust that the benefit your kids get from being here outweighs the stress it puts on you? Isn't your willingness to continue doing something you've done for longer than you'd care to admit based on your trust that things you do have value on their own?

Faith is admitting that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and, even if we don't know where it is going to lead or see the whole picture, trusting that God has a plan and it's our responsibility to keep showing up.

Call it head faith if you want, But remember that it's only half of the story.

Faith is also a willingness to accept where Jesus is calling you to go without him having to prove it.

Thomas places a high barrier to entry for himself to overcome when it comes to buying into the story that the other disciples are telling him. Notice, however, that Thomas' stubborn commitment to his community doesn't end even when they don't believe the same thing he does. But for Thomas, the story is not enough. In his mind, even if Jesus stood in front of him it would just be a ghost or some other kind of hallucinogenic magic. Unless I can place my hand in his side, says Thomas, I will not believe the story you tell me.

Unless I can be sure that the person I saw die is in front of me; unless I can have all slivers of uncertainty wiped away by me literally having this person in my hand, I will not trust the story.

To paraphrase that great philosopher, Mike Tyson, however, – everyone has a plan, until you get punched in the face. The next time the disciples are all together, Jesus appears with an agenda for Thomas: Go ahead. Here's the exact proof you were looking for, all you have to do is reach out and touch it.

But before he can, maybe even before he can think about it, Thomas heart leaps from its chest and he makes a declaration that can only be considered a leap of faith: my Lord and my God.

Thomas' faith makes a leap from his head to his heart.

But notice what he doesn't do: he doesn't touch the holes in Jesus' hands and feet or place his hand in Jesus' side like he said he needed to.

Instead he exclaims two truths that he now understanding new ways: one material, and one spiritual. My Lord and My God. In view of the resurrected Christ, Thomas is willing to surrender everything he has and everything he is. To recognize here that this risen Jesus is Lord is to grasp the consequences of the resurrection. It is a political statement, a declaration that what once belonged to the empire, now belongs to Jesus. It's a shift in values and priorities that inevitably results in a shift in action. NT Wright put it this way, *"A new sort of power will be let loose upon the world, and it will be the power of self-giving love. This is the heart of the revolution that was launched on Good Friday. You cannot defeat the usual sort of power by the usual sort of means. If one force overcomes another, it is still "force" that wins. Rather, at the heart of the victory of God over all the powers of the world there lies self-giving love, which, in obedience to the ancient prophetic vocation, will give its life "as a ransom for many."*

And to recognize him as God is to admit that his previous theology was insufficient. If people can rise from the dead, then who am I to say what is possible or not? Who am I to put God in a box, to limit who he can work through and what he can do? Thomas places everything he knows to be true on the altar when he encounters the risen Christ, and John's words to us at the end serve both as an invitation to discover Thomas' faith, and a commendation to carry it forward.

And this shows us something about what faith is, and also something about what faith is not. Faith is being willing to make the leap, to change in bold and admittedly frightening ways in view of the reality God placed in front of you. But Faith is not about how big a leap you can take. God has never required grand gestures or opulent sacrifices. And when he has, it's always been about challenging those who are faithful with little to be faithful with more. In fact, Prophets like Amos, Micah and Isaiih call the thinking that big leaps earn God's favour more than small ones detestable. God is in the business of creating somethings out of nothings, so why would he need big showy gestures? Jesus told us exactly what God is looking for from his people. Luke 18:8 – when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?

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Faithfully, Thomas

Rev. Jared Miller

John 20:24-29

As Martin Luther King famously observed, "Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the rest of the staircase." The story of Thomas is a story of faithfulness. Thomas' steady dedication to the place God placed him and his willingness to encounter the risen Christ.

To embody both the commitment of faith and the willingness of faith is where God calls us to be. In an age of deep uncertainty for the future of the church in all its forms, we need both. We need good shepherds to steward the resources of time, talent and treasure that God has placed in our care because every indication of the future says the trend away from church attendance and participation is only going to continue. Calling us to be cautious of our spending as church body is faith. But by the same token, we need people with bold visions to challenge us to trust that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside of us now. Our God is a resurrection God who is in the business of bringing something out of nothing. Challenging us to trust in God for more than what we see is also faith. The mistake comes when we assume that one kind of faith is better than the other, or prioritize one over the other.

Like Thomas, our faith is twinned.

Amen.