

Thomas



John 20:19-31

*Year A Easter 2 ; Year B
Easter 2 ; Year C Easter 2*

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		●
■	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	▲	▲	■
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲		●
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	▲		▲
▲	Cleophas - A conscientious disciple whose faith briefly fails him after the death of Jesus		▲	
●	Nathanael - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life		●	
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past		▲	
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus		▲	
●	Jesus			●

Scene 1

James , John , Matthew , Peter , Thomas

{Some of the disciples try to convince Thomas that Jesus is truly risen.}

James *[cheerfully, but with a scolding edge of condescension]* "Doubting Thomas"! That's what we should call you. You're determined to be a skeptic to the end!

Thomas *[earnestly]* I'm trying to believe. Honest. I'm just not hearing anything that's helping.

James And I suppose that's our fault?

Peter *[curtly]* Give him a break. When he sees the Lord, he'll know.

Thomas That's the part I'm the most flummoxed by. *[to Peter]* You met a man in the dark of night, when you were worn out physically and emotionally, and you instantly recognized him as the rabbi even though he didn't even look like him. Don't you see how...insufficient that is? At least for someone like me who's trying to understand your certainty?

Peter Sorry. I can't do better. It's what happened.

John I'm afraid that's what it came down to for me, too. I just knew it was him. As surely as I know I'm me. As surely as I feel the air in my lungs and the beating of my heart.

Thomas But not at first.

John True. He's changed in some way. I can't put my finger on it.

Thomas Were his eyes a different color, or shaped different? Was his hair different? Was his face a different shape? If someone looks different, it's got to come down to one or more details like this, right?

Matthew It stands to reason, and yet...I can't think of a single thing that looked different!

Thomas Then he looked the same as he used to.

Matthew No! He was completely different. I thought a Roman soldier had snuck into the house!

John I'm sorry, Thomas, but I have echo Matthew, as incredible as it might seem. I can't think of what actually changed, but he looked completely different - until he didn't.

Matthew It's like those puzzles where the face is a vase and then a face and then a vase.

Thomas You know what they call those puzzles, don't you? Optical *illusions*.

James *[more heated than before]* What's wrong with you, anyway? You were the one who always wanted to belong to the group. Well, can't you see that we all believe now? Or do you think we're all liars?

Peter *[stolidly to James]* Just wait for him to see the Lord for himself. There's nothing else to be done.

Thomas I know that none of you would lie. But you might be mistaken about what you saw. Honestly, if you were in my place, wouldn't your stories seem a little suspicious? Wouldn't a better explanation for everything be mass hallucination, or some kind of deliberate deception by a third party?

James So we're not liars, just nutjobs or suckers! Is that what you're saying?

Peter *[patiently]* Just. Wait. For him. To see. The Lord.

John *[reassuringly to Thomas]* I do see your point. I think I'd feel the same way if I were in your place. I wish I could better describe what it was like to see him and to *know!* It's our fault for not being able to communicate it more powerfully to you.

Matthew But it doesn't have to depend on our own experiences! What about the scriptures? It turns out they clearly predicted everything! Isn't that proof?

Thomas The scriptures can be made to say almost anything! And we even wondered about some of the rabbi's uses of it when he was with us

James Now you're trashing the scriptures? First the Lord, and then us, and then God's Word!

John James, I don't think he was trashing anyone or anything.

Matthew There's no ambiguity about the scriptures on this! Their meaning was made clear on the road to Emmaus!

Peter *[barking the command like a military order]* People! *[firmly but with a note of pleading impatience, after a pause in which everybody turns their attention to him]* Just wait for him to see the Lord for himself, all right? Then the problem will be solved without the need for all this endless talk, talk, talk!

Thomas What if he doesn't appear again? What if I never see him?

Peter *[grimly]* You will. Believe me. If you go out looking for him, you'll find him.

Scene 2

Cleophas , Joanna , Mary , Nathanael , Thomas

{Thomas questions four others about their experiences.}

Thomas So you didn't recognize him at first, either, right?

Cleophas We thought he was just a random traveler on the road.

Nathanael Or a Roman spy.

Thomas *[to Mary]* And at the tomb?

Mary I thought he was the gardener.

Thomas And then you suddenly recognized him, for no reason you can recall.

Cleophas Well, he *had* spent the last hour opening the Messianic scriptures to us. I realized later that all through it, I *was* feeling something, a kind of thrill or warmth of the heart. As if my body were trying to tell me something my mind wouldn't hear. Nathanael felt it, too.

Thomas *[to Nathanael]* But I thought you were totally skeptical about the man.

Nathanael I was! But afterward, when I finally recognized him, I realized that I kind of knew it all along.

Thomas *[to Mary]* Was there something that triggered your recognition as well?

Mary He called me by my name. With love in his voice.

Joanna *[to Mary]* Blessed are you among women!

Thomas *[to Joanna]* You recognized him right away.

Joanna True, but then I'd already met the angel.

Thomas Was it the same with the angel as it was with the rabbi for the others? Did you not recognize it to be an angel at first, and then it suddenly became clear?

Joanna No, no, no! It was as clear as day from the first moment. I'll never forget it!

Nathanael What did it look like? Did it glow or shine? Was it ghostly? Did it have wings?

Joanna No, none of that. I guess it...just looked like an ordinary man.

Cleophas Then how was it so clearly an angel?

Joanna The same way the rabbi was clearly the rabbi to you and Mary, I suppose!

Thomas This again! *[to Joanna]* You're saying that there was no physical characteristic that set this "angel" apart?

Joanna *[after a pause for thought]* Not that I can recall. Its robes were pretty white, so I guess you can say it kind of glowed, but not beyond the abilities of any good laundress.

Thomas Then how could you be so sure it was an angel?

Joanna I just knew. Sorry! I know that's what everybody's been telling you.

Thomas You get why that's a problem, don't you?

Joanna Absolutely. If hadn't seen the angel and didn't "just know" the rabbi was truly risen, I wouldn't be believing anybody's story, either. It would sound to me like some kind of mass delusion.

Nathanael *[angrily]* Hey! Are you calling us crazy?

Cleophas *[calmly]* If she is, she's including herself. And I have to admit, I was trying pretty hard to delude myself on that road, but Nathanael would have none of it. He was the realistic one between us, but he also came to believe.

Thomas You understand that people under a delusion never believe they are, don't you?

Joanna That's true! There's really no reason you should believe any of us, until you see for yourself.

Thomas I think it's going to take more than seeing. Vision is the most deceptive sense of all. All it takes is low light or a sudden dazzle, or just a little tiredness, and you can imagine you're seeing all sorts of things. I think I'm going to have to touch him, and feel those nail holes in his hands and the spear wound in his side!

Nathanael *[jokingly]* Then you're a lost cause, dude!

{A brief pause, after which Mary speaks out of the silence, almost as if she's talking to herself.}

- Mary** *[shyly and tentatively]* Sometimes when I dream, I know I'm dreaming and think, "How wonderful to be in a dream where I can do anything I want!" But usually, I don't know I'm dreaming and it feels very real. But when I'm awake, I never wonder if I'm dreaming, and the "real" I feel is so much realer than the real of the dream.
- Cleophas** You know, that's exactly how it felt. There was something nightmarish about the road - we were scared and exhausted and feeling guilty over abandoning the rest of you. When the stranger began speaking with us, it turned the nightmare into a pleasant dream, but still a dream. But then...
- Nathanael** When he broke the bread, it was like we woke up!
- Joanna** That's how it was with the angel, too! I imagine that people all through the ages have been tricked into thinking they saw an angel - maybe by some natural phenomenon, or by mental illness, or through deliberate deception by some con man - and sometimes they've fallen for it and sometimes they haven't, but now that I've seen a real one, I know that no one could ever make the opposite mistake. When you're awake, you can comprehend your dreams, but not vice versa.

Scene 3

James , Jesus , John , Matthew , Peter , Thomas

{Thomas speaks with John.}

- Thomas** I'm sorry I can't go along with the rest of you.
- John** Don't be silly. In many ways, you're the only sensible one among us. You always have been.
- Thomas** I'm not sure about "always". In the past, when the rabbi was among us and plainly performing miracles and I still couldn't commit to believing in him, I always felt like a child among the rest of you. We were all climbing a steep path and I wasn't strong enough to keep up and needed to be carried by the adults. But now, I feel like you've all fallen into a pit, and I'm still a child and not strong enough to pull you out. And worse: you're all trying to pull me in!

{James, Peter, and Matthew enter.}

James *[to John]* Any luck getting through to him?

John He's fine as he is. It's not his fault the Lord hasn't appeared to him yet. And we need someone like him in the group, to keep us balanced, to keep us grounded.

Thomas *[clearing his throat]* About that. I've come to a decision and I guess I'd better tell you about it now. *[solemnly]* It's been an honor and a great joy to know you all, but I think it's time for me to leave the group. I've truly appreciated how you've hung in there with me through all our differences, but this latest divide is just too big a chasm for me to jump. You call me a doubter, and it's true, but one thing I'm sure about is that I'll never meet a group of people as kind and noble and generous as you for the rest of my life.

John We feel the same way about you, Thomas.

Matthew *[urgently]* Thomas, you mustn't leave!

Thomas I'll miss you all, too, but -

Matthew *[more insistently]* Thomas! You must not leave!

James Who cares? If the doubter wants to leave and lose out on everything, let him.

Matthew *[to Thomas]* That's exactly why you have to stay! Don't you see? The Day of the Lord, which we thought was upon us when we entered Jerusalem, was only delayed! Now that the Lord has returned, more powerful than before, the Day will come, and it won't be pleasant for the unbelievers. It's more important than ever than you remain faithful!

Thomas I appreciate the concern, but the question of the rabbi's return is precisely where we differ. And nobody's shown me any proof that would change my mind.

John Thomas, could you at least wait a few more days? It's only been two days since he rose, and nobody knows what's going to happen next. Would it hurt to stay a few more days?

{A long pause while Thomas mulls it over.}

Peter *[firmly]* Words won't help. He's set on leaving.

{Peter walks up to Thomas.}

Thomas *[affectionately]* You're probably right. I think I might miss you most of all, Peter. *[makes to leave, but Peter grabs him]* Hey, what are you doing? Let me go!

Peter You're not going anywhere!

Matthew That's it, Peter! That's the idea!

John Peter, what are you doing?

James *[decisively]* What we *have* to do. Quick, let's get him into one of the tents.

Thomas Let go! Let go of me! John, help! This is madness! Don't you see this is madness? You're kidnapping me!

Peter If you don't stay, you'll never see him, and if you never see him, you'll never believe.

Thomas All right! All right! Let's talk! Just let me go and we'll talk!

James Don't let go, Peter! It's a trick!

Peter Words won't help. You've got to see him. It's the only way.

John Guys! Let him go! This isn't right!

Matthew This is for his own good. We can't let him end up outside the gates. "There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth!"

Thomas Help! Help! Anybody! Help!

{Jesus enters.}

Jesus Peace be with you!

{Everybody cries out in alarm or confusion. Nobody recognizes Jesus yet again. Except for...}

Thomas *[in awe and wonder after the commotion dies down]* My Lord and my God!

Jesus Would you like to feel the nail holes in my hands or the spear wound in my side? I'm happy to do anything that will help you to believe.

Thomas No. I believe. *[laughing in relief and triumph]* I believe!

Jesus *[to everybody]* You believe because you've seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe!

Peter *[triumphantly]* What did I tell you!

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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