

Original Doubting Thomas. The One and Only. Probably about the only thing you know about me, except that I was an apostle. How I came by that nickname? We will talk about that in a moment.

In the *Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, I am only mentioned in the lists of the apostles. John calls me Thomas, also known as Didymus. Since Didymus means “twin,” you can infer that I was known to have a twin. John mentions me four other times, two before the resurrection, and two after.

The first time John mentions me is when Jesus was headed to bring back his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. I knew that it was the beginning of the end of Jesus’ career, and probably his life, because he was headed into the places controlled by his enemies, the Pharisees. In a show of bravery, I told the other apostles, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” And we did go with him.¹

The second time John mentions me is on the night of the Last Supper. Jesus told us that he was going away and that he would come back to get us. When Jesus ended that statement by saying we knew the place where he was going, I was mystified. I had no idea what he was talking about, where was he going? I blurted it out, “Lord, we **don’t** know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus replied with some of his most famous words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.”²

The third and fourth time John mentions me will become apparent as we go through the rest of my story. (pauses to shift the subject)

After he was resurrected, Jesus first appearance was to Mary Magdalene. Ironic? I guess he was rewarding her for her faithfulness, while we apostles had deserted him on the last night and day of his life. She had served him in his life and in his death. I was glad he gave her special recognition. I was also glad that he also appeared to the other women that had served him in the same way.³

¹ John 11:16

² John 14:5-6

³ Matthew 28:9-10, Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18

His next appearance was that same day on the road to Emmaus, where he talked with Cleopas and his companion. They were about seven miles from Jerusalem, when Jesus appeared, but they didn't recognize him even though he talked with them. Jesus told them all of the things about himself in the Old Testament. Then, boom, they knew who he was. They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles the good news.⁴

They arrived that evening, ten of the apostles had already heard the good news from Mary and the women. And, they knew that Jesus had also appeared to Peter.⁵ One apostle heard the news, he found another apostle, and they found another (he gives a "and so on" gesture.). Scattered and hidden, all of us, but now we apostles gathered together. Behind locked doors, of course, because we still were afraid of the Jewish leaders... All eleven remaining apostles. Except one. Me.

I had gone to hide with my twin and his family. They were staying on the Mount of Olives, and were preparing to go back home after Passover was finished. We were among the poor people so I wasn't worried the leaders would mistake my brother for me. Nobody knew where I was...(let's this sink in), I didn't hear the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

The apostles felt safe behind their locked doors. Nobody could get inside without them knowing it. Nobody. Except Jesus. He just appeared...and stood there...among them. Peter once walked on water, this time he nearly walked on air. Everyone was freaked out, scared out of their wits, they thought they saw a ghost.⁶

"Peace be with you." Jesus said, then he held out his hands and feet for them to see the nail holes. He showed them the gash in his side where he had been pierced with a sword. They were overjoyed. They could not believe it was their Lord, so he solved the problem like a good Jew. With food! He ate a piece of fish.

Later, Jesus blessed them again, and breathed the Holy Spirit on them. He said they had the power to forgive sins, or not to forgive them. And then...he left.

The apostles searched everywhere for me, finally they found me. They could not wait to share the news. But...I would have none of it. I told them that I would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead unless I touched the holes in his hand and side. They understood my reticence to believe. They understood that the disappointment would be too much for me to take if they could not prove it to be true.

We stayed together, the apostles, for the next several days. Every night, in the same house, behind locked doors. Exactly one week after the Lord had risen, still behind the locked doors,

⁴ Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-32

⁵ Luke 24:33-35, 1 Corinthians 15:5

⁶ Luke 24:36-43

praying to God, Jesus appeared among us just as he had the first time. Again, "Peace be with you," just as he had the first time. But this time, he walked over to me.

"Reach here with your finger, and feel my hands; and reach here with your hand, and thrust it into my side: and stop doubting, but believe." I went to my knees, "My Lord, and my God." Jesus said, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Those who don't see me and believe, are blessed, too."

Now you know how I got my nickname, Doubting Thomas.

Shortly after this appearance, we disciples hurried to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus told us to go. We worshiped him, but some still doubted. I was not one of those doubters.

While we were in Galilee, we spent a lot of time away from Jesus. I don't know what all he was doing during this time period, but there were many times we were left alone. The third time we saw Jesus was on the lake below the mountain.

Peter was feeling down because he kept thinking about how he had denied Jesus on the night before he died. Peter decided to relieve his anxiety the same way men have always done...go fishing. Get in the middle of a lake and think about nothing for a while. Sounded like a good idea, so Nathaniel, James, John, two others and I agreed to go with him. Zebedee loaned us a boat, and away we went.

And like happens to many fishermen, we fished all night and caught nothing. Nothing. I know, I know, we went fishing just to get away, but we were still perturbed that we caught nothing. After all, Peter, James, and John had made their living fishing on that lake before they followed Jesus.

As we rowed toward shore, we saw a man standing on the edge there, dawn was just breaking and it was still too dark to recognize people on the shore. We heard, "Friends, didn't you catch any fish?" Peter was like "how does he know?, and wanted to curse at him like he would have in the old days. Instead, we just said, "No." "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you'll find some."

Now, Peter was about to explode. Not only had he failed to catch fish, here some nobody on the shore was trying to tell him, an expert, how to catch fish. In the time it took him to decide to go ballistic or not, the nets hit the water on the right side of the boat. Nathaniel and I had thrown them. We weren't fishermen. We didn't know it was foolish to throw the nets one more time.

He snickered as the nets sank, but Peter's eyes bugged out when we could not haul the nets up because they were buckling from the overload of fish. Finally, John said...so quiet, "It is the Lord." Splash! I mean, not even a second later. It was Peter in the water frantically swimming to shore to see Jesus. Peter helped us drag in the nets, where there were 153 large fish.

Jesus had already built a charcoal fire. We cooked our breakfast and ate with him. (Thomas closes his eyes and gestures for us to wait) Imagine that, seven apostles and Jesus sitting around a campfire eating fresh fish, dawn breaking over the Sea of Galilee. I can still smell it, hear it, and the peace. I never wanted that moment to end. Especially the way it did.

“Simon, Son of John,” said Jesus looking at Peter and using his first name, “do you unconditionally love me with deep devotion much more than these things.”

Peter squirmed as he sat on a log, and we squirmed for him. “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you like a brother.”

“Feed my lambs...Simon, Son of John, do you unconditionally love me with deep devotion?”

Again, Peter squirmed like a little kid caught stealing a cookie. “Yes, Lord, you know I love you like a brother.”

“Take care of my sheep.....Simon, Son of John, do you love me like a brother.”

Busted. Peter knew he was busted. Jesus knew that Peter was not willing to commit himself wholeheartedly. But Jesus also knew that Peter soon would. .

“Lord, you know all things. I love you like a brother.

“Feed my sheep.” And with that, we all knew that Jesus had forgiven Peter for his three denials, and had reinstated him as the leader of our group.

Jesus did so many things during his life and resurrection that all the books of the world could not tell of them. John, and the other Gospel writers wrote down what they could, and it was enough that anyone who believes them, can believe and have life in his name.

During the forty days after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people, many of whom lived for decades afterward and were willing to tell anybody who would listen about Jesus.⁷ As Jesus taught me though, those who are witnesses for Jesus without seeing him are blessed, too. You. That’s you! You are blessed every time you are a witness for Jesus.

One of the last things Jesus said in Galilee...We were on the mountain where Jesus had told us to go. It was there that Jesus gave instructions to all Christians for all ages. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:6

always, to the very end of the age.”⁸ There was never a clearer instruction to eyewitnesses. To you, the blessed who believe without having seen.

⁸ Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV)