

About the Story

“Believe” (John 20:24-31)

Verbal Thread: Believe

This resurrection story has two sections:

1. The story about Jesus and Thomas
2. The statement about the purpose of John’s Gospel

These two sections are linked with the verbal thread of “believe/believing.” Being aware of this verbal thread helps us know what is most significant in the story, and also helps us remember it.

In the first section of this story there is a link between Thomas saying, “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**,” and Jesus quoting back to him, “Put your finger here and see my hands; reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but **believe**.” The importance is placed on believing.

The significance of believing in Jesus’ resurrection is emphasized in the second section of this story where “to believe” comes up again: “These [signs that Jesus did] 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.”

Dynamic of the Story

The issue of believing points to the primary dynamic of the story. The purpose of the story is to provoke belief from the listeners. Thomas' credibility is in his disbelief and that he demands evidence. He is a true empiricist. He looks for specific empirical data like the mark of the nails and the wound in his side. He wants to know it by first-hand sense experience, not by hearing about it from someone else.

So this story is consolation and comfort to all those who want empirical data. Thomas is the scientist of the group. His experience is the source of credibility in relation to the believability of the story. Thomas is central in this story.

The story’s emotional dynamic is peace in the midst of conflict. Jesus' enemies have just killed him. In the background of this is the Jewish-Roman War and Jesus' non-violence as a way of dealing with the resistance to the Roman Empire. Jesus’ way of peace is different than the way of violence and warfare that had been so disastrous in the years prior to the hearing of John’s Gospel.

(over)

The Presence of Jesus

The issue that is present in this story is the experience of Jesus' presence and of the joy, peace, and hope that is present in believing this story that tells about what happened after Jesus' death. It is a story that has had revolutionary impact for the last 2000 years because it sets all experiences of death, and especially the death of those who have died following Jesus' way of non-violent resistance to evil, in the context of the work of God. It vindicates these martyrs, and highlights the victory of life over death.