

From high to low

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Carter's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

This week is the Second Sunday of Easter, aka "low Sunday." There is in the life of a church a movement and momentum toward Easter Sunday, and then inevitably a scattering, a rest after the intensity. And yet the gospel lesson does wrestle with the implications of belief, unbelief and doubt. For those who are with us on Easter Sunday *and* the Second Sunday of Easter, the preacher has the interesting challenge of going more deeply into the meaning of resurrection faith--and seeing all of John 20 as a whole.

The resources for such reflection are rich. North American Christianity tends to associate Thomas with doubt (which Frederick Buechner wonderfully and succinctly [defines](#) as "the ants in the pants of faith" that "keep it awake and moving"). I have explored as well the understanding of Thomas in Eastern Christianity. If Easter Sunday is a day to proclaim the faith in bold and broad strokes, the following Sunday offers a time and space to explore the nuances of such a faith. For the close reader of scripture, those questions happen to be lodged within the tradition itself, from the very beginning. This can form the beginning of a creative (but not necessarily defensive) response to the new atheism.

The gospel reading also gives the preacher the opportunity to explore the concept of religious experience itself. As a United Methodist, my theological resources are scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Most Christians come to faith or sustain their convictions by working with these four categories in some way. Thomas seems to be insisting that he needs not only to receive the faith from the eyewitnesses; he also needs to experience the faith for himself.

He is not alone. We come to the resurrection story from many different perspectives: we believe, we confess, we doubt, we bear witness. The Easter faith moves from simplicity to complexity. Attendance may be down this week, but there is good and necessary work to be done.