

Easter II, Year A

For nearly 2000 years the disciple Thomas has been getting unfairly maligned because in the confusion of all the reports of Jesus sightings following the resurrection, Thomas said that he would not believe unless he saw Jesus for himself.

Of course, there are others for whom Thomas is the patron saint of all those who struggle with doubt, thus his nickname “Doubting Thomas.” But I have a slightly different angle from which to understand Thomas; a fairly modern one that many of you might be familiar with too.

How many of you have ever taken the Myers Briggs personality indicator test? It's very popular in organizations where people have to work together closely, and is a tool for both self-understanding and understanding why other people are different.

The test has over 100 questions, always with 2 possible answers. Test takers are asked to “go with their gut” and check the box that comes closest to their preference. And that word “preference” is the key. We all have preferences that are related to how our brains are wired.

Some people are left handed or right handed, not because they made a decision about that, but because their brain is wired in such a way that a little child will naturally “prefer” to use one hand or the other.

The Myers Briggs Test is based on the premise that we have lots of other innate preferences as well. Each person is tested on their preferences in 4 sets of couplets: Introvert/Extrovert, Sensate/Intuitive, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving.

And each couplet is on a continuum so one can be heavily introverted or extroverted, or closer to the middle line. For those of you who know the test, I ? INTJ: Introvert, Intuitive, Thinking, Judging.

Each category requires a lot of interpretation, but it's the second couplet, sensate vs. intuitive, that makes me think of Thomas. A sensate is someone who gathers information and makes decisions based on their 5 senses: taste, touch, sight, smell, and hearing. A sensate is the kind of person who says, “seeing is believing.”

An intuitive is a person who gathers information and makes decisions based on what you might call a sixth sense, an inner voice that helps them interpret things. An intuitive is the kind of person who says, “there's more to the picture than meets the eye.”

I remember taking a group of students on retreat once to the ancient ruins of a 6th century Irish monastery, and it was easy to distinguish between the intuitives and the sensates. The intuitives were very moved and could almost feel the 1400 years of prayer emanating from the place. The sensates looked around at all the ruins, shrugged their shoulders and said, "It's a bunch of rocks."

Of course, both are true and so neither are absolutely right or wrong. But also, neither exhausts the truth and actually needs the other to have a balanced picture.

So now I hope you can see why Thomas made me think of the differences between sensates and intuitives. The guy has been getting hammered for nearly 2000 years for not immediately believing in the resurrection, when in fact he was simply behaving the way any Myers Briggs sensate would behave. He only trusted what his senses would tell him.

So Jesus gave him what he needed. Jesus appeared to Thomas and the others and said, "see my hands, see my side, you have believed because you have seen me; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

We are all given what we need to believe. Some need experiences related to their senses, some are looking to that inner sixth sense, but God has sufficiently revealed himself in creation, in the love people share together, and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that anyone who wants to believe has plenty of opportunities to do so. So let's not be too hard on Thomas. Instead let's think of the ways we experience God through the mystery of our own personalities.

Today we baptize Sadie Lois Raughley into Christ's Church. We don't know yet what kind of person Sadie will grow into, but we know that she will be raised by loving parents, that she will be cared for by her church, and that, like Thomas and you and I, she will come to faith by some means that God will use to draw her in.

Today, in her baptism, begins Sadie's life of faith. Let us gather at the Font.

Amen.