

It seems like everyday there's some kind of new personality test which you can take that tells you all about how your brain works.

Well, there's one test in particular that I like and it's called the Emergenetics personality profile.

To put it simply, you're put into one of four color-coded categories, red, yellow, green or blue.

Reds are emotive and social.

Yellows are conceptual, big thinkers.

Greens are structural and task-oriented.

Then there are the blues.

They are analytical, logical, rational.

They need hard, objective data in order to make decisions.

They're the kind of people who make pro and con lists.

Thomas the disciple, he was a blue.

He needed hard facts and evidence.

For example, when Jesus told the disciples about his ascension into heaven, he shared the now-famous scripture about how there are many dwelling places in his father's house (14: 2).

We can imagine that most of the disciples are confused as to what Jesus is referring to, who is his father, and where's this big house with lots of rooms?

But who is the one to speak up, to ask the clarifying questions?

Thomas.

He's a straight shooter.

He's the kid in class that raises his hand because he just doesn't get it.

He says uhhh, Jesus, we don't know where you are going, and how can we know the way (verse 5)?

Jesus' response to Thomas is the famous verse, "I am the way, the truth and the life..."

Thomas isn't doubtful, I think that's a terribly unfair reputation that he's developed over the years.

He just has a healthy skepticism.

He doesn't make decisions or understand the world based on intuition or feelings.

He doesn't rely on the past or the way things have always been done, he's open to change and evolution, he just needs the hard evidence to prove it, otherwise, he's skeptical.

He likes the scientific method: observable and replicable.

Thomas is engaged and curious.

He wants to fully understand Jesus, not just take his word for everything.

So I don't think we should be surprised that when the disciples claim that the impossible has happened, that they saw Jesus alive and with them after they watched him get killed, Thomas doesn't blindly believe it.

Now, he doesn't actually doubt them, he doesn't call b.s., and he doesn't accuse them of lying.

He's just very pragmatic/practical and says that he needs to not only see, but touch, the evidence for himself.

I think he's courageous.

He has the courage to admit his skepticism and the courage to ask for what he needs- to see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, to put his finger in the mark of the nails and put his hand in Jesus' side, where there are also wounds.

And while we, understandably, focus a lot on Thomas in this passage, there's also something to be said for how Jesus responds.

He doesn't shame Thomas or make him feel badly for needing physical evidence; he just gives him what he needs.

Now, granted it took a week, but Jesus did reappear to the disciples and he told Thomas to touch his hands and his side.

Jesus gave Thomas what he needed in order to believe, and lest we think that Thomas is the only skeptic who questions Jesus, the truth is that Jesus has to give many people different things in order to 'prove' his identity.

He gives the Samaritan woman water at the well, he made the lame man walk, and the man who was born blind didn't believe Jesus healed him until he could literally see him.

Jesus meets us where we are, gives each of us the evidence that we need so that we might believe that his message will outlast all others.

And, considering the miracles that Jesus performed were literally unbelievable, it's not surprising that Thomas and others needed proof, because they were being asked to believe something that was inconceivable.

I think most of us have that impulse when we see something we don't understand, whether a magic trick or card trick or optical illusion, we want to understand it.

Get behind the black curtain and the smoke and mirrors and figure out how it works.

Thomas was told that Jesus was back from the dead, if you were told by your family that they had an encounter with your deceased loved one, you might demand proof too.

You'd probably say, nope, I don't believe it, I want to see them with my own two eyes.

This kind of skepticism is normal, I don't think it's any comment on our faithfulness, it's just a consequence of our having complex brains which are capable of higher-order thinking.

Speaking of brains and evolution, we can't forget that Thomas had good reason to be skeptical as a matter of self-protection.

Remember that Jesus had just been executed by the state, and his followers probably thought that the authorities would be after them next if they tried to continue to perpetuate his message.

So, it makes sense to me why Thomas wasn't just like, "Oh, you saw Jesus, great, I believe you. Come on, let's continue to teach, preach and heal in his name. I mean, sure, our lives are at stake, but if he came back from the dead, like you all claim, then surely he can protect us from... the most powerful government on Earth."

If he was going to risk his life by following this miracle worker who supposedly rose from the dead, he needed to see him with his own two eyes.

And we have to try to understand this not only from the perspective of Jesus' first followers, who were present for his life and death and resurrection.

But this is in the Gospel of John, so we have to think about it from the perspective of the Johannine Community as well, after all, they were the intended audience for this text.

They were trying to follow Jesus and create a community based on his teachings from about 70-100 AD, which was 35-65 years after Jesus was killed.

They were being persecuted by other Jews who did not have such intense devotion to Jesus.

So, perhaps, these earliest Christians needed a story about proof because they needed to be reassured that they were doing the right thing by following Jesus, as it was incredibly risky to do so.

Jesus' first followers and the later Johannine community needed proof, otherwise they could've taken the more understandable easy route of just going back to their normal lives.

And while Thomas gets singled-out for needing hard evidence, the disciples don't believe Mary either after she tells them that she's seen the Lord.

Later that same day is when Jesus appears to them and shows them his wounds, presumably because they needed proof as well.

And I can't help but wonder why Thomas wasn't with them in that upper room.

The doors were locked and the disciples were afraid, but Thomas was nowhere to be found.

What was he doing?

Was he off with his Twin, the one that we never hear anything about?

Was he going back to his normal life, trying to avoid being arrested or killed for being a follower of Jesus?

That would make sense to me.

And while we can sit here 2,000 years later and judge him for not being there, for needing proof, for being skeptical, I imagine any of us would have reacted the same way.

God gives each of us what we need in order to sustain our faith.

If you're a blue, like Thomas, you want substantiated evidence.

If you are an emotive, social red, you might want to experience God through relationships, through people.

If you are a big-picture yellow, you might find God in the cosmos or when thinking about the vastness of the universe.

If you're a green, and you like structure and order, you might experience God through a DNA helix, or the rings in a tree or when you understand all the ways in which nature is interconnected.

A friend once told me a joke that goes like this, *"Why did the UCC pastor cross the road? To support the chicken as it searched for its own path."*

I am not going to stand here and tell you to believe some dogma or doctrine, because you won't believe it anyways, just like Thomas did not believe those disciples when they said they saw Jesus.

We all have to have our own, individual encounters with the divine, and that is what sustains our faith.

The disciples were hiding behind locked doors, and Jesus found a way to get to them.

Our Creator finds ways of working in, around and through our doubts, questions, cynicism and skepticism.

God find the cracks in our walls, and then lets the light shine in.

The promise of this text is that God comes to us like God came to those first disciples, amidst our fears, our pain, our doubt, our confusion.

All we have to do is be open to wonder, even if just a little bit, and God will give each of us the evidence that we need, to remind us that we are loved, we are called to love, and love is stronger than all our fears and doubts.

So go ahead and doubt and ask the questions you need to ask, you will find the answers that you seek. In due time. Amen.