

Sermon for 2 Easter
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Holy Nativity, Plano
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I want to talk about a couple of Greek verbs today. I know that sounds boring to some of you, but I'll try to make this as painless as possible.

These particular words are the most innocuous of verbs. Linguists call them "existential verbs", because they have to do with existence, being. The quintessential English existential verb is "to be". When we say "is, was, were, am" we're indicating a state or condition, rather than an action. It's about *being* rather than *doing*.

The Greek word that corresponds to that is *eimi*. This is the word in the great "I am" passages in the Gospel of John. "I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says, "*Ego eimi...*" It doesn't mean that he has somehow *become* the Good Shepherd. He just is.

Now look at the conversation between Jesus and Thomas in St. John's Gospel. Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the other disciples a week ago. He has demanded the same sort of evidence that they received. The chaos and horror and fear of the last weeks have gotten to him. He doesn't trust the senses or the sense of his closest companions. He doesn't trust that Jesus is who he said he was. He's confused and hurt, and he doesn't know what to believe. And this silly report about Jesus being alive again is just freaking him out.

So when Jesus finally appears to him the next week, he says to Thomas (in our translation), "do not be faithless, but believing." That sounds like *eimi*, right? It sounds like it's about existential conditions. Stop being in the state of faithlessness, unbelief, and distrust; and instead be in this other state of faith, belief, and trust.

Actually, the word that's used here is an entirely different word. The word translated "be" here is *ginomai*. It's also an existential verb, but it's not so much about static, unchanging states and conditions. It's about changing and becoming. It's the word that is used when you want to say that someone was "born". It might be more appropriate to translate this as "stop *becoming* faithless, and start *becoming* trusting." It sounds a little clunky, which is why our translators didn't choose to do it that way. But it captures the dynamic quality of the verb.

Now I know you're all sitting there thinking, "Father Garrin has finally gone around the bend. We knew he was weird, but this is down right crazy! Who cares about the infinitesimal difference between two Greek existential verbs? Why does this matter?" Well, I'll let you decide whether it's crazy to let this sort of thing keep you up nights. But I can tell you why it matters.

The point here is that trusting Jesus isn't something that you can just do and forget about. The mustard seed of faith doesn't suddenly spring forth instantaneously as a full tree. It is planted, it germinates, it sprouts, it grows, and it grows, and it grows, until finally you have a great tree. And the whole time it is *becoming* the tree it's supposed to be. In one sense, it may *be* what it's supposed to be at all those stages. But there is always more growth to be done. If, at any time, the tree stops growing, it's dying.

In the same way, there is no standing still in the walk of faith. You are always growing, either one way or the other. When Thomas stopped trusting, he started growing into death. When he started trusting Jesus again, he started growing into life. He started becoming the trusting, faithful person that God created him to be. And so it is with us. We don't just choose life or death, trusting or not trusting, and then go ahead and get on with our lives. That choice *is* our lives. Every moment of every day, every choice you make, no matter how seemingly unrelated to "religion", is a part of that growing tree of faith within you.

And that's what St. Peter is on about in our Epistle reading. "By [God's] great mercy," he says, "we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". We haven't simply been transferred from one state to another. We've been "born anew", and it's a "living hope". They're words of becoming and growing. We've been transferred to a new life and a new ability to grow.

And we look forward to the fullness of that growth. Our "living hope" is for "an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading". It seems that, like the tree, our end is dynamic. Our hope really is a "living" one. But unlike the tree, it never stops. The tree will finally reach its full growth, and then it will die. But we don't. At least not the part of us that is still growing.

In one sense, we will eventually arrive at our inheritance in Christ. We will be with him. But in another sense, we will never completely arrive. Even in the Beatific Vision, there will be growth. There will be no boring, static experience of the presence of God. The presence of God will be exciting and dynamic. We are so far below it that we couldn't possibly see how all this will be. But in the presence of God there will be eternal expanses of exploration and growth and progress. How could it be otherwise, when we have already said that where there is no growth, there is no life? God *is* life. And we will have grown up when we can look forward to change and growth in the presence of God forever.