

I remember some years back being in Barcelona with my family and we were sitting one evening watching a light display in some fountains. As the water rose in the fountain so the light was projected into the water and as the music played the colours changed. It was fascinating. At one point my daughter Anna who was sitting next to me said, "try my glasses". I put her glasses on and the difference was amazing. Suddenly I could see the individual jets of water and almost each drop. "Is that what everyone else is seeing?" I asked. I realised I needed to get some glasses to help my long distance sight. The glasses changed a blur into clear vision.

Being able to see clearly is important. But being able to understand what we see is even more important.

I quite enjoy those pictures where you can actually see two different things. You know what I mean there's the one where you can see either a young woman or an old woman. Such things are just a bit of fun but sometimes it is important that you understand what you see.

Recently there was the case where Swansea Council wanted a sign saying "no entry for goods vehicles. Residential site only" translating into Welsh. So they sent it by e-mail to a translator. The reply came back, "I am not in the office at the moment. Send any work to be translated." But of course it was in Welsh and so that is what they put on the sign.

Understanding what you see is important and while that is a humorous example clearly in some situations not being able to understand what you see could be more serious.

In our passage for this Easter Sunday we have the issue of understanding what you see.

The account is familiar to us I'm sure, but nonetheless let's open our Bibles at John 20:1.

Here we read that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb where they had laid Jesus very early in the morning and she saw. What did she see? We are told she saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance to the tomb. We are not told that she looked into the tomb. It was early in the morning so it might still have been a bit dark and so seeing in the tomb might not have been easy. But she saw the stone was gone and then she interpreted that, v2 into the claim that the body of Jesus had been taken. It may have been a logical assumption. The practice of grave robbing may have been prevalent I don't know. But that was what she thought about what she saw.

When the disciples heard this v3 they started running to the tomb. Peter when he got there v6 went into the tomb and he saw the strips of cloth that had been round the body of Jesus. He saw the trappings of death but we are not told what he made of it.

But then, v8, the other disciple, whom I presume is John, went into the tomb and he saw and believed.

Now reading that raises in my mind a number of questions. The first is what did he see that caused him to believe and then out of that why did he believe and finally what did he believe.

I think these are important questions because what we see when it comes to the resurrection can be key as to whether we believe or not.

•1. What did John see?

Well basically he saw nothing. He saw emptiness. He saw no body. For John it was what he didn't see that was important. He went to the tomb where he expected to see the body of Jesus and there was no body. v5 he had looked in at the strips of cloth so he saw the grave clothes but he didn't see the body that ought to have been there in the grave clothes. He saw and he believed.

•2. Why did John believe?

Well because of what he saw but of course that isn't the end of it. The point of difference between John and Peter and Mary was that John understood what he was seeing. Mary's immediate presumption was that the body had been stolen. Peter seems dazed and unable to make sense of what he was seeing but John saw and understood.

The other day I typed "saw and believed" into Google it came up with 1,560,000 results in 0.17 seconds. Now I don't actually need to know either piece of information and certainly not how fast they can do it. However they want to tell me how quickly they can compute things so I stick with them. I think what we have here is John able to compute things quickly. Why he believed is not down just to what he saw but the fact that he was able to place that alongside other things and come to the conclusion that Jesus had risen.

He saw the empty tomb and that along with what he had heard from Jesus in terms of Jesus saying he would die and rise again and along with what he had seen when Jesus raised Lazarus, when he raised Jairus' daughter all these things together caused John to believe.

•3. What did he believe?

Well if we look in the passage we are not told what he believed. It is as if John expects the reader to know what it is that he believed about Jesus. Indeed we should because the very first verse of the gospel tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Then he sums it up for us at the end of the gospel, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31) John saw the empty tomb and finally it all became crystal clear and he knew that Jesus was God and that he had risen. The empty tomb was the final piece in the jigsaw and when John saw it the picture became clear and he believed that Jesus was God and that he had risen again.

He saw the evidence and he believed.

•4. The results of the resurrection

For John and eventually the other disciples when the penny dropped for them was quite clearly faith. What Jesus had said he would do he did and if he was true in this huge way then surely they could trust him to be true in hundreds of smaller things.

The second result was that they told others about him. That's not surprising is it when something as amazing as this has happened.

•5. What does it say to us

First of all it says have a good look at the evidence as John did.

There may be some here this morning who are not sure that Jesus rose from the dead or not sure that he is God. If that is so then let me ask you to look at the evidence.

The empty tomb is just one piece of evidence and I know that many ideas have been suggested as to why the tomb was empty.

Some suggest the women had got it right and the body had been stolen but the surely those who had the body only needed to show it and disprove the resurrection.

Some suggest he hadn't actually died just swooned. But if that was so it is hard to imagine after all he had been through he was able to move this huge stone. Tertullian came up with the idea that a gardener moved the body to protect his lettuces from the spectators (Tertullian *De Spectaculis*, p. 30). But none of these and many other ideas for the empty tomb really stand up. But the empty tomb, important as it was for John is only one part of the evidence for belief that Jesus rose again.

His resurrection appearances are a major factor for many. If we carry on in John's account we read, v12, Mary saw two angels and still didn't compute what was going on. Then v14 she saw Jesus and didn't realise it was him, thinking he was a gardener. Finally when he spoke she did realise and then was able to testify to the disciples, v18 "I have seen the Lord". So over the next forty days did many others who bore testimony to the fact that they had seen the risen Jesus and their faith in him as the risen Son of God was based upon what they saw.

The existence and growth of the church. From the point of his resurrection the church began to grow and especially so after the day of Pentecost. If the resurrection hadn't happened I suppose a kind of 'memorial society' might have arisen to commemorate the death of a much-loved teacher, but there certainly would not have been a Church meeting daily to celebrate the breaking of bread 'with glad and generous hearts' (Acts 2: 46). The very existence of the Church witnesses to the fact of the resurrection.

The Christian experience points to the resurrection. Countless millions of people down the ages have experienced the risen Jesus Christ. They consist of people of every colour, race, tribe, continent and nationality. They come from different economic, social and intellectual backgrounds. Yet they all unite in a common experience of the risen Jesus Christ. Wilson Carlisle, who was head of the Church Army in this country, was preaching at Hyde Park Corner. He was saying, 'Jesus Christ is alive today.' One of the hecklers shouted out to him, 'How do you know?' Wilson Carlisle replied, 'Because I was speaking to him for half an hour this morning!'

Look at the evidence. If you have never done that let me encourage you to. There are some leaflets explaining Easter available in the welcome area.

Secondly the resurrection encourages us to accept and trust Jesus because the risen one is God. He said he would rise he did and he can be trusted. The resurrection moves us towards faith in Jesus as God. As I said earlier Jesus told the disciples he would rise and if he was true in this huge way then surely we can trust him to be true in hundreds of smaller things of our daily lives, which brings us to say that

Thirdly the resurrection is about life. Jesus who was dead rose again he was alive and through him we have life. We have life with God now and into eternity. It is about sharing our life with God in the here and now and finally in eternity. I remember some years back I used to do Bible study with a guy who had just come to faith. He was just an ordinary guy who worked in a factory. One day as we were talking he said, "lan it is amazing. Since I became a Christian even my bus ride to work is different. As I sit on the top deck of the bus and look out the world seems different. The flowers have more colour the grass is a deeper green."

Through the resurrection we have the life of God in us which affects the way we live now. We live life with God, life, as Jesus described it, in all its fullness. So live God's life.

Finally the resurrection is something to share with others.

Have you come across 'twitter'? It appears to be a website where people post what they have been or are about to do. So when Stephen Fry got stuck in a lift everyone knew because he posted it on twitter. Now in a sense I suppose people might be interested in what he has done but what Joe Bloggs had for his lunch? If people think that others may be interested in such trivia how much more important is the sharing of the resurrection of Jesus? One of my prayers is that God will strengthen us to share the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus with those around us.

John saw and believed that Jesus had risen. May God remove the cataracts of doubt from our eyes and give us the lens of faith that we too may see and believe. Then believing may we walk in trust with Jesus living his life and share this good news with others.