

Well, it's a great pleasure to welcome today the Reverend or Canon Gwynn Lynch with us today, Canon to the Ordinary in the diocese, who will be preaching for us in a couple of weeks' time when I'm back in England. The only trouble with having diocesan and dignitaries in the congregation is that Gwynn knows that I've changed the gospel reading for today because we have a custom (well, it's my custom) here at St. James. Today is for some reason in the Episcopal calendar, Good Shepherd Sunday. I have no problem with that, but I don't like the fact it comes on the fourth Sunday of Easter. As far as I'm concerned, this is the Easter season, and I want to be talking about the resurrection and not Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Hallelujah, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

I was very interested this week. I'd gone down a bit of a rabbit hole on the internet as one does, and I came across a team from MIT who spent years coordinating telescopes all over the world to try and take a photograph of what was thought to be unseeable, namely a black hole. And there was great excitement, I discovered, because they'd actually been able to take a photograph of a black hole and it looked exactly like Einstein and Hawking and all the others had suggested that it would look, even when they couldn't see it. Shep Doleman, an astronomer, said this. "We have seen what we thought was unseeable. It is a one-way portal to eternity." And the Harvard physicist Peter Galison said this. "There is now a wonderful open-ended sense of being able to see something instead of merely accumulating statistical evidence."

And I was interested to see that, whilst I was continuing to ponder this week, the resurrection story. I think the gospel that we heard just now is a story about looking and seeing. It's a story with several references to looking. The first people to look in the gospel are a group of women. On the first day of the week, the women took spices to Jesus's tomb, and when they got there, they found the stone in front of the tomb was rolled away. They went in, but they didn't find the body. I'm reminded of one of my great heroes, Winnie the Pooh, who we're told in one of the books that he

went looking for Piglet and he went to his house and the more he looked in, the more Piglet wasn't there. That's what's happening to the women as they looked into the tomb here. The resurrection story begins with people looking and not finding.

At the heart of the story is an empty tomb. It's about absence, not about presence. The angels say to the women, "He is not here." That's the message that they get. There's a story of a psychiatrist, who, several decades ago, had an experiment where he got two young boys. He put one in a room full of toys and he put the other one in a room full of manure, and he went back a couple of hours later and the first boy was crying. He said, "Why are you crying?" He said, "Well, I can't find my favorite toy." So he went to the other boy. To his surprise, he found him running around the room excited. He said, "Why are you so excited?" He said, "I'm looking for the pony." He said, "What pony?" He said, "Well, there's so much manure in here, there must be a pony somewhere." Looking and seeing are not the same.

I'll be back in England in a few weeks' time for our daughter's wedding, which we're looking forward to. She's marrying a very nice young man called Sam. And Sam came out to San Diego a few years ago when there was a super bloom going on, so we thought, "Well, we'll take him to the desert, show him the wonders of our region." Well, it soon became apparent that Sam was distinctly underwhelmed by the desert. He was looking at the flowers and not recognizing the wonder of what he was seeing. I think he thought he was walking through some sort of bucolic English meadow where, of course, there'd be wildflowers, and we had to say to him, "Sam, you're not in the Cotswolds. You're in the Anza-Borrego Desert. The clue is in the name. It's the desert and it's full of flowers." He still didn't quite get it. And many of us, we can look, but we don't necessarily see.

Going back to our gospel story. The second reference to looking is made by the angels, whose appearance so terrified the women. "Why do you look for the living amongst the dead?" They said, "He's not here but has risen." The women were

looking for the risen Jesus in the wrong place, and we've all done that. That story of the first Easter, there are no whoops of delight. There are no hallelujahs on that first Easter day. The women don't see Jesus. They can't find him, and when they went to the disciples to tell them what the angel had told them, no one believed them. It seemed to them to be an idle tale. And most of us, like the disciples, don't come to faith in a flash of lightning. Coming to faith is often, but not always, but often, something that takes time to develop. We often begin by looking in the wrong place, which is one of the reasons it can take time to develop. The resurrection faith is difficult. It's challenging. It's not easy to comprehend or to understand. Even the disciples who'd heard from the lips of Jesus, that promise of resurrection, didn't believe it at first. They had their doubts.

The resurrection faith will always come with an element of doubt. I can't prove to you that the resurrection occurred that first Easter morning, but I can only share with you along with millions of Christians around the world gathering on this Sunday, the day of resurrection, something of an encounter that I have had with the risen Jesus. I can't prove anything. I can simply share experience. The book of Hebrews reminds us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. There are no neat and tidy answers when it comes to our resurrection faith. The resurrection leaves many questions unanswered. The resurrection faith came slowly to the disciples, but when it came, it changed everything. They had a conviction of things not seen.

The last person to go looking, in the reading, is St. Peter. He was one of the disciples who'd heard the women's story and dismissed it as an idle tale, but he must have at least been intrigued because he makes his own way to the tomb. Stooping in and looking in, he saw the linen lying in the tomb by themselves, and then it said he went home amazed. What he saw, looking in the tomb, wasn't in and of itself particularly amazing or miraculous. It was an empty tomb with linen, but he knew what it represented. He knew that the discarded grave

clothes showed that Jesus was alive. He was starting to see the significance of what had happened. He wasn't just looking; he was seeing the significance of what lay in front of him and what he was looking at. He was beginning to dare to believe that it was true, that Jesus, as he had promised, had been raised to new life and broken the power of death. By his resurrection, he defeated death, our worst enemy, and created a whole new world order, where before there was death and despair, now there was grounds for hope.

As St. Paul writes, "Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. The first fruits of those who have died." Peter's eyes were opened, and he could see. He came to be filled with hope as he met the risen Jesus and was filled with the power of His Holy Spirit. To quote that Harvard physicist again, "There was, for Peter, a wonderful, open-ended sense of being able to see something. He might not have understood what he was seeing, but he could see the wonder of Jesus being raised from the dead." If he'd gone to MIT, Peter might have said that first Easter morning as he looked in the empty tomb, that he was seeing a one-way portal to eternity.

Hallelujah, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed.
Hallelujah!