

As I started to prepare this sermon this week, the news was dominated by that discovery of a black hole, that the news of which was released. And it turned out that for several years a team coordinated from MIT had got telescopes around the world looking into space and they've compiled a photograph of what many people had presumed was un-seeable, black holes. And there was great excitement, the photograph released looked just like the kind of black holes that Hawking and Einstein and all those people said they'd look. It looked right.

Shep Doeleman, an astronomer, said this, "We have seen what we thought was un-seeable. It's a portal to eternity." The Harvard physicist, Peter Galatin, said, "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 read all this while thinking about our resurrection story that we celebrate today. It made me think that the story that we're thinking about is also a story about looking and seeing. It's a story with several references to looking.

The first people to look are a group of women. On the first day of the week, the women took spices to Jesus' tomb to embalm him. When they got there, they found the stone rolled away. And when they went into the tomb, they did not find the body. It reminds me of when Winnie the Pooh went to Piglet's house. Well, not in every respect, but when Winnie the Pooh went to see Piglet, some of you will know, he opened the door, he looked in, and Piglet wasn't there. And the more he looked, the more he wasn't there.

The resurrection story begins with people looking and not finding. At the heart of the story is an empty tomb. It's an absence, not a presence. The angels say to the women, "He is not here." There's a story told about a psychiatrist who conducted an experiment on two young boys. He put the first boy in a room full of toys. He put the other boy in a room full of manure. He came back an hour later, he found the first boy sitting amongst the toys crying. Saying, "They haven't got my favorite toy!" He went to the other boy and he found him running around excitedly. He said, "Why are you so excited?" He said, "I'm looking for the pony." He said, "The pony?" He said, "Yes, there's so much manure in here, there must be a pony somewhere."

Looking and seeing are not the same. My daughter, Miriam, is with us at the moment from London. And the first week she was here, she brought her boyfriend, Sam, who was very nice, he passed all the tests. And Sam has never been to the States before, so we thought we'd show him all the sights. So we took a trip out to Borrego Springs to see the amazing wildflowers that were there this year.

We were walking through a desert super bloom and Sam seem distinctly underwhelmed. He was looking at the flowers, but not recognizing the wonder of what he was seeing. I think he thought he was out walking in some bucolic English meadow. We said, "Sam, you're not in the Cotswold now, you're in Anza-Borrego desert, the clue is in the name." It's amazing to find flowers in the desert.

Many look but fail to see.

Going back to our Gospel story, the second reference to looking is made by the angels, whose appearance so terrified the women. They said to the women, "Why do you look for the living amongst the dead? He is not here but has risen." The women were looking in the wrong place. And we've all done this, and it's striking that that first resurrection morning, that first Easter day, there was not one whoop of delight. There were no hallelujahs. The women don't see Jesus and they can't find him.

And when they went to the disciples to tell them what the angel had said to them, no one believed them. Their words, it said, seemed to the disciples to be an idle tale. Most of us, like the disciples, don't come to faith in a flash of lightning. The penny doesn't drop straight away, it takes time.

Many of us need time to look in the wrong places. The resurrection faith is difficult, it's challenging. It's not easy to comprehend. Even the disciples who'd heard from the lips of Jesus that he would rise again, didn't believe at first. They had their doubts. And the resurrection faith will always come with an element of doubt. I can't stand here this morning and prove to you that the resurrection occurred, but I can share my faith that it did. And I know why millions of Christians around the world gather like us this morning to worship the one who was raised and now lives amongst us. I share that experience of encountering the risen Christ in my life.

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 the resurrection faith. The resurrection faith leaves many things unanswered. The resurrection faith came slowly to the disciples. But when it came, it changed everything. They had a deep conviction of things not seen.

The last person to go looking in our Gospel reading is St. Peter. He was one of those disciples who'd heard the women's story and dismissed it as an idle tale. But he must have been at least intrigued. Something was bothering him because, we're told, he got up and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the cloths lying by themselves. Then he went home amazed.

What he saw was not actually a particularly amazing sight. Just an empty tomb with some discarded grave clothes. But he was starting to see the significance of what had happened. He wasn't just looking; he was seeing the significance of what he was looking at. He was beginning to dare to believe that it was true. Jesus, as he had promised, had been raised to 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 were grounds for hope.

St. Paul writes, "Jesus has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died." Peter's eyes were opened. 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 the Harvard physicist. There was, for Peter, a wonderful open-ended sense of being able to see something. He might not have understood everything, 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 tomb of Jesus, that he was seeing a one-way portal to eternity.

Hallelujah! The Lord is risen!