

John Gay, Easter Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2025  
Seeing is Believing?

200425 'So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going towards the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.' (John 20:3-9)

There's an old motto that says 'seeing is believing'. I wonder how that applied when Peter and John arrived at the tomb. I say that because, for one thing, it is a very western construct; I would be surprised if anyone from an Eastern tradition would really agree with it.

People from the East held and probably still do hold a different sort of spirituality to those of us from the West, in the main. When it comes to faith, they tend to worry less as to whether they have actually seen something themselves or not. Their tendency is to ask themselves: 'Does this make sense to me; can I believe it?'

So they hear stories and truths through the oral tradition handed down from generation to generation, the same tradition that formed our own Bible, and make their judgement: could such a thing have happened and do I believe the source from which I am hearing this account.

This used to be much more the way people in the West used to think, but since the 'age of enlightenment' and the development of the scientific method, leading to scientific reasoning, the Western intellectual mind tends to demand proof of something, or else that thing will not be believed. So bearing this Eastern view in mind, let us return to our text.

What was it that John and Peter saw when they went into the tomb? First to approach was John. Now the first thing he saw was that the stone had already been removed sufficiently to allow access to the interior. How did that happen? It was no small stone and the women who alerted them to the situation would not have been strong enough to move it on their own. Besides, there had been a guard there all night, he would not have moved it for them.

Then 'stooping to look in, John saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in.' He could see the cloths, but not the body. Now there were two possibilities, either the body had been undressed and moved further into the tomb, or the body had been removed altogether. Peter, when he enters the tomb dispels the first idea, there was no body to be found. So what happened to the body? Could it have been stolen?

The trouble with the theory of robbers taking the body away, is which robber, with any sense would hang around a crime scene long enough to fold the cloths so carefully and to place them and the sweatband at such a deliberate distance from each other? Any lady would tell you that it was inconceivable that a male robber would have been capable of folding the cloths at all! No, a robber would have picked up body and all and got out of there, the cloths could be dealt with later. The fear of being caught would have called for hurried work and surely, the cloths would have laid any old how as they fell. The cloths would have fallen the same if it was some kind of 'Hey Presto' conjuring trick. So if it wasn't robbery, nor a magic trick then what?

'Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.'

John saw plain enough, but what did he believe? He believed that Jesus was risen from the dead, because nothing else would make sense. This was the Eastern mind at work. He didn't know how

it happened, or where Jesus was now, but nothing else made any reasonable sense. Of course, had he understood the references to the resurrection in Old Testament scripture (Ps. 16:10-11; 110:1,4; 118:22-24; Is 53:11-12), and what Jesus had told them before he died, he would have worked it out straight away; indeed he might have run to the tomb expecting to see it empty.

But is this all reasonable? I would say yes, it is, simply because the idea of 'seeing is believing' only works sometimes in certain circumstances. For instance, who sees the bug that makes them ill? No-one, and yet if one catches it, one knows and believes one has it. If we could see it, we would surely try to avoid it, but we can't evidence it until we are laid up in bed! And then there are affairs of the heart. If someone develops a fondness for someone else, we might see plenty of evidence that fondness being reciprocated. But we cannot depend on observation alone to believe that love, for we may be reading signals ourselves, that the other person would regard as merely a friendly nature. We have to sense the deeper love from the other person, but it is not a physical thing you can see with your eyes. One needs the heart of faith.

This is where the Western 'enlightened' mind falls down, because there are mysteries out there yet to be discovered and unfolded of which we know nothing, and will know nothing until they are revealed. The thing about faith is the principle to which the writer to the Hebrews alludes in ch.11:1-2:

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.'

In that statement lies the joy of the mystery of Easter! It matters less how Jesus was risen; it matters more that he was risen at all. To that the disciples and Jesus' entourage, along with many others who saw him walk the earth again before his ascension into heaven would attest.

We will never get to heaven by trying to find the way on our own. We need the heart of faith, that we will get there otherwise we will become lost as sure as eggs are eggs. And we need someone to bring us there to heaven, safely, through all the joys and trials of life. Do you know someone who could do that? Both Peter and John did.