

Mark 8.22–29a

‘Do you see?’


St Editha’s Amington

Easter Sunday 1 April 2018

A hoax?

On 1 April 1957 the BBC’s flagship news programme *Panorama* showed the following video:  *The Swiss Spaghetti Harvest*.

I particularly enjoyed the bit about the, ‘virtual elimination of the dreaded spaghetti weevil’! Huge numbers of viewers were taken in, even contacting the BBC to ask how they might procure one of these ‘spaghetti trees’. The corporation’s response was, ‘place a sprig of spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best’!

In April 1934, American newspapers printed a photograph of a man flying through the air by means of a device powered only by the breath from his lungs . Accompanying articles excitedly described this miraculous new invention. The man blew into a box on his chest, which activated rotors that created a powerful suction effect, lifting him aloft. Skis on his feet served as landing gear, and a tail fin allowed him to steer.

It made its way to America thanks to Hearst's International News Photo agency which not only fell for the hoax but also distributed it to all its U.S. subscribers.¹

Today is, of course, both Easter Sunday *and* April Fool's Day.

But Easter is no hoax. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the fact that his tomb was empty three days later, are two of the most easily proved historical facts there are.

So the question for us today isn't *whether* the tomb was empty; the question is *why*?

‘Do you see?’

Last week Ray cleverly pre-empted my sermon today **§**. Jesus' disciples had got confused about some bread, and the question was – will they *ever* understand? Will they ever *see*?

This bit of Mark comes exactly in the middle of his account of Jesus' life and death (and life again). It is quite literally the pivotal moment – in the first half of Mark Jesus' ministry is expanding and growing out of Galilee, through Israel and the surrounding regions. In the second half, Jesus circles ever nearer to Jerusalem and the awful death that awaits him there.

This is the moment it all changes, and it all hinges around this one, simple question **ƒ**:

‘Do you see?’ (23)

In **Bethsaida** Jesus met **a blind man** – Jesus was famous for his healing, so the man’s friends **begged Jesus to touch him** (22). Wouldn’t you? So Jesus **led** the man **outside the village**, **spat on the man’s eyes** and **asked, ‘Do you see anything?’** (23).

It’s a little gross, but we’ll let that pass.

The interesting thing is that *it didn’t work*. Or rather, it didn’t work *completely*: **‘I see people,’** the man said, **‘they look like trees walking around’** (24).

Was Jesus losing his touch? Or was he simply inventing Ents (!)?

Jesus tried again – this time without the spit: **once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly** (25).

Phew, I was starting to worry there.

Had Jesus not had a good night’s sleep or something? Was he distracted? Perhaps he was hangry – that tends to stop me doing things properly!

Or, perhaps it wasn't a mistake at all.

Perhaps Jesus was teaching us that a person can 'see', without *really* being able to *see*: the first time the man could **see people**, but they looked like **trees**; he could 'see', but he couldn't really *see*.

After Jesus' second attempt Mark tells us three times, to make sure we know it's important ¶ (25):

- ¶ **his eyes were opened**
- ¶ **his sight was restored**
- ¶ **he saw everything clearly**

¶ *now* the man could really *see*.

OK Mark, we get it – but why would Jesus want to teach us this? Why would Mark want to tell us this? Do you see?

The clue is in the verses either side of this miracle.

Last week, we saw how the disciples *really* didn't understand what Jesus was on about. The conversation ends with an exasperated Jesus asking (21), **'Do you still not understand?'**

Immediately after this miracle Jesus asks his disciples (27), **'Who do people say I am?'** He wasn't acting like a z-list celebrity yelling at an unimpressed cab driver, 'Don't you know who I am?' ¶

For some time now, Jesus had been feeding and teaching the crowds, healing the sick, calming storms. He wanted to know if anyone – *anyone* – understood who he was; he wanted to know if anyone could *see*.

The disciples' answer was, effectively, 'No.'

'Some say John the Baptist,' they replied (28), **'others say Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets.'**

People knew Jesus was special – that was obvious – but they had no clue who he really was. They had seen him perform miracles, feed thousands, teach with authority, cast out demons – they had seen all that, but they couldn't really *see*.

They were exactly like the blind man who said he could (24), **'See people; they look like trees walking around.'**

It is possible to 'see' Jesus, without really *seeing* – without really seeing *who he really is*. That is why this whole series on Mark – we are now in week 21 – is called, 'Seeing Jesus'. This is why Mark wrote his gospel – he wants us not only to 'see', but to *see* Jesus.

And that's why Jesus' next question is so important: ¶ **'What about you?'** Jesus asked (29), ¶ **'Who do you say I am?'**

You'll have to wait until September to find out what happens next – or you could read it for yourself I guess! This morning I'd like to hear Jesus ask that question to us, to you: who *do* you say Jesus is?

Back in September I asked everyone who came to church to fill in a slip of paper asking that very question. I have printed off a summary of every answer given by two or more people – take a look at the end of the service.

Who do *you* say Jesus is?

If you think he was special, someone to look up to, a good example, a wonderful teacher, a kind and compassionate man –

Jesus *was* all those things – but they don't result in an empty tomb.

You see Jesus *is* also much, *much* more. He is God's own and only Son, fully God and fully human, like you in every way, except without sin. He died, but unlike everyone else who died before or since, *he is not dead any more*: he is alive!

Hence the Easter greeting: Alleluia, Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed, alleluia!).

The tomb was empty because *Jesus is who he said he was*: God's Son, the Saviour of the world, and death could not hold him.

And there's more – Jesus ascended into heaven where he rules as King – as his kingdom comes here on earth. You and I can be part of that, not as slaves and servants, but sons and daughters, as children and heirs, adopted into his family.

Friends to say Jesus is a great guy, a fine teacher and a good example is like saying people look like trees. If that's you, then please, ask Jesus to *open your eyes*, like he opened the eyes of the blind man, so you can *see*.

Whether you *do* know Jesus, whether you *sort of* know Jesus, or whether you've never really met him before – this is the question we each need to answer for ourselves.

And the prayer that goes with it is the prayer of the blind man: 'Jesus, please open my eyes, and help me *see*.'

Friends, Easter is no hoax, but the greatest news you will ever hear: Jesus Christ is risen. May he open our eyes to see him today.

¹ See <http://hoaxes.org/aprilfool/P10>.