

April 21, 2019
Resurrection of the Lord
Trinity United Methodist Church
Rev. Steven W. Manskar

You probably saw, or heard about, the first image of a black hole that was revealed to the public a couple weeks ago. The more I read and thought about this incredible accomplishment, the more I am amazed by what the scientists achieved. The black hole image was released to the public near the end of Lent, just before Holy Week, when I was thinking about Jesus' death and resurrection.

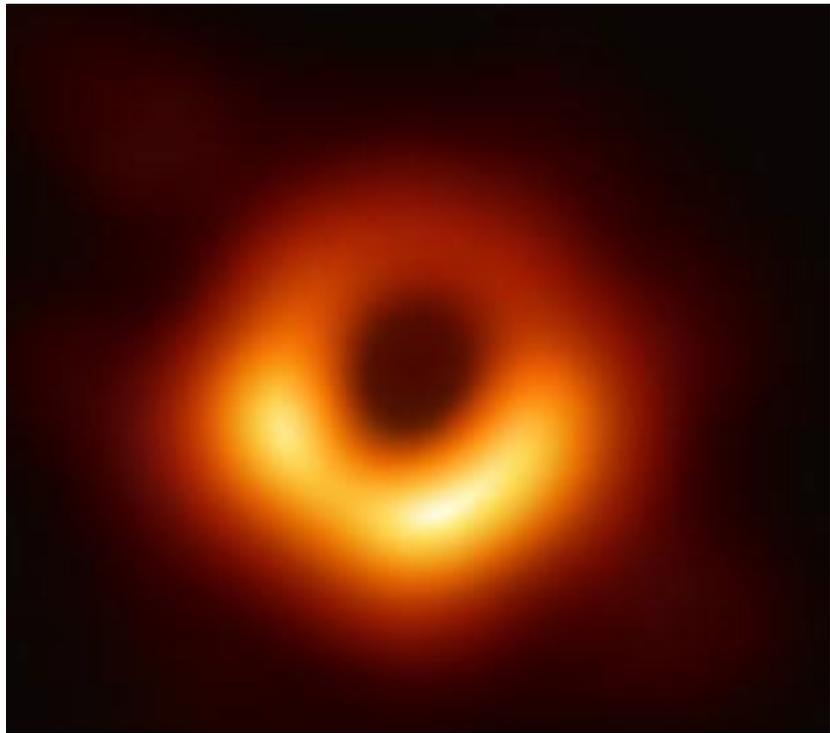
It dawned on me the God who made the universe, including that black hole, became one of us in the man from Nazareth, Jesus. Think about it: that black hole is in a galaxy 55 billion light years away from planet Earth. The God who made black holes, galaxies, planets, moons, and stars also made you and me. That God chose to become one of us on a tiny planet in a corner of the Milky Way galaxy.

The God of the Universe chose Abraham and Sarah. An old and childless couple. God chose them and promised they would become parents to generations of people. And, in spite of their advanced years, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

The God who made the universe appeared in a burning bush to an exiled Hebrew shepherd named Moses. God spoke to Moses: "I have observed the misery of my people (the descendants of Abraham and Sarah) who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:7-8). God chose to be the God of an enslaved people and led them from slavery to freedom in their own land.

God gave Moses the law to guide their life of freedom. The purpose of the law was to reveal to the world what true freedom looks like. The people were set free and blessed by God to be a blessing to the world. The law God gave is summarized by two great commandments: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Scripture tells us the people turned away from God and God's law. They followed other gods. Their disobedience led them to oppress the poor, the widows, orphans, refugees, and



foreigners. They put their own interests ahead of God's and didn't listen to the prophets God sent to them. They turned away from God's way of forgiveness, righteousness, and justice.

When the time was right, the God of the Universe entered this world in a new way through Mary, a poor, unmarried, Jewish girl from a dusty backwater at the edge of the Roman Empire called Nazareth (see John 1:46). Mary gave birth to Jesus.

“The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish” (John 1:14, *The Message*).

She and Joseph the carpenter raised him as their son. Jesus, the maker of the universe, learned to make a living as a carpenter. He lived among his people, the Jews, who were conquered and oppressed by the Roman Empire. He learned the Scriptures from the rabbis in the synagogue and in the Jerusalem Temple.

When the time was right Jesus left home. He was baptized by John in the Jordan. When he came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon him and he heard a voice say, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness devoted to fasting and prayer. The Holy Spirit helped him understand who he is and what he was to do with his life.

Jesus emerged from the wilderness and went home to Nazareth. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue where he read the Scripture that described his mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV).

He spent the rest of his life preaching the good news of repentance, forgiveness of sin, and the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus' life and ministry are summarized in the Great Thanksgiving when we pray: “He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.”

Jesus' preaching and identification with the Kingdom of God caught the attention of the Roman authorities. They worked with religious leaders who wanted to maintain their power and privilege. They conspired together to arrest and try Jesus on trumped up charges. Jesus was condemned as a common criminal and enemy of the state. He was condemned to be crucified.

Crucifixion was a form of execution reserved for criminals and political trouble-makers. It was a terrible, humiliating way to die. And that was the point. The message sent was: if you question the authority and power of the Empire, and its' religious collaborators, you will get the same.

Jesus, the Lord of the Universe, did not resist when he was arrested and unjustly tried. He did not strike back when the soldiers beat and mocked him. While dying on the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus, the Lord of planets, stars, galaxies, and black holes, turns upside-down what we are taught about power and authority. The world tells you if someone hits you, you hit back harder. Jesus said, "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matthew 5:39). Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45a).

On the cross Jesus took all the world's sin upon himself. Your sins, my sins, all the sins of the entire world; past, present, and future were put to death in Jesus' body hanging on the cross. On the cross Jesus Christ destroyed the power of sin with the power of forgiveness. Charles Wesley describes what Jesus did when he wrote:

He left his Father's throne above
(so free, so infinite his grace!),
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

("And Can It Be That I Should Gain", UMH 363)

All sin is forgiven. Sin no longer has power over you or me. Because we are forgiven, we are free to repent, to turn away from sin, self-centered, disordered love, and turn toward the good life God wants for us.

The resurrection of Jesus defeated the power of death. The Lord of the Universe revealed that Love is more powerful than death. Because Christ is risen, sin and death no longer reign and rule this world. Their power is replaced by the power of God, which is the power of love; self-giving, self-emptying love.

Because Christ is risen from the dead, God gives us the grace we need to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin.

Because Christ is risen, God the maker and Lord of the Universe, gives us freedom and power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

Because Christ is risen, we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as Lord, in union with the church which Christ opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

Because Christ is risen, we know God is Love. God loves you and me, and all people. Because Christ is risen and God loves us we serve as Christ's representatives in the world.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Amen.