

# Sermons at Saint Paul's

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

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*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

This is the beginning of the fourth week of the Easter season. And if you are like me, the sheer majesty of our celebration has faded a bit. The fantastic flowers and music, the glorious liturgy and the sense of joy have dimmed. It is hard to sustain those memories in the face of an election that already feels as though it has been going on forever, the reality of tax deadlines and pressing family and community issues.

But we Christians need to keep vividly in our minds what Easter really means! We need to be alive to our living Christ, so that we may respond when he asks us to walk with him through our needy world.

Long, long ago – about 1.3 billion years ago – and far, far away – so far that we could not hope to see it -- two enormous black holes collided and merged. Last February, astrophysicists announced that through computer simulations and sound simulations, they had a credible record of the collision. The merging of those two huge energy structures into a single black hole resulted in a rippling of space-time. It made a “gravitational wave” so huge that the new LIGO Observatory in Louisiana was able to detect and record it as it rolled past our planet and onward through the cosmos.

By analogy, that is what Easter is about – the collision of two energy structures, and an amazing outcome. If Jesus' death on the cross was proof of the colliding of two powerful legal systems (the Roman and the Judaic) and their failure to protect him, then the Resurrection may be seen as the collision and merging in Jesus of God and man. That first Easter was a stunning, once in a planetary history, kind of event – the triumph of a living God over death and hatred and injustice in the body of a human. The triumph of Love!

Now I am not suggesting that Love and black holes have a lot in common from human perspective (because we really are too ignorant to explain either very well); but the collision of implacable forces is something we do have some experience with. Just as

the two black holes created a gravitational wave so huge that 1.3 billion years later it moved through the space and time in which our earth rests, so the “wave” of Jesus’ resurrection has rolled through human history for more than 2,000 years.

Think about it: what does Jesus’ resurrection tell us about the living nature of God’s love for us and all creation? On Palm Sunday I said: “many people at many times in their lives reject Jesus, a Jesus they think they know. But the Jesus you reject is the one you have fixated on, a static figure....And then by the grace of God, you discover that Jesus is alive, and wants you to share in his love.”

Each of our lessons today bears testimony to that process. Peter did not restore Tabitha’s life; he never thought he could do that. Peter did not pray to the dead man on the cross. He prayed to the living Jesus, whom he had seen alive and transformed into the Christ by his resurrection. He prayed to the living Jesus to restore life to this woman, and God did.

The lesson from Revelation speaks of what will happen after the black holes of Rome and Babylon/Assyria (the energy structures of that time) have collided and merged, and the people of God who have come through that ordeal will emerge into a world ruled – they hope – by the living Christ. The language of prophecy is hard for us to understand, but the process is one we know. (I rather imagine that Einstein was equally incomprehensible to the mathematicians and physicists of his time, when he talked about gravity waves across a space-time continuum!)

In the passage from John’s gospel that we heard this morning, Jesus tries to tell his questioners a simple truth: “The Father and I are one.” But few, looking at Jesus the man, could fathom what would happen on the Cross and in the tomb. Bishop Steven Charleston said in his book, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*, “On the Cross Jesus becomes a Two-Spirit Messiah.” Jesus becomes all humanity, a living Christ, in whom all prophecies are fulfilled and who is one with all creation. After the Resurrection, God walks the earth in human form, now less disguised than before it. No wonder Jesus seemed to wink in and out of sight, going where merely human eyes could not see him!

Does it surprise you that the first Jesus-followers had a palpable sense that Jesus was alive, and present whether seen or unseen by their limited vision?

We, with our human limitations, and twenty more centuries of human experience, are too quick to reject the Jesus we see in icons, paintings and sculptures. We are too hasty to debunk the static Jesus we have imagined we know, with words of science or mathematical analysis.

It takes, perhaps, the collision of two black holes from some place beyond our planetary vision, which happened more than a billion years ago, to get an accurate perspective on the painful limitations of our science and mathematics. We know so little.

Einstein, our secular prophet, said a century ago that we would one day discover that gravitational waves exist in the time-space fabric of our universe. One hundred years later, physicists and astronomers have finally constructed a device that can register what has been passing Earth in space and time, and devised ways to simulate those events with computer-produced sound and color. They confidently expect that the LIGO Observatory will begin to reveal the gravitational waves from other such occurrences. They even dream of recording and interpreting waves from the “Big Bang,” the theorized powerful explosion of energy and matter (which Einstein said were the same thing) that started the universe in which we live.

Hear what I just said. We have just figured out how to notice and record what has been going on around us for billions of years.

What if our hearts and souls can become more finely tuned, so that we can see the love of God, the living Jesus, going there among us? What if we can begin to notice and record the living Jesus? Each one of us is invited to see Jesus, alive and going before us. He tried to tell us where to find him. We might see him, walking through refugee camps and detention centers, sitting with those in captivity and prison, consoling the sick, the hungry and the thirsty. We can talk to this Jesus, and listen for his voice in our hearts.

This is the “Two Spirit Messiah” speaking. This is the living Christ, who after his Resurrection now invites us to follow him into Easter’s promise. Will you accept?

*Amen.*