

A few weeks ago when the pastors were away, the Diaconate led the worship service. Richard Fiske, Diaconate chair, volunteered to offer the message. We are so glad he did. Here it is...

The Event Horizon

Recently, I was viewing online the spectacular, first-ever photos of a black hole, located 55 million light years away in the galaxy named Messier 87. A black hole is an object of extraordinary density which results from the collapse of a star. Because no matter and no light can escape its immense gravitational power, a black hole can be known only indirectly by its effects on the surrounding universe. Massive black holes are thought to be at the center of all galaxies, including our own Milky Way. Also, revolving around the black hole is a ring of inconceivably hot matter, which emits intense radiation. The radiant point at which everything passes forever beyond this emission ring and into the black hole is called "*the event horizon*". I am fascinated by this sighting of the black hole, unimaginably dense and powerful, with its blazing instant of no return. I wish that I could command the physics, as developed by Albert Einstein, which predicted these occurrences. Yet, such photos challenge our faith. *What if the universe were just energy and matter? What of person? What of moral obligation? What of God?*

In responding to these questions, let us assume *the mind of faith*, the mind of faith which is implicit in sacred scripture, the mind of the faith which is evident in the lives of wise Christians, who have come before us. In the 5th century, St. Augustine wrote, "*Believe, that you may understand.*" I think that Augustine would have agreed

that God is not the end point of scientific verification. God is the beginning, the very mother and father of our understanding. *If we begin in gratitude*, our encounter with the stars, the sky, the burgeoning spring is the moment of wonder. *If we begin in compassion*, setting aside thoughts of social status and insistence on control, our encounter with each other discloses the moral imperative of love, even self-sacrificing love. *If we begin our faith journey in humility*, we realize, in the encounter of our loving minds with the mind of another, that mind itself is a real dimension of the universe. God is that real dimension. *God is the Loving Mind who sustains and celebrates the universe as irreducibly wondrous.* God is our assumption by whom we, like Mary near the tomb on Easter morning, may recognize among us the Risen Christ. God is the divine assumption. The Gospel of John proclaims, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*". That is, in becoming incarnate as the Christ, God assumes His/Her own Loving Mind.

I think that this Loving Mind is something like a black hole. God, present everywhere, is the unknowable center, *who is drawing us, irresistibly, to the glory and abundance of His/Her merciful Self.* In 1320, the poet Dante, at the conclusion of his *Divine Comedy*, having affirmed that his eyes had overcome by grace the blinding, encircling illumination of

heaven, wrote,

*"...But already my desire and my will were revolved,
Like a wheel that is evenly moved,
By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars."*

God is recognized at *the event horizon of eternity*, at our intimate, light-filled engagement with compassion, truth, and hope. We should understand that God is not supernatural. As theologian Paul Tillich declared, *God is the ground of being*. God, the irreducible ground of being, is prior to any difference between creator and creation, man and woman, gay and straight, native born and not native born. Also, God is not a supreme being, which means that the moral authority of God rests not in the assertion of divine will, but in the being of God as inexhaustible grace. Within the imponderable expanse of space and time, *God, at once transcendent and immanent, is the Mystery of the Word, the cosmic potentiality of person and of love.*

Faith can be difficult in this secular age. What can life mean, if we are merely the stuff of energy and matter? What can life mean, if our beliefs can be dismissed as mere opinion? Only in faith, can we hear a hymn as the music of adoration; only in the shared language of faith, can we know that the Christ is mystically with us at the communion meal. I think that our challenge is *to keep faith with the mind of faith*; in truth, our weary souls depend upon it. With that, let us now reflect on three moments at *the event horizon of faith*.

First, St. Teresa d'Avila, a 16th century Spanish nun, has been acknowledged as a reformer of the Carmelite order, a

theologian, and an important mystic. Teresa, the mystic, was devoted to the ascension of the soul to God. In her writings, Teresa described, first hand, four stages of mystical experience, culminating in what she called the Devotion of Ecstasy. Teresa is remembered for having died at the moment of an ecstatic vision of the Lord, the meeting with the unknowable God at the instant of overwhelming light. In fact here at First Church, our centering prayer group continues to explore this same meditative aspiration which was known to St. Teresa.

Second, with the burning of Notre Dame cathedral, I am reminded that the French are rightly proud of their formidable church organs and their formidable church organists. In the 20th century, Olivier Messiaen prevailed at the keyboard of Trinity Church in Paris for over 60 years. Messiaen wrote significant works for organ. For him, God was the great, luminous music of the universe. One of Messiaen's works, "*La Nativité du Seigneur*" ("*The Birth of the Lord*"), which has been performed and recorded at Notre Dame, evokes, I think, the coming of the Christ, eternally unfolding throughout the cosmos. I have often thought of this music. Early each working day for 29 years, I would arrive at Penobscot Bay Medical Center, park at a distance, and then approach the hospital, while looking out over the waters of the bay and to the islands beyond. In winter, clouds covered the sky, but revealed, just at the horizon, the emerging sun, an invitation to the landscape of the soul, the life-renewing music, *The Birth of the Lord*.

Third, we can behold in our gospels the

poetic revelation of the unknowable One at the instant of penetrating light. From Matthew 25, as we have heard perhaps many times, “...Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? *And when was it that we saw you sick* or in prison and visited you?...” (Jesus replied), “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it you me.”

This scripture, as well as the entire message, leads us to this poem, which I wrote some years ago.

Nursing

In the morning, I am grateful.

The anticipated dawning
Is a music for the organ,
La Nativité du Seigneur,
So ecstatic and so inward.
Privileged, I shall care for the sick,
Tending with voice, eyes, and the mind.
Though deformed, the woman lying
Here appears beatified. She can
Scarcely move this urgent hand, but
She is holding to her body
Close the image of Teresa,
Lest the day should lose a soul's grasp.

RF

Amen.
May 12, 2019



