

## 19.4.21 - “InCredible” - By Rev. Adam Hange

*“But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”*

-Luke 24:11 NRSV

Of course they didn’t believe them. It *was* impossible...extraordinary... the news defied belief! When Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the Mother of James, and the other women went to the tomb that morning. They came prepared to mourn, to grieve the loss of their teacher, friend, a child. They did not expect what they found...or rather, what they didn’t find... his body. And they did not expect to meet anyone there. But they did. They did not expect that Jesus’ words were to be taken literally. But they were. Something incredible had taken place. And sometimes, incredible things, still take place.

*“We have seen what we thought was unseeable,”* said Sheperd Doeleman, director of the Event Horizon Telescope Collaboration. *“We have seen and taken a picture of a black hole.”* “The massive galaxy, called Messier 87 or M87, is near the Virgo galaxy cluster 55 million light-years from Earth. The supermassive black hole has a mass that is 6.5 billion times that of our sun.”<sup>1</sup> It’s so far away, that seeing it, and capturing it in a photo, is like the equivalent of taking a photo of a penny on the moon, from earth - and it being so clear, and having such detail that you can read the letters “ONE PENNY.” Do you realize, that up until now, almost all we’ve known about black holes has been theory? Albert Einstein theorized that these exist, and how they might work. And yet, our understanding of physics cannot explain exactly what is going on, when you look within the event horizon, the glowing edge, to that place in the center, where gravity is so strong that not even *light* can escape! Now we have the observable data!

The incredible, is now credible - thanks to a young woman named Katie Bouman, and a global collaboration of scientists - linking a global network of radio telescopes together, at just the right time, under just the right circumstances, and

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<sup>1</sup> Strickland, Ashley, “This is the First Photo of a Black Hole,” CNN, April 10, 2019, accessed 4/20/2019 - <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/10/world/black-hole-photo-science/index.html>

crunching an incredible amount of data in just the right way - to produce the first photograph of a black hole.

What we have here is an incredible phenomenon, and the incredible proof of its existence! It defies belief, and yet somehow we believe. Somehow, we find this *credible*. Even though none of us can see it with our naked eye. Even though it defies our understandings of how this universe is supposed to work. This incredible thing, is true!

I'll tell you what's also true. The Empire meant to kill, and make an example of, a rabble-rousing rabbi that day. That was supposed to be the end of Jesus of Nazareth. But it wasn't. The Gospels are silent on what happened between the burial and the women's visit to the tomb on Easter morning. No explanation is given for how these things are to have happened. All we are told is: "*He is not here, but has risen. Just as he said.*"

And, notably, it was the women, those who remained by his side to the bitter end, and who returned, as soon as they could, as soon as the Sabbath was over, early that next morning to lovingly give his body a proper burial... And because of their great love, and devotion, they were the first to receive, and then to preach the *Good News* of the resurrection. Just remember that if anyone ever tries to tell you that women shouldn't preach! Luke's Gospel says that the rest of the disciples couldn't believe their account, thinking it some idle story. They didn't count the women as *credible* witnesses. But they were... credible. As Peter found out himself. It was just incredible news. And the last verse of our passage says, "*they were amazed.*" And, rightly so... For the message of Easter is incredible!

To say that life is greater than death, love is greater than hate, hope is greater than despair, is the definition of what it means to have faith. This incredible story, is above all things, a story of hope, which is still resonating, years after the fact. And why? Because hope is something a lot of folks are desperately searching for.

I know many were devastated when news came, earlier this week, that a fire had ravaged the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France. For some it felt like the death of a friend - . There have been several stories of the almost miraculous. Many artifacts were saved. Even the bees on the roof, are alive! And, already, all kinds of private and corporate donors have pledged nearly a billion dollars to rebuild the cathedral, something which President Macron, has said, the French hope to do in just 5 years!

It's a kind of modern-day resurrection story in the making. But there was also another story of new life, which is connected to that one. After people started raising funds for Notre Dame's rebuilding, a few journalists, activists, and advocates, even some pastors, began encouraging people who felt motivated to give to Notre Dame, to donate, instead, to three historically black churches in Landry Parish, Louisiana, St. Mary Baptist Church, Greater Union Baptist Church and Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, which also burned this month. The fires took place over ten days in March. An investigation is underway, but local police arrested a young man on charges of arson and hate crimes. For many, it felt like the world had turned back the clock 50 years.

The Baptist Churches in that area launched a Go Fund Me page to help assist in the rebuilding. As of last Sunday, they had raised only about \$50,000. Then, as the story spread in the wake of the fire at Notre Dame, the campaign went viral. And as of Thursday, it raised \$1.8 Million. As of last night - \$2,155,640 have been donated - not pledged! Donated! All sorts of people, from all over the world gave \$5, \$20, \$100 gifts.<sup>2</sup> Now, that's *incredible!*

Yes, there may still be people filled with hate in this world, we have more evidence even this morning - with the news of bombings of churches in Sri Lanka, and we must clearly condemn all forms of religious hate and bigotry! But...

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<sup>2</sup> Jack, Ruth V., "Seventh District Baptist Church Fires St Landry," GoFundMe.Com, April 10, 2019 - Accessed, Accessed 4/20/2019 - <https://www.gofundme.com/church-fires-st-landry-parishmacedonia-ministry>

What this “Good News” speaks to me is that, there are a lot more people who are good, and generous, and kind. There are people who wish death upon their “others,” who would have joined the crowd that shouted “Crucify!” that day.... But there are *so many* more people who wish Life to their neighbors. Who work tirelessly, in fact, to make Life better for others, and for all of Creation.

The Easter Story is not just some idle tale. It is a story of radical hope! It invites us to imagine the world anew, through the lense of hope. Imagine a world, where we did not just rebuild Notre Dame cathedral, but rebuild the cathedrals of Creation, the forests, and oceans. Imagine a world where we rebuild society, in a way that is more fair and just for all people, where no one is treated as less than, because of who they are, or where they come from.

Imagine a world, where our children grow up, without ever having to know the fear of gun violence, hate, or climate collapse. Imagine a world, resurrected. Easter is a reminder that Love and Life are greater. And that when Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the Life...” We can take him at his word. Maybe it’s hard for you to believe. It’s hard for me to believe sometimes, too. Some things are incredible. And yet, we are a people of faith, and hope, who believe in a God who makes all things new.

My hope and my prayer for you this Easter, is that you will know the life-transforming love of Christ, and that our lives, and our world, will be transformed into Christ’s vision of the realm of God. Jesus is risen. Death is defeated. So let us remember, we are an Easter people, and alleluia is our song!

Amen.