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What happens if the gravity of a star is so strong that even light can't escape? That's a big question, one that astronomer and pastor John Mitchell wondered about. In 1784 he published a paper in which he called this idea a dark star.<sup>1</sup> When Albert Einstein published his theory of General Relativity in 1915, his mathematics indicated that these dark stars could exist, which in 1967 physicist John Wheeler called a "black hole."<sup>2</sup>

Ever since then many have wondered what a black hole might look like. Even though some indicated it's impossible to see a black hole, astronomers have searched for a way to visualize one, and April 10, we got our first look at a black hole by linking telescopes around the world to create the Event Horizon Telescope. "This black hole resides 55 million light-years from Earth and has a mass 6.5 billion times that of the Sun."<sup>3</sup> Just think—the light we see from this black hole occurred 55 million years ago traveling at 186,000 miles per second. This black hole is larger than the distance from our Sun to Pluto!<sup>4</sup>

In the vastness of the universe, we might begin to wonder, "Where is God in all this space?" Jesus' followers, after watching Jesus die a painful death on

a cross, may have also wondered the same big question, "Where is God?" When the stone rolled in front of the tomb, sealing it from the outside world, Jesus' followers may have struggled with other big questions as well, "If Jesus really had a connection with God, why didn't God prevent Jesus' death? How could God let this happen? We thought Jesus was the one the prophets had said would free us from oppression. What do we do now?" These may have been some of the big questions the disciples asked.

The Gospel of Matthew tells us about the first visitors to the tomb: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, which Mark's Gospel tells us was Jesus' mother and also adds a third woman. They went to see the tomb—not to see Jesus, but the *tomb*. When we go to a cemetery today to visit the site of a loved one, we often say we're going to the *grave*, knowing that we don't expect to see the actual person who died. In the same manner, the two women traveling to the tomb of Jesus expected to see a cave-like site with a large bolder rolled in front of it. Mark's version of this event tells us the women's big question was, "Who will roll away the stone so we can place spices on his body?"



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But when the women arrived, they experienced more than they anticipated: an earthquake, an angel that appeared like lightning, and a rolled-away stone!

The events seem so...well...hard to understand. How in the world do we explain such an event? Years ago, one Sunday school teacher faced that same big question as I reviewed the upcoming stories in the curriculum with the teachers.

I talked about the theme of the various sessions, and then I came to the Easter session. "This session," I said, "may seem like such a familiar story to us. But remember, some of the younger children are still sorting out the meaning of Easter. They may think of Easter as bunnies and candy, but you can help them begin to see that Easter is about new life for Jesus and each of us."

One of the teachers of a younger group of children slowly raised her hand. "I'm not sure I can teach this session," she said. I wondered if she would be absent that Sunday visiting family, but then she explained, "I'm not sure I can explain resurrection to young children when I don't completely understand it myself."

The Easter story contains some big questions, ones that may be hard to explain. Even in our everyday lives, we run into big questions, such as the parents of two brothers, Danny and Mikey, ages 10 and 8, who were quite ornery and got into lots of mischief. Their parents tried everything to get them to cooperate, but nothing seemed to work. The parents' big question was, "What can we do to convince our children to cooperate?"

The parents decided to talk with their pastor, who had raised several children and might remember those days. "Please," they pleaded, "please talk to Danny and Mikey. They misbehave so often, and we can't think of anything else to do!"

The pastor replied, "Send the youngest boy to me tomorrow morning, and we'll reflect together about God's presence and how God is always watching us."

The next day, Mikey entered the minister's office and sat down. The minister sat in silence and looked at the young boy for a minute. The minister asked, "Where is God?"—hoping to prompt a conversation about how God is everywhere and sees everything we do. The minister paused and then asked again, "Where is God?" Silence... Then, a third time, "Where is God?!"



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Mikey's eyes grew wider and wider, and he jumped to his feet, dashed out the door, ran all the way home, and burst into Danny's room. "Oh, Danny, we're in big trouble this time!" he wailed.

"Why? What's wrong?" Danny asked.

"God is missing—and they think we did it!"<sup>5</sup>



I imagine you have some of your own big questions, such as: How can I explain resurrection? Not knowing the answers to the big questions of life can be a bit unsettling, but writer Barbara Crafton suggests that "The resurrection is unknowable in the way we like to know things." She reflected that the writers of the Gospel stories were willing to have their lives changed before fully understanding what was happening. She explained,

Actually, this is the only way life ever really changes. You won't understand marriage until you've been hitched for a while—maybe not even then. You're not going to know what it's like to have a baby until you have one. You don't even know your profession until you've been in it a while. Nothing in life is obvious immediately. It all grows on us.

This is how we must approach resurrection, as well. No, you don't understand it. Let it grow on you.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes we might wish to experience how the resurrection story can bring hope to us today, but the struggles and turmoil of life can become so overwhelming, as is the case with Melanie, who had a conversation with Shauna from NightLight, a ministry that helps abused women find hope. Melanie had experienced:

NIGHTLIGHT<sup>★</sup>

church and God shoved down her throat her whole life... She enjoys things "that she knows Christians shouldn't do." At one point, she told that she felt Christianity was an all or nothing thing—and since she didn't want it all, then she wanted nothing. She just enjoys certain things too much.

But later in the conversation, Melanie said something different. She said she *wants* to want God. She just doesn't know how.<sup>7</sup>

Melanie's big question was "How do I know God?"—which many of us may have asked at one point or another. We may ask other big questions, such as:



- What do I do when a relationship falls apart?
- Where is God when the doctor tells me about a serious illness?
- How do I prepare for my test at school, for the information seems overwhelming, and I'm so busy and stressed out?

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- How do I prepare for retirement when the economy continues to struggle?
- How do we create a more peaceful world when we hear about so many wars?



Many times, we want quick answers to our big questions, wishing we could Google it and find a quick solution. Author Rachel Remen suggests, however, that:

The most important questions don't seem to have ready answers, but the questions themselves have healing power when they are shared. An answer is an invitation to stop thinking about something, to stop wondering. Life has no such stopping places. Life is a process whose every event is connected to the moment that just went by. An unanswered question is a fine traveling companion. It sharpens your eye for the road.<sup>8</sup>

The women who approached the tomb on that first Easter morning didn't find easy answers to their big questions, but they found a journey of hope when they discovered the empty tomb. They heard from the angel, "Jesus isn't here. God has raised him to new life." They took their traveling companion of unanswered questions and headed down the road, still frightened at what this event might mean, but also excited about the new possibilities.



On this Easter Sunday, we may still have our unanswered BIG questions, but through the resurrection of Jesus, we have hope not only for our lives after death, but for renewed life today and tomorrow and the next day, for we know that we are never alone. Christ has risen. Alleluia!

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<sup>8</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* (Penguin, 2006), as quoted in *Homiletics*, April 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Michell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Michell)

<sup>2</sup> [https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_hole](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_hole)

<sup>3</sup> <https://eventhorizontelescope.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://futurism.com/the-byte/big-m87-black-hole-compared-the-earth>

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, adapted.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Cawthorne Crafton, *The Christian Century*, April 2, 2012, quoted in *Homiletics*, April 2014.

<sup>7</sup> "The Storey Story" newsletter, April 2014.