A couple of months ago, Lori and I attended a conference that featured speakers on a wide range of topics mostly out of my wheelhouse. One of the most fascinating – and mystifying – was titled “The Space-Time Symphony,” by a professor from Sonoma State University, Lynn Cominsky, who is an astrophysicist.

Professor Cominsky is one of 1,500 scientists worldwide working on a project called LIGO, which stands for the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory.

I cannot possibly explain what all of those words mean or how this works. The math is way beyond me – this is all Einstein Relativity stuff.

But go with me here for a few minutes.

We might look out into space and think of it as a vast void of empty darkness, but the scientists at LIGO will tell you it is anything but empty.

What these scientists are doing is measuring the ripples in space and time created by gravity from massive objects like black holes.

They are able to detect the final moments of neutron stars and black holes colliding.

For fun, they convert these gravitational waves into sound, hence the title of Professor Cominsky’s talk, “The Space-Time Symphony.”

Astrophysicists are easily amused.

So where am I going with this?

This morning is called “Ascension Sunday,” marking the moment when Jesus disappears from his disciples. We observe this day last Thursday, and we continue to observe this until next Sunday.

So, what is the Ascension?
Jesus has gone to his death on the Cross, and on the third day, he has risen from the grave.

He comes back to his followers in closed rooms, walking on roads and even cooks them breakfast on a beach.

He is healed, completely himself, yet different.

There is something joyfully mystifying in these encounters with the Risen Christ, and those who encounter him are changed in unimaginably new and unexpected ways.

Then he suddenly disappears again. Gone. The party is over.

The Ascension of Christ into heaven is typically portrayed in art and hymns as grand and glorious, with Jesus ascending into the clouds surrounded by angels strumming harps.

But I would imagine that for the first followers of Jesus, this was not so grand and glorious.

They hear only an excruciating silence. All that is left is a vast void of empty darkness in their souls.

Something new will fill the emptiness within them, and in fact, is already filling them, but they don’t see it yet. This is an in-between time for the disciples.

Next Sunday we mark Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. We will talk more about that next week.

This time in-between between the Ascension and Pentecost marks the reality that something new cannot begin until something old ends. We are in an in-between time.

But sometimes the line between endings and beginnings isn’t neat and clean. In-between times can feel fuzzy, confusing, and empty.
There are times in our life when we are in an in-between time, when we might feel low and empty. God may feel distant or non-existent. Believing in anything is hard, and all we feel surrounded by a vast void of empty darkness.

Maybe you have had times like that – I sure have.

This time between Ascension and Pentecost is a time to remind ourselves that even in our emptiest times, in our darkest moments, something new is growing – that these are really in-between times.

Yet, from the moment we are born, we are taught to fear the darkness and the empty places. Things go bump in the night. But even in the darkness, something we have not yet seen is filling us.

From the ashes new life will rise.

Barbara Brown Taylor, among my favorite authors, writes, “I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again,”

She adds: “I need darkness as much as I need light.” [Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, p. 5]

It is in the empty, dark, in-between places where new inspiration can spring forth – if we have the patience to look deep within ourselves. When we do, we might just find God in the hidden voids that we might have overlooked.

It is in the dark, in-between times that we are challenged to look closely at our pre-conceived notions and ask whether these ideas work for us or drag us down.

The in-between times are when we can be most honest with ourselves – and with God.

Barbara Brown Taylor puts it this way: these in-between, dark moments are the “wrecking ball that brings all your false gods down.” [Taylor, p. 15]

What is it within us that needs to end so that something new can grow? What is struggling to emerge in our in-between times? What do we cling to that we keep doing the same old way that needs discarding?
The biblical lessons today are stories of dark in-between times.

If these passages feel disjointed and disconnected, I believe that is the point. I think they are designed to throw us off kilter a little bit. The gravitational waves of the Spirit are rippling here.

First, we hear how Paul and Silas are flogged and imprisoned. They are definitely in an empty dark, in-between place.

Then we skip to the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of John, and hear his poetic vision of Jesus returning again – but not yet.

Finally, we jump backwards in time to a lengthy prayer by Jesus when he is facing the darkness of his own death.

Jesus’s words are presented as a multi-layered prayer.

“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me,” Jesus prays.

Listen closely beneath his words.

Jesus is describing a new way of understanding the oneness of humanity with the oneness of the Universe through his relationship with the Creator.

“The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.”

He prays we will discover in our darkest moments “that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Ultimately, it is the love of God who fills every void, every empty moment, every in-between time. I end with the words of my favorite psalm, 139: “Darkness is not dark to you,” O God, “the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.” AMEN