

## **Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

**Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 (Sundays after Ascension)**

### **Ephesians 4:8-16**

You need to take a deep breath when you read Paul's letter to the Ephesians

Not just because of its content but because of the way it is written

In the opening thanksgiving of Chapter one, what we now have broken up into some fourteen verses and by numerous commas and full stops was in the original Greek without any punctuation whatsoever

It was a wave of praise, an outpouring of amazement seeking to express the writer's awe at this Jesus and the solid hope He has given to us

But you also need to take a deep breath when it comes to content as again and again the writer seeks superlatives, struggling with the finite constraints of language to express the infinite boundless truths about Jesus

In our reading Paul speaks of the gifts of the Spirit that Jesus pours out on the church and speaks of it in the context of his incarnation ("he who descended into the lower parts of the earth") and then his resurrection and ascension ("he who has ascended up on high") and how "He that descended is the same that ascended.."

Then continuing with the deep breath bit as he says that this Lord Jesus has ascended "up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things." (4:10)

Above all heaven and filling all things

This is language pushed to breaking point to express what takes our understanding to the edge and beyond

"Above all heavens" - he is trying to express the grandeur and the status of Jesus, beyond any religion or gods of the then known world, including Judaism, for heaven is the place where the divine in any religion us believed to be – and Jesus is beyond all of that

"filling all things" – this takes us beyond a remote and far off picture of any god, to hold together both imminence and transcendence, humanity and divinity

All of creation is now under His rule, a rule that will gradually become reality as Jesus' love touches, fills and transforms individuals and peoples, the whole created order to be all that they were always intended to be in God's loving purposes

And so we too are caught up in the amazing, breath-taking reality

"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men" (V8)

For we are part of the ones who were once captive, held captive by our own waywardness, our own efforts to be good enough, the allure of the world, flesh and devil, held in the golden cage of this world but who are now set free and invited to be the people God always intended us to be, invited back into relationship

This is the truly breath-taking reality of Ascension-tide: not Jesus withdrawing, but Him going ahead to claim for us what will one day all be ours

But as we wait: that same Jesus promises to come to us: no longer to just be with us but within us as we receive His Holy Spirit, what Paul calls in Chapter 1 of Ephesians “the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (1:14)

Ascension-tide is the season to reset our inner compasses, so often dragged off spiritual truth north by all that we see and experience day by day, that so often is about constraint and limitation, sadness and hopelessness because we have lost a sense of God’s greatness and His loving presence and engagement with His world

In the quiet of this service drink in afresh the reality of the one who is “above all heaven” and yet “fills all things”

And so again, in the words of this breathless letter of Paul:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask of imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20)