

## ASCENSION 2014

## “... to fill the whole Universe...”

### Ephesians 1 v 15-end Luke 24 v 44-end

Ephesians 4v10: *“He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe”.*

Three-dimensional geometry has always eluded me. If I try to pack a case to go on holiday, I never seem to manage to get everything in; or if I do, I can never make it fit back in when I come home again. There always seems to be more contents than my suitcase can contain.

The writers of the New Testament seemed to have the same problem when it came to describing what happened to Jesus after his death and resurrection. There always seemed to be more of him than the suitcase of their universe could contain.

At least with my suitcase, I knew which was the top and the bottom, the up and the down. You can't know that with the Universe; which way *is* up and which way *is* down?

The world view at the time had the heavens as '**up**' above the world as they knew it 'the middle'; and the underworld, the realm of the dead was '**down**' below that. Given this world view, they tried to explain what had happened to Jesus.

They knew that Jesus was a person who lived on earth and went about eating and drinking, preaching and teaching. So, they knew where the middle was.

They knew that God **raised** Jesus from the dead because he appeared to the disciples and others many times after his death. So, Jesus must have gone *down* to death and then God *raised* him back up again, at least to the *middle*, at the resurrection.

But then the resurrection appearances stopped and Jesus took his leave of them to go to his Father in heaven. So, Jesus must have gone from the *middle* '**up**' to the heavens at what we now celebrate as the Ascension.

Hence, Ephesians 1v20: *‘God put his power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places’*. That is God used his power to raise Jesus from '*down*' to '*up*' (via the resurrection appearances in 'the middle').

Got that?

Well, actually, it is not quite as simple as that; not even for the NT writers.

Ephesians 1v22-23; *‘God has put all things under his **feet** and made him the **head** over all things for the church, **which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills all in all’*. The church is the community of believers; it is **in** the *middle*, on earth, and is his body, so Jesus must **remain** in the middle. **And** the church is the *fullness of him who fills all in all*; so Jesus must be '*up*', '*down*' and in 'the *middle*' at the same time. He must **fill** the Universe.

As Paul (or one of his followers) later puts it, more simply, in Ephesians 4v10: *“He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to **fill** the whole universe”.*

So, just like my suitcase, Jesus now fills the universe to overflowing; up, down, in the middle (and side-ways) all at the same time. He even spills out beyond the confines of the Universe; he fills all in all.

Got **that**?

**If** we *have* got that, why do we persist in looking for God as if he were difficult to find; searching for Jesus when he is there all along – everywhere present and filling all things? It seems to me that we cannot but trip over God sometime in our lives!

If we **really** have got it, then it is not a matter of *finding* God, it is a matter of our *becoming conscious of* God's presence **already** with us. 'Finding' God becomes a matter of **perception** not of expedition.

Just because we don't always *perceive* God, doesn't mean that God is not always there!

Got **that**?

Discovering the pleasures and rewards of the Presence of God is a matter of our schooling and honing our **perception** of the God who is already with us. It most definitely is not a matter of tramping around in the undergrowth of a Godless world looking for where God is. The truth about "finding" God is that **God has already found you!**

Are you ready for the final geometric complication?

So far, we know that God in Jesus is 'here in the middle' with us his body (< >); God went 'down there' too (∇ - he descended to the dead); and God is 'up' there (^ - he ascended into heaven) as well. God is everywhere present.

But actually, God is inside us as well (⊙). We Christians are **in** Christ and Christ is **in** us as St John's Gospel puts it (c14 & 15). In the sacrament of Baptism, God comes to dwell **in** us. We are part of Christ's body, the Church. God abides in us.

So, God is **in** us too.

It seems to me that we can only **not** "find" God if our perception of God is extraordinarily dulled, *or* we are so lazy as not to bother, *or* we deny that what we perceive **as** God **is** God.

Our life-long task, then, is to cultivate our perception and acknowledgement of the God *in* us and all *around* us. It is **the** great task of our lives **to perceive and to express** that presence of God within us, in our daily lives; And in doing so, become more **like** Jesus, more **God-like** in our living.

Finally, in the lead up to Archbishop Justin's visit in September, we are being invited to be more outgoing in our approach to those outside our churches. We are being invited to begin by coming to terms with the concept of evangelism ourselves.

To me, that means that we are being invited to **engage** with people at *their* level of perception and understanding of God and to **assist** them to develop their spirituality further.

Apparently over 90% of people claim to have had some spiritual experience, but they do not connect it with the vocabulary or culture of the Christian Church. Many have this experience through the natural world, walking through woodland with raised spirits or contemplating the immenseness of the universe gazing at the stars at night.

It seems to me that engaging with folk and assisting them to perceive the God who fills the universe with his presence, when many people are already beginning to do so, is not such a daunting task as we might imagine. Evangelism, at least for me, is a matter of engaging with folk and assisting them to perceive the God who is all around them; the God who has already found them, if they did but recognise God better in daily life.

Ephesians 4v10: "*He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe*".

Our task is to perceive that for ourselves and help others to do so.

The great benefit of God filling the universe with his presence is that God can and does fill us too.