

## **Trinity 17, 8am, St Mary's, Barnes, 2018**

### **Ephesians 4, 1 and St Luke 14, 1**

There is a striking sentence in today's epistle, the letter to the Ephesians. St Paul writes of "The God and father of all, who is above all, and through all and in all." The word "all" is repeated four times. God is the creator of all that exists, this universe and whatever other universes there might be: the Father of all nations and every person on earth. Jews, then and now, particularly stress that God is above all-utterly transcendent and other, not to be captured by any human images or words. It is also a particular emphasis in Islam; whilst the religions of the Indian sub-continent, Hinduism and Buddhism, would stress the last phrase, that God is in all. God is in all things, and closer to us than our own breathing. This sentence brings home to us the awesome, incomprehensible mystery of God. God is above all, or as it can be translated, over all, and through all and in all. As it is all too easy to construct a domesticated God in our own image, it is salutary to be reminded of this mystery sometimes. Another way of putting it, associated with As Nicolas of Cusa the 15<sup>th</sup> century German thinker is that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

The Christian claim, however is also that this incomprehensible God has made himself accessible, has come to us out of the heart of light to show us a human heart. So as Paul says earlier in the sentence "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" He is of course stressing the unity of the church there, but it goes beyond this. Our allegiance is to Jesus in whom and through whom we know the unknowable God. Furthermore, the reference to one faith and one baptism reminds us that in Jesus God does not just make his good purpose known to us; he makes us partakers of his life. To share the faith of the church and be baptised is to be baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ and a sharer in his life.

These two great truths, first that God is over all, and through all and in all, and secondly that this God has come close to us in Jesus in order that we might share his life and he partakers of his nature as love, should put the whole of the rest of life in its proper perspective. A good example is the humorous vignette recorded in today's Gospel. A man goes to big dinner and makes his way to the top table and settles down in his seat. Then someone else had comes in and was spotted sitting in the shadows. "Friend go up higher" is heard all over the hall and the first man is turfed out of his seat. Humiliated, he slinks back into the crowd. In one way or another we all want the others to think us important, to sit up and take notice of us. It is of course absurd, as the late Malcolm Muggeridge used to say. But too often we are absurd. Nevertheless, our faith can at least begin to put things in perspective. Our true worth, our true importance. is found in relation to the God who is over all and through all and in all and who in Jesus is close to us day by day.

We are important-important enough for God to create us in the first place.

We are of value-valuable for him to come amongst us to save us from ourselves and unite our life with his now and for ever. That makes everything else look different.