

Everybody equal

Richard Greatrex *reflects on* Jeremiah 11:18-20,
James 3:13 – 4:3. 7-8a and Mark 9:30-37

A short while ago, through Peter, the disciples hailed Jesus as Messiah, then immediately denounced him for trying to teach them that messiahship was about sacrifice, not martial victory. Requiring them to clearly understand the true cost of his mission, and consequently of discipleship, Jesus travels with them away from the crowds. Nevertheless, they still fail to comprehend his words, retreating into traditional fantasies of victory, arguing over who deserves the highest honours.

Both Jeremiah and the author of James have cause to castigate those who prefer disputes and one-upmanship over listening to, or following, God's ways. Life, both Jeremiah and James argue, is diminished, becomes unholy, when we prioritise our wants over God's vision.

Jesus reasserts his authority, gathering the disciples around him like pupils of a rabbi. They fall silent, perceptive enough to realise their conversation was inappropriate. Having regained their attention, Jesus forcefully restates his countercultural position: the last shall be first; children, seen as "non-persons" in the society of the time, are, he claims, of equal value as the Messiah and consequently, God.



Arguments over precedence have no place in God's kingdom; they sap its strength, drawing us away from striving for equality. To achieve God's vision requires a preference for the least powerful, those who are marginalised, the "non-person", alongside each of us choosing to reject selfish ambition in favour of loving, willing service. 🍷

The books of the Old Testament

"God working through and against nature" – *the book of Exodus*

by Gillian Cooper

What exactly happens to the Red Sea? Is it blown back by the wind, or divided to form two walls? Exodus has both. It takes every story that has ever been told about Israel's escape from Egypt and puts it all together. The overall effect is dramatic and meaningful. God works through nature and against nature, whatever it takes, to rescue Abraham's family, the people God has chosen. Exodus is first and foremost a story of salvation.

It takes a lot to make a people. They have to be persuaded to leave Egypt, which despite its hardships is at least familiar. They have to learn to trust that they will not starve. They have to dare to wait at the foot of a volcano for God to speak. They have to commit themselves to a relationship, a covenant, with Yahweh their God who has rescued them. It takes a long time and much effort on the part of God and of Moses, the miraculous child whom God calls to be the hero of this book. 🍷

“He became what we are that he might make us what he is.”

Athanasius of Alexandria (died AD 373), bishop of Alexandria

Living Lord, by our arguments we wound you, each other and those who most need care. Teach us to reject envy, partiality and hypocrisy, and to embrace the life of loving service you offer through your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Baptism Part II – *baptism in a secular world*

by Heather Smith

Baptism symbolises someone's separation from the world and their union with Christ, but at the same time it is about being received into a worldwide community, a family that has God at its centre, where someone can grow into the fullness of Christ. Acts 16:33 describes the baptism of the

whole family of the Philippian jailor. It is unusual to see infants and adults baptised at the same service, but when it does happen it is a powerful occasion that brings together God's work in different situations, enriching everyone's experience.

Many parents bring their children for baptism without themselves having much of a church connection, and it may come as a surprise to find that their child is also welcomed into a church community which is keen to help him or her discover their true identity within Christ. Finding the language to convey this exciting prospect is a challenge that local churches need to grasp. 🍷