

# Taking on the mantle

Richard Greatrex *reflects on* 2 Kings 2:1-12 and Mark 9:2-9

One reading of the parable of the talents interprets the man going away on a long journey as Jesus ascending to heaven. The slaves represent Christians, the talents the gifts of the Spirit and the return of the master the return of Jesus. However the parable is understood, the teaching is clear. The talents given to us make us what we are and differentiate us from others. In God's eyes there are no winners and losers, no pecking order, no hierarchy. The reality – that some people are able to run or swim faster than others, while others are better writers, musicians or business people – matters not to God. What matters is that we put our talents to good use. It is significant that the slave who made two talents was given equal praise to the slave who made five.

This parable is part of a series at the end of Mark's Gospel with the theme of judgement. Talents are given on trust and we are held responsible for full and faithful use of these gifts. Whatever our talents, we must never let them wither from lack of use. We are to improve the quality of our work for God and widen its scope according to our circumstances and abilities. Like the slaves in the story, we are to be stewards and, as St Paul says to the Corinthians: "it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy". If we are faithful and trustworthy stewards for God, it will never be a chore. 😊

**Holy God, teach us to discern the brightness of your glory shining in those we don't normally notice, those hidden from view by our own ignorance, prejudice and apathy. In seeing the world through their eyes may we serve you more clearly. Amen.**

## Poet in lockdown

*Poets in the making*

by Julia McGuinness

"Journeys" is the theme for Chester Cathedral Young Poets' Competition this year. As entries are slow to come in, I heed advice to "think national, not local", and cast the net further afield. Soon poems are flowing in from 16-25 year-olds across the UK. But two weeks before deadline, lockdown happens. Entries start referring to "these strange times".

Our locked-down judge makes some tough decisions over a

diverse mix of good writing. It's clear that poetry is engaging this generation. Winners are notified; book token prizes arranged; prize-giving cancelled. The vice-dean suggests a Zoom celebration for winners to read and receive our congratulations. All the young poets, who hail from places as diverse as Chiswick and Gateshead, delight us with their on-screen poetry. We could never have achieved a physical full house.

The competition journey has been a poem: it's had a clear beginning; parameters of space and form; creating fresh connections; an ending that resonates with rightness, however unforeseen. Like the psalmist, I feel that "the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places". 😊



## Food in the Bible

*Manna*

by Caroline Fletcher

Manna was bread from heaven miraculously provided by God to nourish the Israelites throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Arriving with the morning dew, it was white in colour, fine and flaky in texture and tasted like wafers made from honey (Exodus 16:13-14.31). The Israelites used to grind it, then boil it and

use it in baking (Numbers 11:7-8). Some have speculated that manna was a form of honeydew which insects excrete when they feed on plant sap.

The Israelites were instructed not to store any of the manna they collected for the next day or it would go off, but gather it afresh each morning (Exodus 16:19-21). This was to show them they could trust God to provide for their daily needs.

Jesus compares himself to manna, saying he is the "true bread from heaven". While eating manna could not keep the Israelites alive forever, Jesus, our bread of life, brings us life everlasting (John 6:31-33. 48-51). 😊

“ In the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.”

Exodus 16:12