

# OpenTheo

## May 16th: Deuteronomy 17 & Luke 9:18-50

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How the law will protect Israel from tyranny. The Transfiguration.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Deuteronomy 17. You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God. If there is found among you within any of your towns that the Lord your God is giving you a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them, or the sun or the moon, or any of the host of heaven which I have forbidden, and it is told you, and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently.

And if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses, the one who is to die shall be put to death. A person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another, any case within your towns that is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place that the Lord your God will choose, and you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision.

Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place that the Lord will choose, and you shall be careful to do according to all that they direct you. According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the decision which they pronounce to you, you shall do. You shall not turn aside from the verdict that they declare to you, either to the right hand or to the left.

The man who acts presumptuously by not obeying the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall purge the evil from Israel, and all the people shall hear and fear and not act presumptuously again. When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it, and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you, whom the Lord your God will choose.

One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, You shall never return that way again.

And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests, and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel. Going through the book of Deuteronomy we have noticed that it follows the order of the Ten Commandments in chapters 6 to 26.

The material of chapter 17 falls under the category of the fifth commandment, to honour father and mother, and here it's about authority structures within the life of Israel. What does a free society look like? Israel has been delivered from Egypt in the Exodus, and in Egypt they were under the tyranny of Pharaoh, a king who functioned more like a god. It would be very easy for Israel to fall back into that pattern of society.

Moses could disappear from the scene, and then they would establish a king with

absolute divine-like authority, and fall under a new form of tyranny. Political structures are of course complicated things. On the one hand there's the disorder of anarchy, every man doing what's right in his own eyes, a society without coordination, without security, and without a strong common life.

On the other hand there's the danger of tyranny, of oppressive, arbitrary government, of being subject to the capricious whims of a willful monarch. Israel had hopefully learned some lessons on this front from the hard-heartedness of Pharaoh and its consequences. There are great benefits in having a strong and effective government if you want to have a common life, if you want to forge an identity that extends over territory and across different periods of time.

Deuteronomy exhibits a centralising impulse when it comes to the worship of Israel, moving everything to a common central sanctuary so that everyone doesn't do what's right in their own eyes, but there is a common form of worship. The establishment of a more centralised government, not an absolutely centralised government by any means, has similar benefits. Yet in the task of establishing a polity any benefits come with great risks or associated costs.

There's no way to opt out of this. In the book of 1 Samuel for instance we see a number of different forms of government in operation. We have Eli the high priest functioning as a sort of judge, then we have the prophetic judge in Samuel, and then of course we have the first king in Saul, followed by David.

None of these systems of government is perfect, all of them are affected deeply by sin. Yet there are differing advantages and disadvantages associated with each one, and the fact that a more centralised monarchical system comes out on top doesn't seem to be merely an accident of history. In chapters 17 and 18 of Deuteronomy we're dealing with priests, with kings and with prophets.

One of the first things we should notice is that there is a division between these different offices. Absolute power is not concentrated in any one of these particular offices, rather they are all subject to each other in different ways. In verses 21 and 22 of the preceding chapter we notice some odd commandments concerning asherah trees and pillars that seemed out of place, and these commandments are followed by another commandment that seems to belong with them, concerning blemished sacrifices.

The importance of unadulterated worship is highlighted at this point. They must not worship the Lord on their own terms. Verses 2 to 7 deal with cases of idolatry and rejection of the covenant.

This is connected with the preceding verses concerning false worship. You can notice, for instance, the use of the term abomination in both. It is, however, more directly connected with the surrounding theme of judgement and justice.

Justice here is seen as something that is a communal responsibility. The entire people need to be actively committed to upholding the will of the Lord in their life as a people. The case of the person rejecting the covenant is the most fundamental case.

This is an act of treachery against the sovereign of the people, the Lord himself. We think of the law often as the responsibility of the government, and individuals within the nation, provided they are law-abiding, don't really have to think much about the law. However, the vision of the law in Deuteronomy is one in which the people play a much larger and more active role in upholding the law.

The entire people are responsible to uphold the righteous standard of God's law and to establish just processes. Injustice in authorities and wickedness in neighbours makes everyone culpable. None of these things should be tolerated, and they must be dealt with as a matter of the greatest severity.

Israel was to have higher courts to which lower judges could send cases that they weren't competent to adjudicate. This is similar to the role of Moses in Exodus chapter 18. The judges and the chiefs of the people would rule in the lesser matters.

If they were not competent to judge in a particular matter, they could put it up to Moses. Specific types of cases seem to be in view here, and these would be ones that would be sent up to the Levitical priests and the chief judge. When a decision had to be made in a potentially capital crime concerning what type of homicide had occurred, it was supposed to be sent to the higher court.

Now this is not a court of appeal, as we might have for defendants. It's a court to which the judges were expected to direct the cases. The prominent role of the Levitical priests in these courts probably depends in part upon their expert knowledge and familiarity with the law.

They were the ones who most meditated upon and studied and taught the law, and so they were in the best position to adjudicate according to it. The authority of the priests and the chief judges had to be honoured, and it would be through this that the authority of the law itself would be rendered effective in practice. Moses now moves on to teach concerning the king.

Having a king is not here presented as illegitimate in principle, I don't believe. However, in wanting a king, we're told that they wanted to be like the nations surrounding them. In 1 Samuel 8, verses 10-18, we have Samuel's long warning given from the Lord himself about the potential actions of the king and the dangers in taking a king.

So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, Although the monarchy is presented as, in many respects, a positive development in Scripture, there remains a very strong note of ambivalence. Like

entering into the land, the monarchy is a levelling up in maturity, responsibility and capacity, but it is one that comes with considerable dangers and temptations, temptations that must be mitigated by adherence to the law.

This isn't an institution immediately established by God, it's interesting to note. It's presented as something established in response to the people's request. Is the monarchy merely a concession to human sin, or is Moses just speaking about a prediction of some future sin on the part of the people? I'm not sure that's the case.

It is presented as a concession in 1 Samuel chapter 8. The Lord says that the people are rejecting him in their desire for a king. However, a righteous king, who ruled under the Lord, is a good and a desirable thing. Unfortunately, Israel failed in this respect.

The monarchy proved to be a gift that they were not mature enough to handle. Nor is it just presented as a permission. Christ, of course, would ultimately fulfil the purpose of the Davidic king.

What would the king do? The king would defend the nation from its enemies, he would assemble and lead its army, he would establish and maintain civil order, he would maintain peace, and he would also, as the guardian and the establisher of civil order, be the one who established the worship of God within the land, and maintain that. Perhaps the most arresting feature of this teaching concerning the king is the fact that the king is so clearly subject to the law of God. The king is not a god.

The king is not himself the law. The king is not even the lawgiver, the one who makes up the laws and teaches the laws as his own wisdom. No, the law is the Lord's and the king must come under that law.

He's a servant of that law, someone who's responsible to study the law, to understand it deeply, and then to rule in terms of it. Not only then is there a challenge to unchecked sovereignty in the separation of powers between king, priest, and prophet, there is also a challenge to unchecked sovereignty in the way that the king comes under the law of God. This is a society with a constitution, it's not something established by the king himself, it's something to which the king himself is subject.

The king isn't the priest. However, he does function as the representative of the people, and as such as something akin to the chief worshipper. He's also the one who's responsible as the representative and leader of the people and the guardian of civil order to establish the worship of God within the land.

He builds the temple, among other things. We can see this in the story of David as he establishes the worship of the tabernacle, singing within the tabernacle, these sorts of things, and then in the story of Solomon, of course, who builds the temple. The king must be an Israelite, one of the brothers.

He must be someone that the Lord himself chooses. The king is not elected by the people. He's a servant of the Lord.

He represents the Lord's authority in his law to the people. He's supposed to be a minister of the law of God to the people of God, but he is supposed to remain one of his brother Israelites, and that will happen as he is humbled by submission to the law. He is not over the law.

He is not the source of the law. He is not someone who rules apart from law by his own capricious whim. He is under the law, just as the rest of the Israelites, and he rules by the law.

There are three key limits here placed upon the king's quest for glory. The first one, he shall not accumulate horses. There should not be this great military build-up.

He shouldn't return to Egypt to get them. The Lord brought them out of Egypt, out of that particular sort of kingdom, and they are not supposed to go back to try and recreate that kingdom in themselves. Second, he should not multiply wives, lest his heart be led astray.

Multiplying wives hold a number of dangers. First, in the king's natural love for his wives, it would be very easy for him to be led astray into idolatry and other things. We see great examples of this in the story of Solomon, of course, and then in the story of characters like Ahab.

A woman has great power over the heart of the man who loves her, and a king who has not mastered his love for women will find that his heart is easily led astray. He will give his strength to women when he should be giving it to upholding the law of God among the people. And third, the king must not acquire excessive silver and gold.

It is certainly not inappropriate for a kingdom to be glorious, but a king that accumulates wealth beyond limits is a king who is tyrannical to his subjects. We see in the story of Solomon that he falls into each one of these sins. In 1 Kings 10, verse 14 to 11, verse 10, every single one of these sins is mentioned, and as we read on in the story, we see that Solomon starts to take on the character of Pharaoh himself.

Israel, having been delivered from Pharaoh and Egypt, ends up recreating Egypt in their own land. There is a real danger that the king is idolised, that the king becomes a god-like figure. The king could easily serve as another god besides the Lord.

This is why it is so important that the king is subject to the Lord and to the law of the Lord, and both as a symbol and as a practical means of this submission to the law of God. The king is required to write his own copy of the book of the law for the purpose of his own meditation throughout his life. He must do this under the supervision of the Levitical priests, who are the stewards of the house of the Lord, and in the fact that they

supervise this, it's a sign that he comes under the authority of another.

The king is not the absolute authority within the land of Israel, but the priests can represent the authority of God relative to the king, and the prophet too. The prophet can rebuke the king, challenge the king in the name of the Lord, as we see Nathan challenging David after his sin with Bathsheba. The king is expected to be literate.

He is expected not merely to know the contents of the law, but to meditate upon them for wisdom. His relationship with the law is even more intimate because he's supposed to write it out all for himself. These are all ways in which the king is supposed to take the law into himself, to internalise in himself the law that he will rule in terms of.

The king's self-mastery according to the law is the basis by which he will rule the nation. In places like the Psalms and the book of Proverbs we see the result of this. The faithful king is the archetypal Israelite, who has become wise through meditation upon the law day and night, who can think about the world and speak about the world with wisdom because he has internalised the principles of wisdom in the law.

Earlier in the book of Deuteronomy we were told that the peoples around would see the wisdom of Israel in the law and come to hear that wisdom. We see that happening in the story of Solomon, someone who had meditated upon the law and as a result could speak with wisdom into the world so that people would come to hear Israel's king. Now ideally what was true of Israel's king would become true of the people as a whole.

The king then is a model for the rest of the people. We see the same thing in the Psalms. The Psalms are the songs of the king, the king who has meditated upon the law of God day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water giving forth its fruit in season. He is someone who is wiser than all of his teachers because he meditates upon God's law and as the law has been taken into him he can be someone who rules wisely within the world in the name of the Lord. If the priest is a steward and a servant the king is more of a son.

A question to consider. Many people when they're thinking about our political systems focus upon the ancestry of the ideas that ground our systems to ancient Greece and Rome. But yet when we look at the history of political thought we see a great deal of influence from scripture particularly the Old Testament and places like this.

What might be some of the distinctive ways in which the teaching of chapters like this has influenced politics within the modern world? Luke chapter 9 verses 18-50 Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him. And he asked them, Who did the crowd say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others that one of the prophets of old has risen.

Then he said to them, But who do you say that I am? And Peter answered, The Christ of

God. And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And he said to all, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And, behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said.

As he was saying these things a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him. And when the voice had spoken Jesus was found alone.

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen. On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain a great crowd met him. And, behold, a man from the crowd cried out, Teacher, I beg you to look at my Son, for he is my only child.

And, behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.

Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your Son here. While he was coming the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.

And all were astonished at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling at



everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.

But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying. An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.

But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side, and said to them, Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great. John answered, Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.

But Jesus said to him, Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you. After the feeding of the five thousand in Luke chapter 9 Jesus asked his disciples who people say that he is. The crowd seemed to identify him with John the Baptist, with Elijah, or one of the prophets.

Jesus' ministry very naturally follows from that of John the Baptist, and it's not surprising that there will be seen to be some resemblances. Herod the Tetrarch was already speculating about that connection. Like Elijah and John, Jesus spends much of his time at the moment in the wilderness.

Peter, however, confesses that Jesus is the Christ, he's the anointed one, he's the awaited Messiah. The disciples are strictly charged not to tell this to anyone. The time will come when they will do so, but that time is not yet.

And here we reach a turning point in the narrative. The first phase of Jesus' ministry began with the testimony of John the Baptist, and then his baptism in which the Father testified to him and the Spirit descended upon him. That phase ended with a cluster of events.

It ended with the death of John the Baptist, and speculation about Jesus being John the Baptist raised from the dead, also with a commissioning of the disciples. Now this second phase of Jesus' ministry, as he moves towards Jerusalem, begins with the testimony of Peter, that he is the Christ of God. Then the testimony of the Father in the Transfiguration, which corresponds to the baptism.

And then that leads up to his own death and resurrection, and a second sending out of the Twelve. And here Jesus announces the fact of his forthcoming death. A great shadow is coming over the story at this point.

There have been veiled foreshadowings of Christ's death before this, but now it is being made more explicit. Jesus teaches his disciples about his forthcoming death in considerable detail. Not only will he be raised, he'll be raised on the third day.

Jesus doesn't explicitly seem to mention the manner of his death here, but immediately afterwards it's followed by a statement concerning those who would follow, that they must take up their crosses and follow him. It can be very easy for us to forget the force of the symbol of the cross. The cross was not just a generic form of execution.

It was a gruesome instrument of torture and public humiliation. And to take up your cross was to mark yourself out as a condemned man or woman, an outcast of society to be scorned and humiliated. Willingly to take up such a thing would be to deny and resist every screaming instinct of self-preservation.

Not merely our desire to avoid pain, but our desire to avoid being ashamed. The humiliation of being made a public display in your agony and nakedness. We all want to save our lives, but Christ says that those who want to save their lives must lose them.

Taking up the cross is not an optional thing to do. Our very lives must be held with an open hand as we live like those condemned to death. There is a stark underlying choice.

Who are we ashamed of? Are we ashamed of the person that we are called to follow? The one who calls us to follow after him in bearing the shame? The one who calls us to take up our cross as he has taken up his cross? Or are we ashamed of the world that rejects him? Ashamed of our sin? Ashamed of the things that tether us to this order? This order of shameful rebellion? Shame stands opposed to the concept of glory. And there is going to be a revelation of glory. The glory of Christ as he comes with the holy angels.

And Jesus teaches his disciples that those who are ashamed of him in that day will find themselves put to shame when his glory appears. Jesus says to them that some of them will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God. And the various forms of this statement in the Gospels are each followed by the event of the Transfiguration.

There seems to be some connection between that statement and the event of the Transfiguration. However, I don't believe that the Transfiguration is the fulfilment of this statement. For one, it might seem rather strange to talk about some people not dying before an event that takes place only eight days later.

Rather, I believe that it refers to the events of AD 70 and the revelation of Christ's kingdom and power at that point. Part of the background here could be seen in passages such as Daniel chapter 7. However, the Transfiguration is an anticipation of the later coming of Christ. It's a trailer, as it were, for a later feature presentation.

The Transfiguration is a privileged preview of the reality of the resurrected Christ, the ascended Christ, and also the glory of the later coming of Christ. In 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 16 to 18, the Apostle Peter speaks about this. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was born to him by the majestic glory, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, we ourselves heard this very voice born

from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

In the event of the Transfiguration, we're seeing a number of different themes coming together. Christ is the glorious last Adam and the second man. There are themes of Sinai, the theophany of Sinai as God's glory appeared on the mountain to Moses and his face shone.

Here Moses again appears on the mountain, as does Elijah, two people who witness glorious theophanic appearances of God in the Old Testament. Here Christ's face, unlike that of Moses, shines with a light of its own, not merely a reflected light. Sinai was also the place where they built the tabernacle, and Peter here wants to build three tabernacles for Elijah, for Jesus, and for Moses, not realising that Jesus himself is God tabernacled among his people.

Finally, the law was given at Sinai, and here, instead of giving the law, God declares that his Son is the one to listen to. As Hebrews 1, verses 1-2 puts it, Long ago at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. Beyond these connections and the presence of Moses, we might also think about what they're talking about.

Jesus is talking about the departure, or very literally, the exodus that he's about to accomplish at Jerusalem. In using the word exodus here, Luke makes clear to his reader that the events that are about to take place fulfil the meaning of the Passover and all the other events of the exodus. Christ is accomplishing a new deliverance for his people.

I don't believe we should think of this exodus purely in terms of Christ's death either. The exodus is achieved in his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and in the gift of his spirit at Pentecost. Indeed, these are events that can be mapped onto the Old Testament story of the exodus, the story of the Passover, the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, the story of the arrival at Sinai, and the gift of the law.

All of these things are fulfilled in Christ's work. Moses and Elijah appear alongside Christ, representing perhaps the law and the prophets, or the great witnesses, the wilderness forerunners. Jesus only takes three of his disciples, the three core disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him up the mountain.

They will witness things here that the others will not witness. However, what they witness will help them to understand what comes next. The transfiguration will help them better to understand the cross.

When they see the power and the glory of the heavenly high priest and his glorious robes, they will know that the events of the cross do not befall him unwillingly. Rather, he has taken up his cross. He has willingly walked towards this fate.

He has purposefully determined this as his path. From the vantage point of the Mount of Transfiguration, we see a glimpse of the future, of the glorious king who will one day display his glory in the coming of the kingdom. There is also an unveiling of the past.

Moses and Elijah appear with him as two witnesses. They are people whose ministry pointed forward to his, and in their appearance we learn something more about the way that Christ relates to the Old Testament and the events within it. In the glorious transfiguration of his face, we see something about the character of the appearances of God to his people in the Old Testament.

In the Gospel of John, for instance, on a number of occasions, the glory of Christ is connected with Old Testament appearances of God's glory to his people. Isaiah chapter 12 verse 41 connects the vision of Isaiah in the temple with a vision of Christ's glory. John chapter 1 verse 51 speaks of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, connecting Christ with the vision of Jacob in Jacob's ladder.

In verses 14 to 18 of chapter 1 of John, we're seeing a contrast and comparison between the glory of Christ and the glory witnessed by Moses on Mount Sinai and the glory of the law. What we see on the Mount of Transfiguration then is an unveiling of the identity of the one who had appeared to Israel throughout its history. Moses saw his back on Mount Sinai.

Isaiah saw the train of his robe filling the temple. Ezekiel in chapter 1 of his prophecy described in the most elliptical way the lower parts of his appearance in bodily form. But now, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see the face, and the face is that of Jesus Christ.

The glory of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration then is a revelation that opens up history and its meaning, both the meaning of Israel's past and its anticipation of Christ's work, and in Christ's work in veiled form in the Old Testament, and the meaning of the future of Israel and the world, as the glorious King is seen in all of his splendour. Following the majesty of the mountain appearance, there is a return to earth with a bump. Jesus had left the nine other disciples at the foot of the mountain, giving them the duty of looking after the people, and they have failed miserably in his absence.

We might think here of the example of Moses. Moses descends from Mount Sinai, where he has received the law, and he goes down to the people, who he left in the charge of Aaron, and he sees that they've gone wild, and they've built a golden calf, and they're worshipping it. He casts the tablets of stone to the ground and shatters them, and the people are judged on that occasion.

Here I think we're seeing much of the same thing. Jesus has left his disciples behind, as Aaron was left behind. The disciples, just like Aaron, have failed miserably.

And I wonder whether we're supposed to hear some allusion to the story of Exodus chapter 32, as the demon casts the child to the ground and shatters him. In calling the people a faithless and twisted generation, Jesus is taking up the language of Moses. Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 5, they have dealt corruptly with him.

They are no longer his children, because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation. And in verse 20 of that same chapter, and he said, Jesus then demonstrates his power over the demon by casting it out.

And at this point, as everyone's marvelling about his power, and Peter, James and John are in wonder at what they saw on the top of the mountain, Jesus tells them, and says that the words must stick in their ears. He is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they still do not understand what he's saying. At this point, of all the things to be preoccupied with, the disciples start to get into an argument about who is the greatest.

This is the typical human desire for exaltation over others. And Jesus' response to it is to show them a child. The kingdom of God does not work in the same way as earthly kingdoms.

The example of the child challenges us to humble ourselves, not to be people who vaunt ourselves over others, with a sense of superiority. We are not players of the competitive game of honour that utterly consumes other people's attention and concern. We must recognise our dependence, our unworthiness, and to resist the pursuit to exalt ourselves over others.

Greatness, true greatness, comes through loving service of others. Greatness also requires welcoming and receiving the weak, receiving them as we would receive Christ. In this respect, children are representative of a wider group of weak and dependent people, but important in their own right.

Receiving children means paying attention to and honouring the people who cannot give you anything in return, the people who might threaten your status rather than raising it up. In receiving such persons, we follow Jesus' own example. Jesus surrenders his rights for the sake of people who have nothing to offer him, nothing to commend themselves to his attention.

This incident is followed by another failure of recognition on the part of the disciples. There is a man casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples seek to rebuke him because he is not one of their band. This is reminiscent of Numbers 11.26-29. Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them.

They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they

prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant to Moses from his youth, said, My lord Moses, stop them.

But Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them. Jesus here challenges any sort of sectarianism. His disciples are called to build his kingdom, not to build their own kingdoms, and learning to rejoice when they see other people doing the work of God, even though they are not of their camp, is one of the ways that they will grow into this calling.

A question to consider, why is there a cloud and a voice on the Mount of Transfiguration?