Discipleship and the Synoptic Gospels
Dr. Dan Scholz (djscholz@stritch.edu)
Wednesday, June 7, 2017
9:00-11:00 am
Discipleship and the Synoptic Gospels

Jesus’ decision to call and form disciples (28-30 CE)
The historical Jesus and his disciples

Some historical context

- Jesus invitation (call) for others to follow him.
- Luke's chronology (sequence of events) most accurate historically and culturally.
- Jesus’ table fellowship as a formative activity.
- Disciples (followers) in “voluntary association” with Jesus – by the numbers.
The historical Jesus and his disciples

Some historical context

- From disciple to apostle – on being “sent out.”
- The “Twelve” as an important public image and statement – who’s sent in the name of the kingdom of God.
- Peter, Andrew, James, and John – the inner circle.
Discipleship and the Synoptic Gospels

Portrait of the disciples in the Synoptic Gospel tradition (70-90 CE)
The disciples in the Gospel of Mark

3-stage progression – round characters
Stage 1 – Mark 1-7: unconditionally follow; little understanding
Stage 2 – Mark 8-10: conditionally follow; partial understanding
Stage 3 – Mark 11-16: unconditionally depart; full understanding

Sample texts:
- Stage 1: Mark 4:35-41
- Stage 2: Mark 10:35-45
- Stage 3: 14:43-52
On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, “Let us cross to the other side.” Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!” The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?” They were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”
Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” He replied, “What do you wish [me] to do for you?” They answered him, “Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left.” Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” They said to him, “We can.” Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, “The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.” He came and immediately went over to him and said, “Rabbi.” And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them in reply, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to seize me? Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me; but that the scriptures may be fulfilled.”

And they all left him and fled. Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.
The disciples in the Gospel of Matthew

Men of “little faith” – flat characters

- Matthew appears to be interested in (partially) rehabilitating the characterization of the disciples as received from Mark.
- The disciples in Matthew are no longer largely ignorant of Jesus’ identity, they are simply, “men of little faith.”
- This characterization occurs from the beginning to the end of the Gospel of Matthew: 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 28:17.
Matthew’s redaction of Mark

Mark 6:45-52
And when he had taken leave of them, he went off to the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was far out on the sea and he was alone on shore. Then he saw that they were tossed about while rowing, for the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out. They had all seen him and were terrified. But at once he spoke with them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid!” He got into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were[completely] astounded. They had not understood the incident of the loaves. On the contrary, their hearts were hardened.

Matthew 14:22-33
After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone. Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. “It is a ghost,” they said, and they cried out in fear. At once [Jesus] spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

Peter said to him in reply, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”
Disciples as “men of little faith”

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. *When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted.*

Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

- Right down to the final episode in the Gospel of Matthew (28:16-20), the disciples are portrayed as “men of little faith.”
- Matthew leaves his community with this lasting image of the disciples.

- Our third evangelist tells the story of “Christianity” – not simple the story of Jesus as with Mark and Matthew.
The Call of the Disciples

Mark 1:16-20

As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.


While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

- By presenting the disciples in the early Church in Acts, Luke is able to completely rehabilitate the images of the disciples/apostles.
- “The Twelve” apostles are reconstituted in Acts.
- They are guided by the Holy Spirit, shown often at prayer, performs miracles, and help the poor.
- The apostles (esp. Peter and John) preach Jesus and suffer for the Church.
Discipleship and the Synoptic Gospels

“Discipleship” defined by Mark, Matthew, and Luke
“Discipleship” in Mark

- “Discipleship” is defined in the shadow of the cross:
  “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” – 8:34

- Fundamentally, discipleship in Mark amounts to following Jesus and having faith in Jesus.

- Role models of discipleship are centered on peripheral characters and not the disciples:
  - A leper (1:40-45)
  - A hemorrhaging woman (5:25-34)
  - The Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30)
  - A blind man named Bartimaeus (10:46-52)
“Discipleship” in Matthew

“Discipleship” is defined as evangelization – teaching and baptizing in the name of the Triune God:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

– 28:19-20a

Discipleship in Matthew includes:

- continued adherence to the Mosaic Law (5:17)
- humility (18:1-5)
- unconditional forgiveness of others (18:21-35)
- a willingness to sacrifice everything for the kingdom of Heaven (16:24-28).

While Peter is “the rock” of church, Jesus remains the object of its faith.

**Gospel of Luke**
- Discipleship is defined by right conduct:
  - Keep a proper attitude toward wealth and possessions.
  - Serve others in humility.
  - Follow Jesus unconditionally.
  - Be willing to suffer for the faith.

**The Acts of the Apostles**
- The disciples are shown living this idealized life:
  - The disciples display a proper attitude toward wealth and possessions (4:32-35; 6:1-7).
  - The Twelve humbly serve others in their healing ministry (3:1-10; 5:15-16).
  - The apostles follow Jesus unconditionally (4:1-3; 5:40-41).
  - The disciples carry their own crosses (Peter and John) and even die for the faith (Stephen, 7:54-60 and James, 12:2-3).
Discipleship and the Synoptic Gospels

21st century American Catholic discipleship
21st century American Catholic discipleship

Lessons from the Synoptic Gospels on discipleship:

The Gospel of Mark:
- Witness to others the grace received in redemptive suffering – preach “Christ crucified” intelligibly.

The Gospel of Matthew:
- Evangelize first within your own parish community – be open to the “other” in your midst.

- Make room for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit – let the Holy Spirit do the heavy lifting.