

DISCIPLES AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK, WITH  
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MARK'S CONTRAST BETWEEN MALE AND  
FEMALE DISCIPLES

by

NICHOLAS CHRISTOPHER COX

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
For the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

NEW TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Prof M.T. SPECKMAN

JANUARY 2007

## **SUMMARY**

This study is an exploration into female discipleship. Its primary aim is to compare and contrast Mark's portrayal of male and female followers of Jesus respectively, while its secondary aim is to establish what lessons there may be for the social status of Christian women in the kingdom of Swaziland. These ends will be pursued by looking at Mark's portrayal of male disciples and the contrast he draws between them and the female followers of Jesus. This study then concludes that Mark has a more positive view of female followers than he has of male disciples, and this may stem from the conduct of male disciples he has observed in the Church of his time.

## **KEY TERMS**

- ◆ The Twelve Disciples
- ◆ New ethics of discipleship
- ◆ Female followers
- ◆ Faithfulness
- ◆ Gender relations
- ◆ Patriarchy
- ◆ Church
- ◆ Following Christ
- ◆ Androcentrism
- ◆ Gospel of Mark

## CONTENTS

<b><u>Introduction</u></b>		p1
	• Aim of the Study	p1
	• Origin of the Study	p1
	• Methodology of the Study	p4
	• The Structure of the Dissertation	p5
<b><u>Chapter 1</u></b>	<b><u>An Introduction to some scholarly views on discipleship</u></b>	p8
	• 1.1 Introduction	p8
	• 1.2 The Semantic Study	p8
	• 1.3 The Context: 'On the Way' to Jerusalem	p11
	• 1.4 The Discipleship Section	p14
	• 1.5 Discipleship in the Passion of Jesus	p24
	• 1.6 Conclusion	p25
<b><u>Chapter 2</u></b>	<b><u>Mark's portrayal of Male Disciples</u></b>	p27
	• 2.1 Introduction	p27
	• 2.2 A Survey of Groups who followed Jesus	p27
	• 2.3 An Exploratory Study into the Characterisation of the Male Followers of Jesus	p32
	• 2.4 A Short Survey of some individual Male Characters	p50
	• 2.5 Conclusion	p52
<b><u>Chapter 3</u></b>	<b><u>Jesus and Women in Mark</u></b>	p53
	• 3.1 Introduction	p53
	• 3.2 A Brief Study on the Status of Women in 1 <sup>st</sup> century CE Jewish Society	p53
	• 3.3 A Concise Analysis of Jesus' Encounters with Women	p54
	• 3.4 Conclusion	p77
<b><u>Chapter 4</u></b>	<b><u>An Evaluation of the Female and Male disciples of Christ</u></b>	p79
	• 4.1 Introduction	p79
	• 4.2 An Introduction to the Evaluation Exercise	
	• 4.3 Conclusion	p106
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b>		p107
	• A Short Summary of the Anglican Diocese of Swaziland	p109
	• The Role of Women in the Diocese of Swaziland	p110
	• A Day of Transformation	p111
	• Two Ways Forward	p112
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>		p116-9

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Aim of the Study**

This study has two broad aims. The first aim is to compare and contrast Mark's portrayal of male and female followers of Jesus. The title of the dissertation "Disciples and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark, with particular reference to Mark's contrast of male and female disciples" reflects this, in as much as it indicates that this dissertation is a study that explores the women and some of the men with whom Jesus comes into contact. It will ascertain patterns of behaviour of male and female followers of Christ, in order to highlight which gender can be said to have a more positive portrayal in Mark's Gospel. The main focus of this part of the study, will be in investigating the behavioural patterns of the female followers, for the intention is to show that female followers in Mark are the 'truer' followers of Christ.

It is worth pointing out at the outset that, traditionally, the term 'disciples' has been understood to refer exclusively to male disciples. Females are not usually associated with discipleship, although feminist influences and narrative readings of New Testament literature have hinted at the possibility that Jesus may have had females among his disciples. This study certainly concurs with this perspective. This study will suggest that women may well be present in the character group labelled 'disciples', and furthermore, that there are a small number of women characters who demonstrate all the key hallmarks of discipleship as defined by Jesus in Mark's narrative. And therefore in this study the term 'disciples' refers to male and female characters.

The second aim of this study is to consider what the implications of the first aim may be for Christian women in the context of rural Swaziland. The reflections offered on Mark's positive portrayal of female followers are intended to be offered as a constructive critique to the low societal status of Christian women in Swaziland, and to suggest a way forward to help remedy the current situation.

### **Origin of the Study**

My own personal motivation for embarking on such a study as this stems almost entirely from the time I have spent in the Kingdom of Swaziland, first as a

Volunteer, and now subsequently as an ordained priest serving in the Anglican Church. During my time in Swaziland I have lived and worked in a number of rural parish communities and villages, and have seen at first hand very clearly defined gender roles, that are rigidly enforced from earliest childhood. On reaching adulthood these gender roles appear to become aligned along hierarchical and patriarchal axis, with male persons assuming a dominant and power-wielding position over that of female persons. And it has been a great culture shock for me, having been raised and formed in a Western liberal environment in the United Kingdom, to witness the second-class status of persons of the female gender.

This juxtaposition of the genders is best exemplified by two cultural practices: the first is the ancient Swazi custom of '*lobhola*' whereby a man may negotiate with a family to acquire a woman to be his wife for so many heads of cattle. The wife thereafter remains the property of the man. The second is the practice of polygamy which is still rife in many parts of rural Swaziland – a man may, according to his own wishes, acquire as many wives as he feels comfortable with.

These are but two examples of Swazi tradition and culture which still exist to this day, and have been practised since time immemorial, which illustrate well the ancient hegemonic position of men over women. And because of its longevity, such customs as these are thought by many Swazis to be endowed with certain hallowed and sacred qualities.

Even within the Christian church this gender inequality is still a major issue. The problem is complicated still further by the fact that Christian churches and the Bible, have often times in the past and even up to today, been key motivators in maintaining the status quo of the oppression of the female gender in rural parts of Swaziland. It is worth amplifying this point by highlighting that the most popular churches in rural Swaziland are the denominations that might be termed 'African Indigenous Churches', and this would include such churches as for example 'The Church of Holy Zion', 'The Church of the Nazarene', 'The Church of Jericho'. And one thing these churches share in common, to the best of my knowledge and observation, is that they appear to be uniformly all-male in their clerical and pastoral leadership. Thus, the dominant gender group in Swazi society and culture is also the hegemonic group within the most popular churches in rural communities.

It is perhaps no surprise therefore that some New Testament texts (such as 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-10, 16 & 14:31-35, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1

Timothy 2:9-15) which appear to subjugate women to a subservient position in the Church and the home have all been promulgated as the unchallengeable and eternal Word of God, from the pulpit and elsewhere. And a hermeneutic of interpretation of Holy Scripture as infallible and indisputable results in such cultural practices as I have cited above being lauded and expounded time and again as nothing less than God-ordained.

As a Christian minister I am of course expected to pastor freely to both men and women in the community despite their grossly unequal status. The biggest challenge one faces is what to do with situations such as these which one finds in the Christian church and in the prevailing culture in the country at large? Especially if one considers it to be unjust, or perhaps even 'sinful'. How does one handle this set of circumstances sensitively and diplomatically? And how does one even begin to go about attempting to transform it? Occupying the elevated – and somewhat prestigious – role of '*Umfundisi*' (Reverend) in the community, has given me a platform that I would not otherwise have been afforded. The dilemma for me has been how to best make use of my role to address these pressing issues?

As an ordained priest and as a student of theology I have returned to the Bible in my search for answers, and particular the Gospel of Mark. My hypothesis is: might Mark with his rural background and his story of Jesus' life have something to say about the current status quo of Christian women in rural Swaziland? It is easy to recall other situations and contexts which the Bible has addressed and made a positive difference in the quality of life of some. For example one need only consider apartheid in South Africa and the liberating and radical interpretations of Scripture espoused by Black and Liberation theologies in the 1970s and 1980s, or the impact of Feminist theology on public opinion and policy in the West again in the 1970s and 1980s.

My hope in this study is to begin to forge a way out of this difficult impasse. It is an attempt to offer an alternative view of both Holy Scripture, and more critically the crucial role that women played in the ministry of Jesus against a hostile and oppressive background of societal and religious expectations. As a priest and theologian it is my hypothesis that Mark's Gospel might have an important message for this situation. And furthermore that it is a perfectly appropriate response to invoke the values of the Gospel of Jesus in such a situation as this – hence this academic study. It is my intention to show – using mainly secondary sources – that the Markan

Jesus related to women in a way that was shocking and offensive for his culture and religion; and furthermore that the Markan Jesus appears to place greater value on the support, loyalty and ministry he receives from his female friends than he does his male friends. I intend to show that the Markan Jesus turns the societal value system of 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Roman Palestine upside down by creating a new egalitarian community of followers, wherein no longer exists hierarchical and patriarchal relational dynamics, and in which women and men together have a full and equal share.

The end result of this study, I hope, will be an attempt to change deeply held perceptions about women as human beings in their own right in Jesus' day and, of course, our own. I shall be amplifying the valued and respected ways in which Christ related to women. I intend this study to be an assistance to Christian women in Swaziland who are subjugated and are suffering at the hands of cultural and traditional practices as well as patriarchal interpretations of the Bible, to unearth for themselves a new positive self image by identifying with some of the heroines that lie hidden in Mark's Gospel.

### **Methodology of the Study**

The method that I shall employ in this study is a method that falls within the framework of Narrative Criticism. Narrative Criticism belongs to the genre of Literary Criticism (Malbon 2000:ix). As one scholar succinctly puts it, Narrative Criticism approaches Mark 'as a literary text which may be analysed in literary terms (e.g. plot, characterization etc) like other works of literature,' (Telford 1995:91). Therefore, a narrative critical methodology examines Mark as a 'unified narrative' (Rhoads & Michie 1981:2), which forms the 'centre of a communication process involving author, text and reader' (Malbon 2000:21).

Narrative critical scholars appear to agree that there are two main aspects to the text; namely the story – indicating the *content* of the narrative including events, characters and settings (i.e. the 'what' of the narrative), and the discourse – indicating the *rhetoric* of the narrative (i.e. the 'how' of the narrative) (so Malbon 2000:6, Telford 1995:92). Thus a narrative-critical methodology would explore how the content and/or the rhetoric of the narrative communicate the meaning of the story (Malbon 2000:47).

My study falls within the first of these two aspects: the *content* of the story (the ‘what’ of the narrative). I shall focus on the characterization within the narrative. My method may be labelled a ‘characterization- based approach’ to Mark’s Gospel. Such a method has been explored by Markan scholars before, perhaps most notably by E.S. Malbon, In an anthology of her research papers on characterization in Mark’s Gospel, she focuses on the interrelations of Mark’s characters and Jesus. By noting that all the characters in the narrative are depicted in relation to the central figure of the story – Jesus – Malbon emphasises the richness in depth that exists in Markan characterisation, especially in the contrasts and comparisons that can be made between the characters (Malbon 2000:x). It is in this particular field of interest that this dissertation is found.

For it is an attempt to examine possible differences between male and female characters in how they relate to Christ. This study is an investigation into the behavioural patterns of the male characters and female characters in order to ascertain whether, the male or the female characters are able to execute the role and responsibilities of followers that Jesus expects of those who would come after him, according to what Jesus himself teaches about discipleship. It seeks to explore the particular characteristics and idiosyncracies of the interactions that occur and the relationships that develop between the men and Jesus, and the women and Jesus.

So it is an exploration into the portrayal of men and women in Mark, especially their relationships to Christ and the quality of discipleship they offer to him that will be the major slant of the study. I shall also be comparing and contrasting between the reactions of the two genders to Jesus, but the bulk of this study will be an enquiry into the female characters and how they fare in light of Jesus’ teaching on discipleship. Exploring these issues will help to clarify why Jesus appears to affirm the actions and ministry of the female gender more than that of the male gender in Mark’s Gospel.

### **The Structure of the Dissertation**

My study opens in Chapter 1 with an attempt to break open the theme of discipleship. I explore what the whole notion of discipleship means in Mark’s Gospel, by evaluating scholarly opinions on this theme. In particular, I investigate what Jesus himself preaches about this, because it is my contention that he inaugurates a new



ethic of discipleship, which all who wish to follow Christ must therefore adhere to. I attempt to define this new ethic by articulating what this new ethic entails, and in what way it can be deemed to be radically different. To this end, an analysis of Jesus' teaching forms the bulk of this chapter. I do not intend Chapter 1 to neatly summarise all that has been said about discipleship in Mark; on the contrary, Chapter 1 is merely a way into the subject of discipleship in Mark's Gospel. It is intended as a starting point which leads directly into the investigative study which follows.

Building on this unpacking of the theme of discipleship in the Gospel narrative, I begin my comparative study of the followers of Christ, in Chapter 2 by considering the male gender of followers of Jesus. Chiefly, I seek to establish how successful those male followers are in fulfilling the new ethic for discipleship that Jesus has created. Therefore, after substantiating clearly who these male followers are, the majority of Chapter 2 is taken up by an exploration into their portrayal in Mark's narrative. I examine their characterisation under three separate lenses, which unambiguously elucidate their mentality and behaviour as followers of Christ. I have deliberately kept this section brief and to the point. I do not imagine that Chapter 2 encapsulates all that can be said on this vast field of interest. My intention is only to make clear the behaviour of the male gender of followers and their failings thereof, in order to accentuate the contrast that exists between male disciples and female followers of Jesus.

Having considered the male gender, I shall in the remaining two chapters of the study turn to the female gender of followers of Christ. In Chapter 3 I examine six examples of Jesus encountering women characters who may be deemed to be followers, and the manner in which they fulfil the new ethic of discipleship that Jesus has pioneered. In each case I explore in detail the nature of the interaction between the female characters' and Jesus, and which aspects of the female character's behaviour can be said to be in close accord with this new ethic. In order to magnify the chasm between the male and female genders of followers, I draw heavily upon feminist scholastic research when analysing these six instances of women engaging with Jesus. To understand the role of women in Jesus' day, I begin Chapter 3 by extrapolating the role and position of women in 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Roman Palestine. Against this background one can understand more readily and reap far deeper insight into how and why they were able to be so effective in following Jesus, and acting in a manner which he expected all his followers to do.

Having established the nature of how Jesus and women interacted with each other in the Markan narrative, I follow this by conducting an evaluation exercise of the male disciples and the female followers of Christ. In this evaluation exercise I outline four key criteria of true discipleship which emanate from Jesus' preaching on his new ethic of discipleship. Each criterion outlines a pattern of behaviour that a follower of Jesus must seek to emulate. With each criterion I compare and contrast the conduct of certain female characters with that of the male disciples, to determine which gender can be deemed to fulfil the four criteria fully. In the evaluation exercise, the conclusion I come to is that it is the female characters who overwhelmingly attain these criteria of true discipleship, rather than the male disciples, and thus it is the female characters who can be termed the true followers of Jesus.

In the conclusion to my thesis, I attempt to outline how the Church can learn from this exposition of faithful female following of Christ; how the Church may effect change internally in order to affect change externally in secular society. By taking cognisance of the excellence of women followers of Christ in Mark, the Church can experience a transformation in its gender relations from a dynamic of subjugating the female gender to a dynamic of equality and unity between the genders. Thus transformed the Church is then well-placed to be a catalyst for real and lasting change in the wider world.

All Bible quotations will be from the New Revised Standard Version translation unless otherwise stated.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO SOME SCHOLARLY VIEWS ON DISCIPLESHIP**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I will briefly explore the meaning of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark as it is reflected in the different schools of thought among New Testament scholars. It is a broad and multi-faceted theme. However, there is some consensus that Jesus' major teaching on discipleship comes in the extended central section (8:22 – 10:52) of the Gospel (e.g. France 2002:320-321, Humphrey 1992:75, Mann 1986:338, Marcus 1992:32, Rawlinson 1960:108), which I shall hereafter refer to as 'the discipleship section'. The importance of Jesus' teaching on discipleship in this long passage cannot be understated, as he clearly institutes a new standard of discipleship by introducing a new ethic. In other words, he calls on women and men to fulfil a radically new style of discipleship in order to be his followers.

In pursuit of the aim of this chapter, I will explore scholarly views on the following: first the key words and phrases in the narrative that signify this theme of discipleship. Secondly, what is perceived as the discipleship section and the context within which it is set – namely Jesus' journey to his destiny in Jerusalem. I will pay particular attention to Jesus' three passion-resurrection-prophecies, and the critically important teaching on discipleship that follows each of them, and the relationship between the prophecies about his passion and his teachings on discipleship. And thirdly, I will explore a short passage in the Passion of Jesus (13:33-37) which conveys a crucial aspect of discipleship in Mark. This might appear to be a long and daunting chapter. However the intention is to introduce each aspect of discipleship briefly while avoiding more detailed discussion. I shall commence with a short word study which I have labelled as 'the semantic study'.

#### **1.2. The Semantic Study**

The purpose of this semantic study will be to attempt to highlight important words that allude to the theme of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. I shall focus on three words, namely '*mathetes*', '*akoluthen*', and '*en te hodo*'. I have chosen these

three in particular because, as will be established, they convey the critical nuances of this concept of discipleship in the narrative. With each of these in turn, I shall explain the Greek grammar and the multiplicity of meanings that can be rendered. As I shall endeavour to show, each of these terms carries a deeper meaning than the superficial first-glance literal meaning<sup>1</sup>.

### **1.2.1. 'Mathetes'**

This word is a 1<sup>st</sup> declension masculine noun which literally means 'learner' or 'apprentice'. It is derived from the verb '*matheo*' meaning 'to learn' or 'to understand' (Strong 1984:273). The noun is closely related to '*matheteuo*' meaning 'to become a disciple' or 'to be disciplined' (Strong 1984:274). '*Mathetes*' in a purely 'technical sense' implies a direct dependence by the one under instruction upon another who is superior in knowledge<sup>2</sup>. Thus it carries the connotation of one who is a student in the sense of being a follower or adherent of another (and so by extension a disciple). A key part of Jesus' call to women and men to become his followers, which supersedes any intention to instruct them or to deepen them in faith, 'is to awaken within them an unconditional commitment to himself'<sup>3</sup>.

### **1.2.2. 'Akoluthen'**

This is the infinitive of the omega conjugation verb '*akolutho*'. It is derived from the noun '*keleuthes*' meaning 'a road', and literally translates as being 'in the same way', i.e. 'to accompany' (Strong 1984:370). The verb '*akolutho*' alludes to the notion that to follow Jesus means to do so both physically and devotionally. In Mark's Gospel it conveys very strong overtones of discipleship, and is often employed as a literary sign that Jesus is calling an individual to follow as a disciple<sup>4</sup>. It implies going after him temporally and spatially, as one of his supporters on his peripatetic ministry: hence it is often interpreted as 'to walk behind', or 'to follow' as acolytes (e.g. 1:17-18, 2:15, 10:52). The call to follow as a disciple meant the start of a new journey in

---

<sup>1</sup> All the koine Greek and ancient Hebrew words have been transliterated into English and do not appear in the characters of their original language

<sup>2</sup> Rengstorf TDNT Vol 4 p416.

<sup>3</sup> Rengstorf TDNT Vol 4 p406.

<sup>4</sup> Rengstorf TDNT Vol 4 p444.

life. For Mark, it is a journey that begins with a call from Jesus and ends in resurrection (Suggit 2002:65).

### **1.2.3. 'En te hodo'**

The third signifier of discipleship in my word study is a three-word phrase that occurs four times in the discipleship section. It is the epithet '*en te hodo*' (8:27, 9:33, 10:32 & v52). This translates as 'on/in the way'. To be 'on the way', can be understood to mean, figuratively, to be on a journey (Strong 1984:67). However on another level this epithet is a symbolic metaphor denoting discipleship. In the text it implies following Jesus on the way of the cross<sup>5</sup>. It is a key motif in the narrative, first occurring in the prophecy of 1:2-3 ('who will prepare your way/Prepare the way of the Lord'). Mark's use of the texts from Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1) show how this concept is grounded in the Judaistic backgrounds of early Christianity (Best 1986:6). The motif of 'the way' was used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe an individual's behaviour (e.g. Genesis 18:19 'keep the way of the Lord' and Psalms 1: 1 & 6 (NIV) 'the way of sinners' in comparison to 'the way of the righteous' – Suggit 2002:63). It recalls the journeys undertaken in the history of ancient Israel by the characters such as Abram leaving Haran to be led by Yahweh to a new land<sup>6</sup> and the Exodus desert wanderings of the Israelites before their entry into the Land of Promise<sup>7</sup> (Rhoads & Michie 1982:64). In the New Testament 'the way' motif denoted the Christian way of life and the Acts of the Apostles reminds us that the first followers of Christ were known as followers of the Way<sup>8</sup> (Suggit 2002:63). Thus for Mark, to walk '*en te hodo*' of God, not only meant living as a disciple but also means to be assisting in the building of God's kingdom on earth (Marcus 1992:33).

Mark's usage of '*en te hodo*' is distinctive because of its many connotations. Firstly it implies the straightforward progression by Jesus and his company as they journey from town to town – and in this part of the text, in a Jerusalem-ward direction. Secondly, Christ fulfills 'the way' as he moves towards the will of God awaiting him in Jerusalem. And thirdly the command to follow Jesus is a challenge to

---

<sup>5</sup> Rengstorf TDNT Vol 4 p449

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 12:4

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 16:1

<sup>8</sup> e.g. Acts of the Apostles 9:2, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14 & v22.

all whom he calls to become faithful followers, that is to venture after him ‘on the way’ of true discipleship.

Therefore, ‘*mathetes*’, ‘*akoluthein*’ and ‘*en te hodo*’ are important signifiers in the text of various aspects of discipleship. For the purposes of this chapter, the most critical is the phrase ‘*en te hodo*’. It’s four-fold re-occurrence in the discipleship section – at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of Jesus’ Southward journey – suggests that it could serve as the title to this particular section of the Gospel (Marcus 1992:32).

Having attempted to highlight the significant words that point to the theme of discipleship in Mark’s narrative, I shall now proceed to offer a framework for the context within which the discipleship section is set. I feel this is important as it will enable a fuller exploration of the discipleship section thereafter.

### **1.3. The Context: ‘On the Way’ to Jerusalem**

The purpose of highlighting Jesus’ geographical progression to Jerusalem at this juncture, is in order to appreciate more fully Jesus’ teaching on discipleship which occurs at significant stages along the way. In other words a fuller appreciation of Jesus’ passion-resurrection-prophecies and his new ethics of discipleship can only be grasped if one first comprehends their literary context, which is this expedition to Jerusalem.

This lengthy section on discipleship (8:22 – 10:52) is set within the framework of the final stages of Jesus’ peripatetic ministry. It is portrayed as a meandering journey that is inexorably leading him to his destiny in Jerusalem (Hooker 1991:200, Stock 1982:138). A total of seven geographical locations are identified in the text as stages on the journey: four are in Galilee and three are in Judea. I have schematised this in the manner that follows:

#### **1.3.1. Locations**

##### Galilean locations

Location #1: **Bethsaida** (8:22). A city by the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus performs a two-step healing of blindness.

Location #2: **Caesarea Philippi** (8:27). A far Northern Gentile city, East of Phoenicia. Jesus prophesies his passion and resurrection for the first time, and teaches his followers and the crowds. The motif '*en te hodo*' occurs.

Location #3: **Galilee** (9:30). A large region due West of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus prophesies his fate for a second time, and teaches his disciples privately.

Location #4: **Capernaum** (9:33). A Galilean city where Jesus teaches his disciples. The motif '*en te hodo*' occurs.

#### Judean locations

Location #5: **Judea, and beyond the Jordan** (10:1). A large region in the South of Israel in which Jesus teaches his opponents, his followers and the crowds.

Location #6: **On the way up to Jerusalem** (10:32 NIV). An unspecified locality, but within close proximity to Jerusalem. Jesus prophesies for the final and most explicit time. The motif '*en te hodo*' occurs.

Location #7: **Jericho** (10:46). A neighbouring city to Jerusalem, and Jesus' final stop before the start of his passion. He heals blind Bartimaeus. The motif '*en te hodo*' occurs.

All these different localities create an artificial and slightly unfeasible framework (Nineham 1963:248) designed to strengthen the sense of movement and increasing momentum towards a climax in Jerusalem (Mann 1986:338, Stanton 1989:50). As each venue is reached and left behind so the pressure and tension in the narrative grows (e.g. 10:32), as the city of Jerusalem looms larger in the distance. It is clear that this journey is a Markan narrative construct loaded with spiritual and symbolic meaning (Best 1986:15). It depicts Jesus as travelling seemingly the entire length of Israel from Caesarea Philippi in the wilderness of the distant North, to the centre of Judaism in Jerusalem.

It is interesting to note what the above scheme reveals. Location 1 (Bethsaida – 8:22-6) and Location 7 (Jericho – 10:46-52) were both places where Jesus healed blindness. These pericopae serve as transitional links in the structure of the Gospel (France 2002:321,421). At Location 1 the two-phase healing of the blind man occurs and serves two purposes: it concludes the main section of the Gospel (4:35-8:26) that narrates Jesus' miracle workings, and it opens the discipleship section (Malbon

2000:40). Likewise Location 7, which depicts the healing of blind Bartimaeus, is a narrative link that concludes the discipleship section and leads directly into Jesus' passion in Jerusalem. France (2002:322) suggests that they serve as an introduction and conclusion to the discipleship section. These healing-of-blindness stories mirror each other. So much so that, as one scholar has suggested, they represent a literary device known as '*inclusio*'. This technique is used to make the beginning and end of a body of text correspond to each other in a significant manner (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:13). It is entirely intentional on Mark's part that the discipleship section, which discloses Jesus' new ethics of discipleship, both opens and closes with these similarly themed pericopae. It is vital to understand that the healing of blindness is a metaphor in the Gospel for the gift of spiritual understanding (Best 1986:3, France 2002:320, Malbon in Anderson & Moore 1992:35). So the pericope of the two-stage healing is a metaphor for two-stages of enlightenment. The instant healing of Bartimaeus who follows Jesus into Jerusalem signifies the notion that genuine spiritual understanding leads to true discipleship (Best 1986:21). Both these pericopae hold deeper implications with regards to Jesus' attempt to instil in his followers a greater depth of faith and spiritual insight needed to see his true identity and vocation as the Messiah.

Furthermore, Locations 2 – 6 were all places that Jesus preached and taught. It is important to garner from this scheme the following point: the fusing of a passion-resurrection prophecy with the Markan motif of discipleship '*en te hodo*'. This occurs in Location 2 (Caesarea Philippi – 8:27) and Location 6 (on the way to Jerusalem – 10:32) and the close proximity of Location 3 (the prophecy of passion in Galilee – 9:30) with Location 4 (the occurrence of the 'way' motif in Capernaum – 9:33). It all emphasises how closely discipleship is linked to the concept of who Jesus is and what Jesus does (i.e. christology). In other words a true understanding of discipleship in the Gospel depends on a genuine comprehension of Christ's ministry and passion that led him, ultimately to crucifixion. Thus, the theme of discipleship is integrally linked to christology in the Gospel of Mark (Telford 1995:140). For Mark, discipleship meant much more than endlessly trailing an eschatological prophet proclaiming the Kingdom of God – it actually meant following Jesus to the cross. Indeed, a full understanding of the nature of discipleship only becomes apparent in the light of the cross, and cannot be properly grasped apart from the passion, death and resurrection of Christ (Best 1981:13).



What is revealed by my scheme above is that there is a three-fold pattern evident within this section of the narrative. Location 2 begins with the ‘way’ motif (v27), followed by the first prophecy (v31), and then the teaching of new values pertaining to discipleship (v34 – 9:1). Locations 3 & 4 open this time with the prophecy (v31), followed by the ‘way’ motif (v33), and then close with more unique teaching on discipleship (v35 – 50). And finally Location 6 opens with the ‘way’ motif (v32), continues immediately with the prophecy (v33-4), and also concludes with radical discipleship teaching (v35-45). In this three-fold pattern, one can see how Mark has blended with great subtlety the christological prophecies, and the motif of discipleship, cementing the pattern with his socially revolutionary teachings on discipleship. So a special trend is discernable here to integrate important Markan themes. What becomes very noticeable from the above scheme, is that there is a tripartite structure underpinning this extended part of the text, based on Christ’s three passion-resurrection-prophecies (Stock 1989:238). As I have shown, these occur in Location 2 – Caesarea Philippi (8:27f), Location 3 – Galilee (9:30f) and Location 6 – on the way to Jerusalem (10:32f). Each prophecy is followed by new teachings on key elements of discipleship. I shall now examine in greater detail each of these prophecies and the discipleship teaching that follows.

#### **1.4. The Discipleship Section (8:22 – 10:52)**

In this section of the narrative, Jesus’ disciples are taught the true meaning of discipleship and the mission of Christ. Kingsbury (1989:105), Swartley (1981:141), Hurtado (in Longenecker 1996:12), Milne 1990:25 and Malbon (in Anderson & Moore 1992:34) all agree that there exists within these pericopae a helpful formulaic pattern with regard to the structure of each of these prophecies<sup>9</sup>. Each prophecy (8:31-32a, 9:31, 10:33-4) is followed by the response of his followers to the prophecy (8:32b-3, 9:32-4, 10:35-41), and then by a teaching Jesus gives based on their response which introduces his new morals of discipleship (8:34-9:1, 9:35-7, 10:42-5). And so in what follows I will focus on Jesus’ three passion-resurrection-prophecies

---

<sup>9</sup> Malbon (in Anderson & Moore 1992:32-33) offers the literary-critical term ‘prolepsis’ for an event that is narrated before its ‘logical order in the narrative world’. Thus Jesus’ three prophecies hint proleptically at what will come later.

and his new ethic of discipleship<sup>10</sup>. This will help to elucidate the specific nuances that discipleship now entails. The intention will be to demarcate the new standards Jesus is setting for all his followers. In the following chapters this study will seek to ascertain if either male and/or female characters meet this new standard.

#### **1.4.1. The First Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy (8:31-32a)**

This first prophecy of Jesus' passion takes place in Caesarea Philippi and foretells great suffering, condemnation ('rejection'), death and resurrection. The appearance of the discipleship motif 'en te hodo' within the pericope of this first passion prophecy indicates the aforementioned blending of the themes of christology and discipleship in the text. This prophecy is perhaps based on a pre-Markan logion or a primitive Son of Man suffering statement (cf. 9:12, 9:31, 10:33-4), perhaps intended for credal purposes by the first generation of Christians (Best 1986:24). What I found noteworthy in this first prophecy is that it states 'being killed' (and not specifically crucified), 'after three days' (as opposed to on the third day), and 'rise again' (not be raised). The significance of this lies in what it reveals about the difference in emphasis of Jesus' words with what has become part of the Christian tradition.

After Jesus' first prophecy there follows an exchange with Simon Peter, which I shall explore further in the next chapter. After this exchange there follows Jesus' teaching.

##### **1.4.1.1. The First Teaching of the New Ethics of Discipleship (8:34 - 9:1)**

Jesus' teaching, after the reaction of his followers, addresses the 'the crowd with his disciples' (v34a). His teaching is a clarion call to all who would be his 'followers' (The NIV diverges from this NRSV rendering by translating 'followers' as those who would 'come after me'. The Greek reads '*Ei tis thelei opiso mou elthein*' which literally means, 'If s/he wants to come after/behind me'. So the NIV is closer to the literal meaning of the Greek). The essence of the Greek alludes to a movement after him in the sense of showing personal allegiance to him (so to all intents and purposes, as his follower) (Metzger 1966:156).

---

<sup>10</sup> I shall discuss the particular topic of the disciples' reaction and understanding of Jesus' prophecies and moral instruction in greater detail in the next chapter when I focus on the role of the male disciples.

The half-verse of v34b contains the new ethic of Jesus' teaching on standards of discipleship that must be fulfilled if one is to follow the way of God faithfully.

To be a follower of Jesus' requires three things:

1. Self-denial ('let them deny themselves'), which denotes humility as opposed to asceticism;
2. Cross-bearing ('take up their cross') – the pre-eminent meaning here being that of voluntary sacrifice and fasting;
3. Faithful following ('follow me'), on the way of discipleship.

This last call emphasises the point of following him as his disciple, as he addressed his teaching to his 'followers' in the first place. To gain the proper sense of the Markan deployment of these verbs it must be noted that the verbs in 8:34 for 'deny' (*aparnesastho*) and 'take up' (*arato*) are both in the imperative mood of the punctiliar Aorist tense indicating a single once-for-all action, and they are then succeeded by the durative present tense for 'follow me' (*akolutheito*), indicating an on-going continuous process (Zerwick 1974:134). What this means is that the Aorist tense views the action of denying self and taking up the cross of 'however long duration, as telescoped to a point' (Zerwick 1974:xii). So a punctiliar statement may be made as we have it here, but it is 'all-embracing, summarising numerous instances' (Zerwick 1974:xii).

In my view it is critical to understand the correct nuance of Jesus' instructions here. For a follower to be a true disciple of Christ, the denying of self and taking up of one's cross is not a once in a lifetime act, but rather a perpetual event in the daily pilgrimage of a believer. Zerwick goes on to offer an alternative translation: he cites the grammatical rule that if an imperative (in this case '*akolutheito*') is linked by the conjunction '*kai*' (meaning 'and') to a previous imperative (here it would be '*arato*') the final clause can contain the consequences of the preceding actions. So one could render the final clause of 8:34 as follows: (he must deny himself, take up his cross) 'then he will be my disciple' rather than 'and so follow me' (1974:134).

The following verse (v35) expands on Jesus' radically new ethic of discipleship. Only by losing one's life (through self-denial, cross-bearing and following Jesus for his sake and for the sake of his good news) will one save one's life: by living the new life of a disciple of God one will have saved oneself for eternal

life. And those who wish to live comfortable, complacent lives, concerned only with their own needs and desires, will indeed lose their lives. The remainder of Jesus' teaching (v36 – 9:1) expounds further on this new value for discipleship according to the will of God, by applying it to the perspective true followers must have of the world (v36-7), and the need for boldness and courage in witnessing to the name of Christ in the world (v38 – 9:1)<sup>11</sup>.

In the early days of Christianity, the ancient world knew of master-disciple paradigms in two general forms: those practised in the schools of philosophy and those observed in the cultic and religious traditions of the day<sup>12</sup>. I must concur with Rengstorf who posits that this new paradigm Jesus is instituting supersedes both of these, in as much as it is a radically new lifestyle, having at its core the existence of a personal attachment to Jesus which shapes and influences every aspect of the follower's life<sup>13</sup>.

#### **1.4.2. The Second Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy (9:30-31)**

The second prophecy occurs in Galilee (9:30), further South than Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus is attempting to keep himself and his disciples anonymous so that he can teach them privately (9:30b-31a). It is the least detailed and most 'primitive' of the three prophecies Jesus utters (Hooker 1991:226). Santos (2003:175-6) makes the noteworthy suggestion that the key changes from the first prophecy include an emphasis on the abandonment ('betrayed') of the Son of Man, and the fact that he will be handed over to the will of humans (i.e. as opposed to the elders, chief priests and scribes), and subsequently to death and resurrection (v31b). Furthermore, Myers (1988:260) offers the view that in this prophecy alone, Jesus stresses twice that his destiny will lead him to be killed (*apokteino*).

Immediately subsequent to this second prophecy is an exchange between Jesus and all the male disciples, to which I shall return in the next chapter. The exchange is followed by a second instalment of discipleship teaching by Jesus.

---

<sup>11</sup> Best (1986:58) has suggested that the fusion of the Great Confession of Simon Peter (8:27-30) with the Transfiguration (9:2-8), sandwiching the passion-resurrection-prophecy and discipleship teaching (8:31-9:1) shows again how discipleship is inevitably seen within the light of christology. The intertwining of these themes alludes to the excellence of Mark as narrator and redactor.

<sup>12</sup> Rengstorf TDNT Vol 4 p419.

<sup>13</sup> TDNT Vol 4 p441.

### **1.4.2.1. The Second Teaching of New Ethics of Discipleship (9:35-50)**

Jesus brings a new aspect into his teaching on discipleship. For the first time he espouses servanthood as a form of ministry (v35). The passion of Jesus is now linked to the need for service. This is the heart of his message on discipleship in Galilee. He develops his new moral principles of discipleship further from the first instalment after his first prophecy (8:34f), by incorporating to the notion of self-denial, cross-bearing and faithful following, the idea of service.

Jesus exemplifies the concept of servanthood (i.e. humility, innocence and selflessness) in little children (v36-7). It is important to understand that in the context of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE in Roman Palestine, ‘Judaism had little understanding of the individuality of the child’<sup>14</sup> and that children ranked among the most vulnerable and neediest in society and least worthy of any honour and respect. They occupied a very underprivileged place in the societal and cultural scheme of things (Best 1981:78-79, Myers 1988:260-261). And yet Jesus bestows upon them a ‘very high evaluation’<sup>15</sup> in opposition to the low estimation his society and culture had of children. Jesus teaches that to welcome a child is to welcome God, no less (v37). This teaching is both shocking and radical, and signals to the disciples what discipleship genuinely demands of them.

Jesus continues his Galilean teaching (v38-50), and expands on his servanthood theme by applying the value of discipleship to the daily lives of would-be disciples. For instance, the pericope wherein Jesus addresses John’s exclusivist concerns about an outsider exorcising in Christ’s name (v38-41), portrays Jesus appealing to John and to all his followers to be open and tolerant of all people who call on his name (v40). In this context it means regardless of whether they belong to the group of the ‘Twelve’ or not.

Jesus closes his teaching (v42-8) with a prophecy of doom (Carrington 1960:208) by preaching about battling against temptations and he outlines the importance of disciples refraining from sin and not causing others to sin (v42), and the severity, or perhaps sincerity, of discipleship required to attain such a level of faithfulness (e.g. v43b, v45b). Jesus is advocating how critical it is for his followers not to heed the cost nor shirk from the pain of sacrifice required to enter life – and the

---

<sup>14</sup> Oepke TDNT Vol 5 p 646.

<sup>15</sup> Oepke TDNT Vol 5 p 649.

terrible fate awaiting those who fail to do so (v47b-48). He uses the images of salt and fire as something that all people will experience (v49-50). A couple of scholars have noted the obscurity of these images and the difficulty in ascertaining their real meaning (Bowman 1965:207, Mann 1986:383). Although one suggestion is that for the unbeliever and the unfaithful follower the fire will be the fire of judgement; for the faithful it will be the purifying fire of persecution (Best 1986:92).

#### **1.4.3. The Third Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy (10:32-34)**

The third and final prophecy (10:32-4) bears a clear anticipation of the passion narrative of Chapters 11-16. It acts as a setting of the stage for the climax of Jesus' life and the Gospel as a whole. At this juncture in the narrative, as Jesus delivers his last prophecy he is facing Jerusalem. Best (1986:120) thinks he is accompanied by only one group of followers, however both the NRSV and the NIV clearly hint at two groups of people and I support the latter view. In v32a the opening pronoun 'they' ('were on the road'), I believe implies **all** the people including Jesus, the Twelve, and a larger mass of women and men. The pronoun 'they' ('were amazed') of v32b I take to mean the Twelve only, and 'those who followed' (v32b) to mean this large group of followers who have tailed Jesus from afar. Bratcher and Nida (1961:328) also concur with this view. The point here with regards to discipleship is that a disciple must be willing to follow Jesus to Jerusalem – or to suffering in the form of an individual passion as an inevitable part of being a disciple, and one which will result in a closer and more intimate union with Jesus.

This third prophecy has a distinct solemnity about it (Stock 1989:277), and 'the ominous nature of the journey to Jerusalem is building to a climax' (Hare 1996:128). For the first time Jesus makes an explicit identification of his destiny as unfolding in Jerusalem (v32). This prophecy is fuller and more detailed than the previous two (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:11, Juel 1999:129): the Son of Man will be betrayed ('handed over') to the Jews ('chief priests and scribes'), who will condemn him to death, and then he will be betrayed ('handed over' again) to the Gentiles (v33), who will mock, spit, flog and kill him. But ... three days later he will rise again (v34).

There are several points of interest when one compares this prophecy with the first two; firstly all three prophecies end on a triumphant final note (cf. 8:31, 9:31).

Whatever the authorities do to the Son of Man, he will be victorious over them by rising after three days. Secondly, the explicit mention made of both the Jews and Gentiles is unusual. The first prophecy mentioned only Jews ('elders, the chief priests, and the scribes' 8:31), and the second prophecy had only a vague reference to 'human hands' (9:31). This perhaps hints at the fact that it is not only the Jews to whom blame must be apportioned for Christ's crucifixion but the Gentiles as well. So all of humankind is in some way responsible for putting the Messiah to death, and yet, by the grace of God, it was for the salvation of all of humankind that the Messiah died. Thirdly, the prophetic details of what will happen to Jesus in the passion itself are more precise too (v34, see above). Whereas the first prophecy mentioned only condemnation and death ('be rejected ... and be killed' 8:31), and the second prophecy refers only to death ('they will kill him' 9:31).

Another point of interest is the occurrence of the *koine* Greek verb '*proagon*' for Jesus was 'walking ahead' of them (v32a). Zerwick (1974:156) points out that this is the same verb used at 14:28, Jesus' foretelling of a resurrection appearance in Galilee ('*proaxo*' – 'I will go ahead'), and also the same as used at 16:7 – the angelic command to the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and meet with Jesus in fulfilment of his words ('*proagei*' – 'he has gone ahead'). This use of the same root verb allows one to summarise accordingly: as the earthly Son of Man went ahead of his followers into suffering and death, so now the risen Messiah will go ahead of his disciples into global mission (Best 1986:121).

This prophecy is followed by a lengthy exchange between Jesus, James and John, and the other ten members of the Twelve, to which I shall return in the following chapter. After this exchange is Jesus' next bout of teaching on discipleship.

#### **1.4.3.1. The Third Teaching of New Ethics of Discipleship (10:42-45)**

In his preaching here Jesus continues to build on his moral instruction from the first two prophecies. He again links his passion with the need for service as he did after the second prophecy. Jesus calls his disciples not to be like the Gentiles whose rulers 'lord it over them' and are 'tyrants over them' (v42). He demands that they be servants and slaves of all just like the Son of Man (v43-5). The mantra 'to reign is to serve' can be used as a signification of Jesus' teaching at this point. And this final verse carries a clue to understanding the theme of discipleship as alluded to here, it

believes the rule of discipleship Jesus has instituted in his three prophetic utterances: namely, that as he does, so must his disciples strive to do. These verses contain a glimpse of Markan theology, in that christology is all about redemption through Christ's sacrifice and only on the basis of that redemption is imitation possible because only Jesus can redeem by giving his life as a ransom for many (v45).

The following pericope is the healing of Bartimaeus, which as noted above, brings to a close the discipleship section. By way of summing up this section, Jesus has followed each of his prophecies of his destiny with a short promulgation to his followers, of the new way of life that being his follower entails. Furthermore each prophecy has introduced the theme of his passion and then in the moral teaching that follows he has developed it accordingly; so, the first prophecy twins the passion of Jesus with the idea that self-denial is a prerequisite for the attainment of faithful discipleship. The second prophecy couples Jesus' passion with the concepts of service and humility. And the final prophecy, similarly, ties servanthood with the passion of Jesus.

In light of the fact that Jesus' teaching on discipleship occurs throughout this discipleship section, it is now fitting that, having explored the three passion-resurrection-prophecies and Jesus' subsequent teaching, we turn our attention to his other teachings on this theme that do not immediately follow a passion-resurrection-prophecy.

#### **1.4.4. Further teaching on discipleship (10:1-30)**

This lengthy passage of discipleship teaching, which I shall presently focus on occurs between the second and third prophecies. I shall briefly articulate significant points about the nature of discipleship that are relevant to this part of the study.

As Jesus and all his followers reach the district of Judea, he continues his discipleship teaching but in a different vein. This time Jesus' teaching in 'Judea, and beyond the Jordan' (10:1) does not follow a prophecy of his passion and resurrection, but it still retains great importance as Jesus amplifies and affirms human relationships within marriage and between adults and children (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:14). The significance of Jesus and his followers of having entered Judea, is that they have now left far behind them the Gentile territory of Galilee, and have moved into the



Jewish region of Judea<sup>16</sup> and much closer to Jerusalem – the destination of Jesus’ journey, hence, as we shall see shortly, the appearance of Jewish opponents at 10:2 (Cole 1989:154). In this passage Jesus’ teaching deals with how discipleship relates to divorce (10:2-12), children (10:13-16) and wealth (10:17-31).

In the pericope on divorce, Jesus teaches in response to a challenge from Jewish opponents – the Pharisees – who quiz him on the controversy of divorce (v2). Jesus answers with a question: ‘what did Moses command you?’ (v3). They reply to the effect that Moses allowed divorce in certain circumstances (v4). Jesus responds that it was due to their ‘hardness of heart’ (v5) which meant they had failed to adhere to God’s standards on marriage: hence Mosaic law permits divorce. I would certainly go so far as to say that Jesus posed the question of Moses in v3 with the deliberate intention of revealing their hard-heartedness. And one can speculate that their hard-heartedness is also the reason why they fail to recognise Christ’s real identity as Saviour and as yet have not been able to become his disciples. Jesus goes on to disclose God’s ideal for marriage as a monogamous, heterosexual unity (v6-9). This at first glance would appear to be an overly strict teaching by Jesus. However Suggit (2002:66) sees within Jesus’ seemingly austere words an attempt on the part of Jesus to protect the rights of wives, who in his own day, were considered to be merely an extension of the husband’s property. So this stringent outlawing of divorce would be the way to guarantee a certain degree of security for women in marriage.

The next brief pericope on children (v13-16) is suggested by Myers to be almost identical to the first ‘child vignette’ of 9:36-7 (1988:266). In this episode people bring their children for Jesus to touch (v13a), and the disciples’ reaction (v13b) is entirely in accordance with their society’s view of children. The disciples look on the children as unfit to disturb Jesus and unworthy of his attention. Jesus’ reaction to this is anger (v14) – because he can see their true worth: their beauty, innocence and purity, and how close they are to the Kingdom. He tells his followers that if they are to aspire to attain the Kingdom themselves, they must be as innocent and vulnerable as these little ones (v14c-15). In other words he informs these adult Jewish males (and females) that the ideal characteristics of discipleship are embodied in these children, and that it is from children such as these that they must seek to

---

<sup>16</sup> New Bible Atlas 1985:75.

learn. This manner of teaching would have been offensive, provocative and thoroughly objectionable to all his hearers.

The final segment of Jesus' teaching in 'Judea, and beyond the Jordan' tells the story of the rich man. In the society and culture in which Jesus and his followers lived, a man who had great wealth signified a person who wielded power and influence, and deserved honour and respect (Hooker 1991:242). So this rich man, despite all the trappings of his wealth and social class, dramatically runs up to Jesus of his own volition and kneels in homage before him, showing him extraordinary reverence (Grundy 1993:560). The rich man asks Jesus a question that a disciple would ask; 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (v17). Jesus replies by telling him to obey the commandments (v18-9). The rich man confesses to having lived a life thus far of faithful obedience to the covenant laws of Israel. In response, Jesus loves him – the only explicit reference in the Canonical Gospels of Jesus loving anybody. Suggit (2002:67) and Grundy (1993:554) both note that Jesus' love for him is in the Aorist tense ('*egapesen*' from '*agapao*' – 'I love'), which is suggestive of the fact that Jesus actively showed his love for the rich man, perhaps by some gesture such as, for example, embracing him. I suggest that the specific mention of Jesus' love proves the truth of the rich man's faithful adherence to the Torah. It is fair to hypothesize that had he been lying, the text would have informed us that Jesus would have perceived the deception in his heart.

The rich man was certainly a disciple of Moses, but not yet a follower of Christ. Jesus then issues the call to discipleship 'come, follow me' ('*kai deuro akolouthei*' - v21). This implies following Jesus as his disciple in the fullest sense of the word (Metzger 1966:165). And as explained above, the cost was too great and the sacrifice too painful. Jesus' challenge to him was to change his attitude with regards to his wealth by not regarding it as a sign of God's favour towards him, but rather as incidental to his life (Suggit 2002:68). He loved his wealth too dearly. Hence he failed to heed the call to life-changing discipleship (v22). He did not follow Jesus, and did not on this occasion become his follower. Jesus concludes his teaching by outlining the rewards for the disciples in v29-31 (and one might add what might have been for the rich man if he had been able to forsake his wealth). They will receive a hundred times as much as that which they forsook in this age (although 'with persecutions', which were a part of the consequence of Christian discipleship in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century world) and eternal life in the world to come as well.

I feel it is important to note that what Jesus teaches here is that discipleship must be a greater priority in the life of a disciple than material wealth. Jesus does not teach that it is a sin to be rich, but rather that loving one's riches and trusting in them (however great or small the quantity of one's wealth) is a sin which can prevent one from entering eternal life. Suggit agrees by declaring that it is not the possession of wealth that is in any degree sinful but rather one's use of it. Jesus saw that desire for wealth could easily supersede a disciple's commitment to Christ (2002:68). One must find security in God and not in worldly wealth. I suggest that the key verse in this whole passage is the last one 'but many who are first will be last, and the last will be first' (v31). This is a socially challenging verse especially when voiced in the face of ingrained patriarchal values that are deeply embedded within the society, culture and religion of Jesus' own day and ours as well. Nevertheless the truth of this paradoxical verse holds clear: all who seek to gain prominence, power and wealth shall be 'last' (cf. James and John 10:37). Whereas those who forsake all such things as these, who 'deny themselves and take up their cross' (8:34) and live as servants of all (9:35) for the sake of Jesus and his good news (8:35, 10:29) will indeed be 'first'.

Having now explored the major passages of discipleship teaching that occur within the discipleship section, it is necessary to follow this line of investigation further by exploring briefly Jesus' teachings on discipleship that occur in the midst of his passion in and around Jerusalem. This will help to expand and amplify the new ethic of discipleship Jesus is establishing.

### **1.5. Discipleship in the Passion of Jesus**

Within the Gospel of Mark, there are other passages, albeit less prominent ones, which offer very helpful insights into the concept of discipleship within the text, aside from the mammoth discipleship section. One passage that I wish to focus on at this point is found in the passion of Jesus in Jerusalem. It is found at the end of the 'Little Apocalypse'<sup>17</sup> (13:1-37), in particular v33-7. Here Jesus calls for wakefulness ('keep alert/*agrypneite*' – v33 and twice 'keep awake/*gregoreite*' v35 & v37). The

---

<sup>17</sup> Hooker (1991:298-299) summarises concisely how Mark Chapter 13 has come to be known as the 'Little Apocalypse'. She cites the theory espoused by T. Colani in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century who suggested that this Chapter was based on an earlier Jewish-Christian document – the original 'Little Apocalypse'. Hooker points out that the value of the label given to the Chapter matters little, but only the fact that this section of the Gospel belongs to the genre of literature known as 'apocalyptic'.

need for wakefulness symbolises the need for readiness ‘for you do not know when the time will come’ (v33). It is vital that the followers of Christ do not fall into slumber, and are not found ‘asleep when (God) comes suddenly’ (v36). Sleep usually occurs at night, and night is a metaphor for the evil world (Best 1986:153). Hence sleep symbolises a state of un-readiness or unfaithful discipleship, and it is a natural inclination. All must keep alert and awake. Jesus is exhorting his three most senior lieutenants to ensure that they fulfil the obligations of their daily journey of faith with great vigilance, avoiding all tendencies to complacency, laziness or backsliding. They must strive to be faithful in every aspect of their lives.

I suggest that this concept of wakefulness can be considered both in the context of watching for Christ’s return, and also for keeping vigil with regards to one’s own daily faith journey. For Jesus to deliver such a message makes perfect sense if one recalls that the context of his preaching is an atmosphere of high tension and great fear as the climax of his passion draws nearer by the hour. And with hindsight one can see the irony of such an exhortation in lieu of how three of these four followers will behave in Gethsemane (14:32-42). These instructions Jesus gives are complementary with his earlier teaching at 8:34f, 9:35f and 10:42f – there it was a call to self-denial, cross bearing and servanthood, but in the face of the imminent arrest and trial of the Messiah, it is a call to vigorous readiness at all times. It is yet another critical facet of the concept of discipleship in the Gospel.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

This, then, is the meaning of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. I have explored the theme by explicating the key passages on discipleship in the Gospel narrative, and, I have examined the main signifiers of discipleship in the text, in my semantic study. By way of conclusion, I should like to highlight the key verses that truly encapsulate the essence of Jesus’ way of discipleship. Taken all together they provide the perfect slogan for Christ’s new standards of discipleship that he has inaugurated. They are as follows:

- 8:34 – ‘**deny themselves and take up their cross**’; indicating the importance of self-denial and sacrifice in one’s pilgrimage.

- 9:35 – **‘last of all and servant of all’**; pointing to the significance of humility, service and servanthood.
- 10:31 – **‘(the) first will be last, and the last will be first’**; indicating a sense of divine justice, and a sign of true greatness (cf. 9:35b).
- 10:45 – **‘not to be served, but to serve’**; indicating again the need for service, and seeking the good of others with sacrificial love.
- 13:33,35,37 – **‘keep alert/keep awake’**; showing the immense need for perpetual watchfulness and vigilance in one’s pilgrimage, at all times.

These are the best descriptions of Jesus’ own life and ministry and also the key expressions of the way of discipleship that he calls women and men to follow. Thus, it is only those who wholeheartedly fulfil and obey these values who will in fact be first (10:44), and who will take the seats of glory (10:37). It is those who deny themselves, bearing their own crosses who will be ranked as the greatest, and will save their lives forever (8:35). As a final note, I would like to suggest that these ethics are the values upon which the Kingdom of God, that Jesus came to establish here on earth (1:15), is founded. Jesus’ way of discipleship will lead one to enter a new life in the Kingdom wherein exists an egalitarian society, inclusive of everybody with all patriarchal values and socio-economic classifications of people in society rendered obsolete. Christ shatters all such values and principles, and profoundly challenges the mentality of all those who subscribed to them. This is the essence of discipleship in the Gospel of Mark.

In the next chapter I shall examine the characterisation of the male followers of Jesus, and how they measure up to this standard of discipleship.

•

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **MARK'S PORTRAYAL OF MALE DISCIPLES**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter I explored the concept of discipleship in Mark's Gospel, specifically the new ethic of discipleship that Jesus introduces to his followers on his journey to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52).

In this chapter I examine the portrayal of the male followers of Jesus. The purpose will be to ascertain how effectively the male followers manage to fulfil this new ethic of discipleship. It is my contention that the male followers of Jesus do not live up to these new morals that Jesus has instituted.

I endeavour to argue this out in what follows by: first, conducting a survey of all the different character groups that followed Jesus and determining the gender of each group so that it can be established clearly, from the outset who is being referred to by the term 'the male disciples'; and second, I explore the characterisation of the male groups of followers in the Gospel narrative by analysing certain passages according to three different themes namely, 'a lack of understanding', 'an inability to heal' and 'an unwillingness to suffer'. This will be done to reveal the mentality and behaviour of the male disciples of Christ. The passages I have selected for this character study are deliberately few in number – for the intention is only to elucidate the pattern of behaviour of the male disciples of Christ. Third, I consider other male characters who also interact with Jesus but whose encounter is highly positive. The intention will be to further emphasize the negative characterisation of the male disciples. I begin with a short survey of all the groups who followed Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

#### **2.2. A Survey of Groups who followed Jesus**

In this survey, I attempt to establish the different character groups who followed Jesus and the frequency with which they appear in the Gospel story. After I have briefly outlined all the various groups, the intention will then be to determine the

gender of each character group, in order to clarify who the male disciples of Christ actually consist of.

### **2.2.1. The Character Groups**

The first task is to ascertain how many groups in Mark's narrative followed Jesus. Telford (1995:141) has compiled a helpful list to identify the principal groups who followed Jesus. He lists these as being:

1. The Twelve (*dodeka*) who are mentioned eleven times in the Gospel <sup>1</sup>.
2. The Apostles (*apostoloi*) who we learn from 3:14 and 6:7 & 30 are one and the same group as the Twelve and are mentioned twice only.
3. The disciples (*mathetai*) who are mentioned 45 times in all (Thompson 1989:104) which is by far the most common appellation for any of the followers of Jesus.
4. Those 'around him' (*peri auton* – 3:32, 34, 4:10)
5. 'those who followed' (*oi de akolouthountes* – 2:15, 10:32, 52, 11:9)
6. Women disciples (15:40-41).

I should like to point out that by using Telford's list I am not suggesting that these groups indicate six different groups of people. With the sole exception of the Twelve (and also therefore the Apostles) who are numbered and named, the other groups are not so clearly distinct from each other. The Markan narrative does not develop their characters as fully as that of the Twelve or women followers. For the purposes of this study I accept that with regards to groups 3, 4 and 5 above, there may be a considerable degree of overlap. Any attempt to unearth detailed information about these groups will be hindered by the paucity of relevant material in the text.

This list reveals an important issue. Namely, that discipleship is in no way restricted to the Twelve. All of these character groups outlined above 'follow' Jesus in some sense, and show signs of being his followers, to varying degrees of sincerity and commitment.

There can be little doubt that groups 1 – 3 follow Jesus. I concur with Telford's suggestion that groups 4 and 5 – who are 'nameless and amorphous'

---

<sup>1</sup> Or twelve times if one includes the variant reading at 3:15 as referring to the Twelve (Telford 1995:141).

(Telford 1995:141) can also be justifiably categorised as followers of Christ. With regards to group 4 '*peri auton*', the main rationale being that at 4:10 Jesus explains the purpose of his parables to two groups: the Twelve and 'those around him'. At 4:34 at the end of Jesus' parabolic discourse the narrator refers collectively to those whom Jesus has been addressing as 'disciples' (Best 1986:157). This would suggest that the disciples are a wider group than just the Twelve.<sup>2</sup> Indeed I would even go further and say that the '*peri auton*' character group can be classed as being even closer to Jesus than disciples. In the pericope 3:31-35, Jesus' family are outside the house within which Jesus is sharing fellowship with his followers. On being told that his family are outside and are calling for him, he responds by highlighting '*peri auton*' as being his true family rather than his biological family for they are the ones who do the 'will of God' (v35). Thus it would seem that 'those around him' numbered as Christ's followers, as he extends 'his true kinsfolk' wider than the inner circle of disciples<sup>3</sup>.

With regards to group 5 '*oi de akolouthountes*', they also come under the umbrella group of followers, on the grounds the verb '*akolouthountes*' is used to describe the nature of their following Jesus. This verb is a key signifier of discipleship as I noted above<sup>4</sup>.

Two other character groups not mentioned in Telford's list but worthy of mention at this juncture are two kinds of crowds. The most common kind is the '*ochloi*' who appear 20 times in the narrative<sup>5</sup>. Usually these form part of the anonymous background to Jesus' ministry i.e. they are situational followers who Jesus meets and ministers to at various stages of his journey. The '*ochloi*' can be said to 'follow' him in as much as they run to see Jesus (3:20, 9:25), and at times they accompany him (5:27). On certain occasions Jesus calls them for instruction (7:14, 8:34), and on other occasions Jesus takes pity on them (6:34). On still other occasions the '*ochloi*' appear to harass and pester him (3:9). On yet other occasions they form part of his family (3:31-35)<sup>6</sup>.

The second kind of crowd is the '*laos*'. This character group appears but twice in the narrative<sup>7</sup>. At 11:32 the '*laos*' are a crowd of people who inspire fear among

<sup>2</sup> Although for a dissenting opinion Rhoads & Michie (1982:122) suggest that 'the term 'disciples' comes to refer to the twelve men Jesus chooses to follow him.'

<sup>3</sup> Winsome Munro 'Women disciples in Mark?' CBQ 44 (1982) p228.

<sup>4</sup> See 1.2.2. above

<sup>5</sup> Meyer TDNT Vol 5 p586

<sup>6</sup> Meyer TDNT Vol 5 p586.

<sup>7</sup> Strathmann TDNT Vol 4 p51.



Jesus' critics because they believed John to be a prophet (cf 8:28), and perhaps therefore believe Jesus to be someone similar. And at 14:2 they are feared by Jesus' enemies as people who would riot in protest at the arrest and trial of a populist preacher. Thus on both occurrences the '*laos*' are a crowd who, at the least, can be said to be favourably inclined to Jesus and somewhat opposed to the machinations of the religious leaders.

The point I maintain is that this brief survey reaffirms that discipleship is certainly not limited to the Twelve alone. But what appears to be the case is that the specially chosen dozen were extracted from a much larger pool of followers.

Having established the kaleidoscope of groups that followed Jesus I shall now address the question of the gender of all of these groups in turn.

### **2.2.2. The Gender of the Character Groups**

The first group whose gender I wish to consider is the Twelve. In Mark's Gospel they are one and the same as the Apostles. The text informs us at 3:16-19 of the list of the names of the Twelve<sup>8</sup> – that it consists only of men. When Jesus went up on the mountain (3:13) he decided that he wanted an exclusively male group to be with him.

With regards to the other character groups, their characterisation is much less developed than that of the Twelve, and hence the clues as to their genders are much more scarce in the text and inevitably less 'watertight' than was the case with the Twelve. Nonetheless one can still make some helpful observations as follows:

When the women followers appear at 15:40-1, verse 41a reveals that they have always been serving and following Jesus at every stage of his ministry, beginning in Galilee and all the way through to Jerusalem. Thus women were a part of the scene on each occasion that 'the disciples' character group is mentioned in the text. Similarly, with regards to the '*oi de akolouthountes*' group I would also propose included both women and men. The grounds for proposing this being that their

---

<sup>8</sup> The mention of these three Apostles brings to light hierarchical strata among the character group of the 12. Scholars have noted that when one compares the list of names of the 12 Apostles from the Synoptics (Mt 10:2-4, Mk 3:16-19a, Lk 6:14-16) the names of the 1<sup>st</sup> (Simon Peter), the 5<sup>th</sup> (Philip) and the 9<sup>th</sup> (James, son of Alphaeus) correspond exactly. This could indicate that Peter, Philip, and James, son of Alphaeus were each leaders of a subgroup of 4 Apostles: hence, Peter was the leader of a mini-group of Andrew, James and John. Philip led a group consisting of Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, and finally James son of Alphaeus, led a group including Simon the Cananaean (called the Zealot in Luke), Thaddaeus (or Judas son of James in Luke) and Judas Iscariot.

categorisation as followers of Jesus depends entirely on the use of the verb *'akoluthen'* to describe the nature of their association with him. And at 15:40-1 this verb is used to describe the nature of the women's allegiance to Jesus. Thus women can also be said to be among 'those that followed' because 15:40-1 shows that they did indeed 'follow' all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem.

There is evidence in the text that the *'peri auton'* group also consisted of women and men. If we return again to the pericope of Jesus' family (3:31-5), Jesus points out that 'those around him' who are participating in fellowship with him, are both women and men because he affirms them as his mother and brothers (*Ide e meter mon kai oi adelphoi mon* v34). And then Jesus goes on to declare that anyone who fulfils the will of God is his brother and sister and mother (*kai adelphe kai meter*) in v35. By implication, therefore, the *'peri auton'* character group included women as well as men (Munro 1982:228).

Brief mention must also be made of the *'ochloi'* and *'laos'*. It is highly significant to note that scholars appear to concur that the presence of female characters in the crowds who massed around Jesus is hidden and obscured by the 'androcentric nature of the language' (Munro 1982:226). In other words masculine nouns are used for mixed-gender groups e.g. *'ochlos'* and *'laos'*. Munro states that this hides the fact that 'women and children were included in considerable numbers among those who thronged after Jesus' (Munro 1982:226-7). With regards to women who are actually identified in the crowds, the appearance of the Bleeding Woman in the crowds at 5:25 hints that it was not only men who thronged after Jesus, and the note at 8:9 that the number of masses who had been fed at the second mass feeding miracle were 4,000 people i.e. they were not only men. As for the latter group, at 14:2 the *'laos'* who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish Festival of the Passover, can also be assumed to be a mixed gender group, if one accepts the Poor Widow of 12:42 as evidence that women mixed freely among the festival crowds and pilgrims in Jerusalem. The note at 15:40-1 also supports the idea that women travelled to Jerusalem as pilgrims to experience the sacred Festival.

So each group on Telford's list (with the exception of the Twelve) and the two kinds of crowds, I suggest, consist of women and men. However for the purposes of this chapter and without intending to contradict this notion, I will be assuming that the character groups of the Twelve, the disciples, *'peri auton'*, and *'oi de akolouthountes'*, all display a 'male' attitude to discipleship and hence I designate

them ‘the male followers’ or ‘the male disciples’ of Jesus. I use the terms ‘disciples or followers interchangeably in this study, but they refer to the same character group as explained here. By ‘male followers’ I mean that all these character groups are male-dominated, and masculine in their thinking and behaviour and most of all in their following of Jesus. I take this stance for this reason: from among these aforementioned groups no woman is ever explicitly characterised in the narrative – they remain hidden in this androcentric text. They do not overtly influence their character groups words or actions. So in the analysis of the nature of discipleship of the male followers that I offer below, I shall be referring to examples of the behaviour of the first five groups on Telford’s list.

With the survey of character groups duly completed and having established who the male disciples of Christ are, I now turn to the exploration into the portrayal of these aforementioned male disciples in Mark’s narrative.

### **2.3. An exploratory study into the characterisation of the male followers of Jesus**

In this section I briefly analyse certain selected passages of Mark’s text to reveal the quality of discipleship the male followers of Jesus offer. The intention is to judge how the male followers measure up to Jesus’ ethic of discipleship. To this end I have chosen a small number of passages under these three different themes; a lack of understanding, an inability to heal, and an unwillingness to suffer. In other words the failure in their discipleship comes out most clearly of all in these three ways. Each of the themes is deliberately broad and there are areas of overlap between them, but the essential point of the failure of the male followers remains the same.

#### **2.3.1. The Male followers’ lack of understanding**

In this first category, I will be focussing on the male followers’ inability to understand Jesus’ true identity, the significance of his miracles, and the full meaning of Jesus’ teaching from his parables, his passion-resurrection-prophecies and his new values of discipleship. I have selected nine examples in all, which I suggest show how these male followers fail to understand key aspects of Jesus’ ministry.

### **2.3.1.1. The Male followers fail to understand the parables (4:10-13, 33-34)**

After his parabolic teaching (4:2-9), Jesus declares his male followers to be those on the ‘inside’ to whom is given the secret of the Kingdom of God – unlike those on the ‘outside’ who will not or do not understand such mysteries (v11). And immediately Mark reveals that his male followers have in fact not understood Jesus’ parable (v13); this is greatly ironic coming after the impressive announcement that as they are his disciples they will indeed understand the parables. However they have not had ‘ears to listen’ (v9) and further guidance is required (4:14f). Jesus’ explanations come in the form of rhetorical questions that require a negative reply (e.g. v21f), a clear sign that they convey a sense of rebuke (Waetjen 1989:106). It is the first instance in the narrative of Jesus’ male followers letting Jesus down and not living up to his expectations of them (Hooker 1991:130).

The note after the end of the parabolic oratory (4:34) emphasises this notion that the male followers do not understand Jesus’ parables because everything has to be explained in private. They have shown themselves to be of the same mind as those on the ‘outside’ who ‘look but do not perceive’, and ‘listen but do not understand’. The irony of 4:11-2 is echoed again at 4:33-4.

### **2.3.1.2. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus through the stilling of the storm (4:35- 41)**

The following pericope of the stilling of the storm is the first nature miracle in the Gospel narrative. Waetjen suggests that it is the elements of chaos threatening to destroy Jesus and the New Israel (1989:111). In the face of ‘a great windstorm’ that threatened to deluge their boat (v37)<sup>9</sup>, the male followers are panicky whilst Jesus sleeps restfully astern. English (1992:106) notes that as some of them were Galilean fishermen by trade, they would have been very familiar with the climate of Lake Galilee, and therefore were perfectly justified when a great windstorm arose; perhaps they had experienced the like before and knew the danger that was at hand. They wake him up with a rebuke ‘do you not care ... ?’. Nevertheless no matter how justified their fear, it exposes their lack of belief in the fact that they are actually

---

<sup>9</sup> And presumably the ‘other boats ... with him’ in 4:36b.

perfectly safe with Jesus close at hand. And it leads them to being almost abusive in their attitude to Jesus (Thompson 1989:114).

When awoken to the situation Jesus subdues the fierce elements and rebukes his male followers for their fear and lack of faith (v40). His first verbal criticism of his male followers goes unanswered, and this ‘sharp exchange’ (English 1992:106) amplifies the first note of concern that perhaps all is not well with these male followers. These failings of fear and lack of faith will become familiar motifs of the characterisation of the male followers throughout the rest of the narrative.

Their reaction to Jesus (‘Who then is this?’ v41) is the first occasion of them puzzling over the christological identity of Jesus (Hooker 1991:138). Suggit (2002:39) suggests that Jesus’ followers ought to have no problem at all in answering the question of v41, because the whole scene is soaked in allusions to the Old Testament, especially from the Psalms where the motif of a strong sea being calmed by Yhwh is a common image (e.g. Ps 65:7 & 89:9). Malbon (in Anderson & Moore 1992:31) concurs that Jesus’ power over the sea ought to be understood by the male followers as a manifestation of divine power. In other words, the fullness of the power of God dwells in their rabbi. One consequence of Jesus performing this nature miracle is that at least the male followers have been triggered into considering the question as to who might possibly wield such power (Cole 1989:154, Hooker 1991:140).

### **2.3.1.3. The Male followers fail to recognise Jesus walking on the water (6:45-52)**

After the first mass feeding miracle (6:35-44), Jesus despatches his male followers to go ahead of him in the boat to Bethsaida, and sends the crowds home, after which he prays alone on the mountainside (v45-6). By evening (v47), the male followers have made very slow progress ‘against an adverse wind’; Jesus sees this and walks out to them on the lake ‘early in the morning’ (v48). He intends to pass by them. English (1992:138) and Cole (1989:180) both suggest that Jesus was intending to test how much they have learnt since the first nature miracle – the stilling of the storm (4:37-41). Indeed there was no reason for Jesus to stop (Hooker 1991:170).

When they see him, they cry out in terror (v41). Ironically, not only are the male followers not assured by Jesus’ presence they do not even recognise him at all (English 1992:138). He assures them that it is their rabbi (v50) and then joins them in

the boat (v51a)<sup>10</sup>. The note that Jesus intended to walk passed them on the lake shows, in my view, that these male followers ought not to have been in any way surprised to see Jesus walking on water, especially after witnessing the stilling of the storm. They can already testify to the first nature miracle. They should not be terrified to witness another one. This is supported furthermore by the Markan addition to the pericope (v52), that they hadn't understood the miracle of the multiplication of the five bread and two fish to feed 5000 men earlier in the day, and thus cannot understand now how Jesus can walk on water. Had they grasped that by feeding the masses Jesus had achieved the seemingly impossible, then they would also have been able to accept that Jesus could perform the similarly impossible feat of walking on water. But somehow they had missed the point of the mass feeding and so when they saw a person walking on the water they assumed that only a ghost (i.e. one with no body weight) was actually walking on the water, and certainly not Jesus.

His male followers at this juncture have no clue as to what such acts suggest as to Jesus' identity, and they still do not see Jesus as divine or as the Messiah. As Jesus reprimanded them in the first boat scene (4:35-41), they do not need to fear, or be faithless in the face of strong weather conditions. When one considers that by the time of this second boat scene, some of these male followers have participated in the apostolic ministry (6:7-13 & v30), have witnessed an impossible miracle (6:35-44), and thus ought to have learnt enough from Jesus, and gained enough faith to solve the problem of the strong headwind out themselves. But, alas, they could not. They need Jesus' help to get to the other side of the Sea and the instant that Jesus climbs into the boat, the winds die down and progress can now continue.

Their astounded reaction speaks volumes (v51b) – they have not given any thought as to the identity of their miracle-working rabbi, and Mark adds the final note in v52 to explain why they have failed to believe what they have seen in this second boat scene and in the first mass feeding. Specifically the male followers have failed to appreciate the divine sovereignty Jesus has demonstrated by walking on the lake. It is their hardness of heart that has prevailed and prevented all possibility of understanding (Thompson 1989:106). Simply put, these male followers don't accept

---

<sup>10</sup> This boat scene differs from the first in that here there is no storm, no challenge or request from the male followers, and no rebukes either way (Thompson 1989:116).

the latest miracles as evidence of Jesus' Christhood<sup>11</sup>. At this point they are no different from Jesus' 'astounded' (6:2) and offended (6:3) home community in Nazareth, and even from the Pharisees who are also hardhearted (3:5), and who subsequently conspire with the Herodians to kill Jesus (3:6).

The male followers' failure is very serious because their successes in apostolic ministry, and the two subsequent miracles have not penetrated their hearts and minds. Even Jesus' 'It is I' (v50) pronouncement, echoing Yahweh's 'I am' saying in Exodus 3:14, has not impacted upon their understanding of Jesus (Thompson 1989:106). As English (1992:139) observes, one wonders if Jesus could have made it much more obvious. It does reveal that the male followers do not conceptualise Jesus in the context of the Hebrew Scriptures, nor as an Israelite prophet, much less as anointed or empowered by Yahweh.

#### **2.3.1.4. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus' teaching (7:17-23)**

After a dispute with the Pharisees and Jerusalem scribes over the tradition of the elders, which Jesus has condemned as being an abuse of the Word of God (7:1-13), he teaches the crowds with a parable (v14-15). He does so by issuing a command to 'listen to me ... and understand'. At 4:12 the instructions to hear and understand were given to those on the 'inside'. So it seems the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God is being extended to the crowds. This is strengthened by the words 'all of you' which convey a hint of affection and fellowship with the crowds (Thompson 1989:109). However once safely away from his enemies and the masses, his male followers ask about the parable (v17-18a). Despite having heard Jesus' replies to the Pharisees and the scribes, and his message to the crowds they reveal themselves once again to be among those on the 'outside' who do not perceive or understand. They have witnessed and experienced much in Jesus' ministry since they were first called yet they seemingly have remained unaffected by it all.

Jesus' rhetorical questions 'Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see...?' (v18) reflects his disappointment and also I suggest a touch of desperation. It gives the impression of Jesus longing for them to understand what he is teaching

---

<sup>11</sup> Thompson (1989:107) makes the interesting point that there is a difference between a **knowledge** of Jesus (which the male followers most certainly possessed) and an **understanding** of Jesus (which they do not). Thompson suggests that the latter requires intellectual and psychological capacity, whereas the former requires only a theological and spiritual virtue – faith.

them. One may concur with English (1992:144) that these male followers deserve a modicum of credit for their courage in asking Jesus for clarification when they need it.

**2.3.1.5. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus' warning and are harshly rebuked (8:14-21)**

This pericope of the third and final boat scene (8:14-21) depicts the relationship between Jesus and his male followers at breaking point. In this scene Jesus delivers his harshest rebuke to any of his followers in the whole of the Gospel. This pericope opens with Jesus and his male followers in the boat having brought one loaf of bread with them, and Jesus warning them about the yeast of the Pharisees. On discerning that they think he is speaking of the lack of bread, Jesus delivers six stinging rebukes in the form of rhetorical questions to them (v17-18). This castigation is not unwarranted: the failure of Jesus' followers to understand the witness of their own bodily senses (in seeing, hearing, touching) to the miracles is inexplicable. Or perhaps it is their myopic concern with their own bodily needs (in this case bread for food v14, 16) instead of having the faith that God would provide all that they need (Cole 1989:199). There seems to be no psychological explanation for their obtuseness. As Cole (1989:198) succinctly puts it, Jesus' followers are 'still as blind and spiritually obtuse as ever: this is what grieves Jesus.' It can only be that this theme serves as a literary device to emphasise (perhaps excessively so) the male followers' total incomprehension as part of their characterisation, and that such miracles as they have witnessed can only be understood by faith, not by reason or knowledge (Thompson 1989:111).

Jesus' outburst here echoes his quoting of the prophet Isaiah (6:9) at 4:12 when he illustrated why those on the outside would fail to understand and hence do not receive the secrets of the Kingdom of God. The irony is that Jesus' male followers have received the secret of the Kingdom but have not managed to decipher what they have received – all that has been taught to them, and that they have seen occur has remained a mystery to them. They are exactly like those on the outside who have not seen, heard, understood nor remembered. Jesus' words at 4:13 have come true. They did misunderstand the parable of the Sower, and so they do not grasp any of the subsequent parables or his other teachings. It is forgivable for the crowds to



misunderstand the parables, because they are on the outside, but these male followers are the recipients of the secrets of the Kingdom of God, and they should understand and receive the message of the parables into their hearts, but they do not.

Jesus' final question in the pericope 'Do you not yet understand?' (v21) needs no answering. They do not even grasp the significance of the number of baskets they themselves collected up after the feedings. However it is worth noting that they do remember how many baskets; they have not forgotten what happened, it is just that they do not have the spiritual insight to comprehend what it means. The reason for this being that, their hearts were hardened (Hooker 1991:196).

Jesus expected them to understand what this means with regards to his own identity as Messiah. His male followers ought to have been able to interpret this for themselves and reach the correct conclusions out of their own intelligence and intuition. His exasperation and irritation with them is tangible in the reprimand he gives them in this scene. The dramatic irony is that it is all so clear and obvious to the reader and so extraordinary that the male followers do not understand (Thompson 1989:113).

#### **2.3.1.6. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus' First Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy and are rebuked (8:32-33)**

As I noted above<sup>12</sup>, there exists a formulaic pattern to each Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy, wherein Jesus' prediction is followed by the reaction of his followers, which in turn is followed by Jesus' instalment of the new ethic of discipleship.

Jesus reveals his destiny in his first prophecy (v31). And he spoke 'quite openly'. There is clear irony in the fact that up to this point Jesus has spoken in parables, but now he speaks straightforwardly. Yet either way his male followers fail to understand him (Hooker 1991:206). Peter acting as the spokesman and mouthpiece of the Twelve (Hooker 1991:206) takes Jesus aside, as if to give him private counsel but instead delivers a rebuke (v32), which in turn triggers a fierce rebuke from Jesus (v33). The rebuke is for all his male followers not only Peter. Cole (1989:206) observes that Jesus never uttered such a stern rebuke to any of his enemies. The

---

<sup>12</sup> See 1.4 above.

reason for their misunderstanding of Jesus prophecy I suggest finds its root in the fact that they do not perceive the notion that the Messiah could be subjected to such a fate, for such a fate would mean defeat and failure for the Messiah. This prediction of suffering and death is bewildering and devastating for the Twelve (English 1992:160). They do not yet realise that Jesus will not fulfil their messianic expectations nor the expectations of the Jewish people, rather he is a radically different messianic figure (English 1992:161).

I suggest that there is a very sharp contrast here between Simon Peter's Confession at 8:29 and his being called Satan at 8:33. Within 4 verses Simon Peter swings from confessing the ultimate truth to being rebuked with the ultimate condemnation. It is an extraordinary turn around. Especially if one includes the final boat scene of the preceding chapter, where Jesus criticises his disciples very strongly, the male followers have gone from very bad (v21), to very good (v29), to worst of all (v33), all within the space of a dozen verses of the Markan narrative. Malbon (in Anderson & Moore 1992:47) suggests that, considering the two-stage healing that Jesus has performed on the blind man of Bethsaida in the midst of these dozen verses (v22-28), so too, Peter's behaviour can be explained by the fact that he also is in need of a second stage of 'healing' from his 'spiritual blindness'.

It is worth pointing out that having just identified Jesus as Messiah, Simon Peter is called Satan. It is a subtle twist on the motif that runs throughout the narrative; that it is the demons that consistently identify Jesus' true nature<sup>13</sup>.

#### **2.3.1.7. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus' Second Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy and fall into conflict with each other (9:32-34)**

Jesus has issued his second passion-resurrection-prophecy to his male followers (v31) when for a second time he alludes to his Messiahship as being one of suffering, death and resurrection. Perhaps in lieu of the vehemence of the rebuke they received from Jesus after they reacted to his first prophecy (8:33), his followers decided to keep silent for they 'were afraid to ask him' (v32). Their misunderstanding stems from the disciples' messianic expectation of Jesus not correlating to his own prophecies about his destiny. They cannot grasp that the suffering and death of which

---

<sup>13</sup> cf. 1:23-24, 3:11, 5:7, perhaps even 9:20b where the demon convulses the boy when it sees Jesus, perhaps because it knows whom Jesus is.

Jesus speaks is part of God's messianic salvation for the world (English 1992:169). Such an idea is incongruous to them. So here, as on the first occasion, the rationale for the prophecy has failed to penetrate their hearts and minds.

The following pericope amplifies the notion that the male followers do not sense the nature of Jesus' Christhood. He asks them what they had argued about on the way back to Capernaum (v33). Their silence (v34) reveals their feelings of guilt in that they were aware of the inappropriateness of quarrelling over which of them was the greatest (Hooker 1991:227). I would add, moreover, that aside from guilt the silence also shows that they do have enough insight to know that their argument was not in keeping with the conduct that Jesus had taught them or exemplified himself. However this insight didn't stretch far enough for them not to have the argument at all.

Once again, I suggest that the argument of the disciples about greatness reveals that they have no perception of the necessity for the Messiah to suffer and die. The quarrel points to the ignorance of the disciples to the importance of Jesus having to suffer, and be the servant Messiah. Nor do they see the need for themselves to emulate such suffering and service.

Jesus does not wait for a reply to his question (there is in actual fact no need of one as the text gives the reason for the argument in the narrative itself at 9:34), before calling the Twelve specifically and instructing them in the new ethics of discipleship he wishes to see observed by all his followers. There is a clear allusion here to a degree of tension and rivalry among the disciples (cf. 10:41).

#### **2.3.1.8. The Male followers fail to understand Jesus' Third Passion-Resurrection-Prophecy (10:35-41)**

The third and final prophecy is addressed to the Twelve alone (v32b). The reaction of Jesus' followers comes in the form of James and John. The sons of Zebedee 'came forward' (i.e. step forward to Jesus to be face to face with him; suggestive of a certain brazen confidence and perhaps confrontation from the 'sons of thunder'), and make an extraordinary request (v35). First they want Jesus' word that whatever they ask he will grant, regardless of the nature of the request (or a 'blank cheque' Cole 1989:241). Jesus asks them what their petition is (v36). Their request is to share in Jesus' exaltation by sitting at his side in his glory (v37). Aside from the

selfish arrogance of their demand, it is not a question that those who should 'deny themselves' (8:34b), and who ought to be 'last of all and servant of all' (9:35b) ought to be making. Clearly neither of the sons of Zebedee have learnt anything from Jesus' first two instalments on the true values of discipleship (Hooker 1991:246). And, furthermore, in asking for such a request for themselves (and not for example all the Twelve, or the other male followers), it suggests, in my view, that the argument about greatness that was begun on the return to Capernaum (9:33) is not yet finished. Those tensions and rivalries still linger among the followers of Jesus, even at this late stage when they are standing in the shadow of Jerusalem.

Jesus' reply is not a stinging rebuke deploring such a misguided request as might be expected in light of past exchanges (cf 7:18, 8:17-21, 9:19). Instead Jesus tells James and John that the monumental nature of their request is far beyond their faith or comprehension (v38a). And that if they had been aware beforehand of the real meaning of their request, they may well have refrained from asking (Cole 1989:242). Furthermore, he asks whether they are able to share his cup and baptism (v38b) which is an allegorical way of asking if they are able to share in his passion, and make the sacrifices Jesus himself will be making, to such a great degree that they will be worthy of sitting at his side in his glory. Passion and sacrifice are the only paths to these seats of glory that James and John both desire, but they have not yet grasped this fact.

Nonetheless they both answer in the affirmative that they are able to drink Jesus' cup and partake of his baptism. This ready answer shows that they understand no clearer what Jesus is asking them, anymore than the implication of the request itself (Hooker 1991:247). Their affirmative response rings rather hollow. They both still think they have done enough already to deserve such a reward, which is what might have prompted the request in the first place. The inappropriateness of their petition which is so clearly contrary to Jesus' earlier teaching, their disbelief at the failure of the rich man to be saved (10:24,26), their share in the scorn for those who sought a blessing for the children (10:13), and their arguing as to who is the greatest of them all (9:33), shows that they have not yet conceived what discipleship requires of one who seeks to follow after Jesus. Jesus' words in reply to the affirmation of the sons of Zebedee (v39b) come across quite ominously: he declares that they both will indeed share in his suffering and his sacrifice, even if they have no idea at this stage what that entails. His word that only God can grant permission to sit in those seats of

glory is most interesting, because it shows that such seats of glory as these do exist and are awaiting their rightful occupants. Some will be exalted above others: there will be those who are first who will be made last, and those who are last who will be made first (v31). Each will receive her/his own reward. The jealous anger of the 10 (v41) to James and John's audacity in asking for such a thing, reveals them to be no better; it is of course highly likely that had they thought of it first, they would have asked for the same. Cole (1989:243) and Hooker (1991:247) both support this suggestion.

### **2.3.1.9. The Male followers fail to see beyond the outward appearance of the Jerusalem Temple (13:1-2)**

These opening verses (v1-3) serve as the introduction to Jesus' extended eschatological monologue on the impending apocalypse. Mark reveals another insight into the mindset of the Jesus' followers. As they were leaving the Temple, one male follower points out the impressive magnificence of the Temple architecture (v1). Perhaps Cole is accurate in suggesting a tone of patriotic pride on behalf of all the male followers because it was one of the architectural wonders of the Roman world. (1989:272). Hooker concurs that 'the magnificence of Herod's Temple was famous' (1991:304). Such splendour gave the Jews confidence that God would protect God's people, and these buildings served as a symbol of God's presence with them (Hooker 1991:304). Consequentially, Jesus' prophecy that 'all will be thrown down' (v2) must have been shattering to Jesus' followers (English 1992:206).

This unnamed male follower has erred greatly in voicing his admiration for the huge Temple: for taking pride in the Temple structure is exactly the kind of mentality one would expect of the religious authorities with whom Jesus has been locked in dispute and argument inside the Temple (11:27 – 12:40). I suggest that the fact that this male follower is not identified can be taken as a clue that any one of Jesus' male followers is capable of making such a *faux pas*. At this stage in the narrative one would have expected all of them to be able to look beyond the external appearance, and not be seduced by it, in order to see the rotten core within the outer shell, and the significance of Jesus cleansing the temple on his first day in Jerusalem (11:15-17). This offhand remark shows that they did not understand what he was doing then, and they do not understand now why he did it. The superficiality and shallowness of their

thinking shows that all that Jesus has attempted to teach with regards to the true value of things has not yet taken root in their hearts.

On that note the first theme of the behaviour of the male disciples (their lack of understanding) is concluded. The study continues in the next section which explores the theme of the male followers' inability to heal.

### **2.3.2. The Male followers' inability to heal.**

This second category of the failings of the male followers builds on what has preceded it, namely the nine instances of the male disciples failure to understand. This second theme emphasises their inability to heal. It contains only one example, but a highly significant one nonetheless. Its importance lies in the contrast between the earlier success of the Twelve as Apostles whereby they exorcised demons and anointed and healed the sick (6:12-13, 30). On this earlier occasion the six pairs of Apostles participated fully in the divine power of Jesus' messianic ministry and had played an active role in building God's Kingdom on earth (Hooker 1001:223). Now however, no longer fulfilling an apostolic ministry, they fail to repeat their previous success.

#### **2.3.2.1. The Male followers fail to heal the Epileptic Boy (9:14-29)**

This scene occurs when Peter, James and John (the first three named as members of the Twelve) go with Jesus up 'a high mountain' (9:2f) to witness the spectacular Transfiguration. On returning to the remaining nine members of the Twelve and the rest of Jesus' followers they find a major dispute happening (9:14). The crowd throng to greet Jesus and he enquires about the dispute (v15-16). In Jesus' absence a man had brought his epileptic son to his followers for exorcism (v17-18c). However Jesus' followers had failed to do so, despite the remaining nine Apostles having been given explicit authority to drive out demons (3:15a, 6:7). The reason for the failure is not given at this point. Perhaps it was due to Jesus' absence (although that was no hindrance when the Twelve were sent out as Apostles cf. 6:7), or that some of the other followers (as opposed to any of the nine Apostles present here) were asked to do the exorcism. Jesus' reaction is a mixture of displeasure, exasperation, and weariness;

‘You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you?  
How much longer must I put up with you?’ (9:19)

There are three important points to note in Jesus’ retort. Firstly, it is a continuation of an important theme in the narrative; that of Jesus verbally admonishing his male followers when they show their obtuseness by asking for clarification when none should be needed. The first occurrence was in 4:13, then 4:40, then 7:18a, then 8:17-21 and now here. And on each occurrence the reprimand intensifies in its acerbity. Secondly, Jesus’ lament here indicates that he has had enough of their failure. In calling his followers a ‘faithless generation’ Jesus no longer fires off a rhetorical question asking when will they ever come to believe or understand (e.g. 8:21). Now he simply accepts that they are ‘faithless’ – he has seen enough failures, and moments of fear and obtuseness to prove this. Thirdly, in these two rhetorical questions he no longer posits a hope of something better from his male followers, rather he asks for how much longer he has to endure their failures and hardheartedness.

In healing the boy (v20-27) Jesus has also helped the boy’s father confess the insecurity of his faith and his struggle for greater faith (v22b, 24). Hooker (1991:224) notes that the man’s cry (v24) is the real climax of the story, and it is also the cry of all of Jesus’ followers. The man fits the paradigm of a typical male follower of Jesus. He half believes in Jesus’ power but his faith is not complete. He has enough faith to respond to Jesus but it is weak, and faltering just like the followers of Jesus. This idea is strengthened when one considers the question: who is to blame for the failed exorcism? Is it the father’s lack of faith (v22c, 24) or the male followers’ lack of prayer (v29)? Ultimately both failings have contributed to the unsuccessful attempt to exorcise the boy (Cole 1989:215-216). After the exorcism Jesus’ male followers ask him about the cause of their failure (v28). Jesus’ reply (v29) is that this severe level of demonic possession can only be exorcised through ‘prayer alone’. Thus aside from fear (6:50), hardheartedness (6:52) and lack of faith (9:19), I suggest that a lack of vigilance in prayer must also now be added to the disciples’ failings.

And that concludes the second theme of the behaviour of the male followers – their inability to heal. It leads straight into the third theme – their unwillingness to suffer.

### **2.3.3. The Male followers' unwillingness to suffer**

This last theme in our study of the characterization of the male disciples reveals a serious flaw in their discipleship because it violates Jesus' first ethic on the nature of discipleship; namely to take up the cross and follow Jesus (8:34). An unwillingness to suffer and share in Christ's fate is akin to refusing to take up one's cross and follow the Messiah. The following four examples, I suggest, bear this out.

#### **2.3.3.1. Judas' betrayal (14:1-2, 10-11), & the Male followers' flight at the arrest of Jesus (14:43-50)**

After the Little Apocalypse (Ch 13), Mark's Gospel narrates two very brief pericopae, in which Jesus' fate of betrayal at the hands of one of his male followers is sealed. Mark gives the scene a temporal setting 'two days before the Passover' (v1). The religious authorities desire to eliminate Jesus continues a long running theme in the narrative (cf. 3:6, 11:18, 12:12). But they wish to do so secretly (v1b) in case the people riot in support of a popular preacher (cf. 11:1-11 & 12:37b). In the second pericope Mark narrates that 'Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve' agreed to betray Jesus (v10). There is much irony in the description of Judas as one of the Twelve being the betrayer; it is the flip side of the coin to 3:19 wherein the list of those called to be part of the Twelve, he is described as 'Judas Iscariot, who betrayed (Jesus).' Judas strikes a deal with the chief priests and agrees to use his inside information as one of the Twelve on Jesus' movements and whereabouts 'to look for'<sup>14</sup> an opportunity to betray him (v11).

It is interesting to note that there is no motivation revealed in the text for Judas to feel moved to betray Jesus. There has been no hint of any friction, nor evidence of a rift between Jesus and Judas prior to this act (Thompson 1989:117). Indeed Judas has not even been identified by name in the narrative since the calling of the Twelve at 3:13ff. Perhaps it was simply an avaricious desire for financial gain (Cole 1989:268). Suffice it to comment that for the purposes of Mark's story the motives

---

<sup>14</sup> The verb for 'looking' or 'seeking' is '*exetoun*' and is often associated with opposition to Jesus e.g. 3:32, 11:18, 12:12 (Thompson 1989:116).



behind Judas' actions are secondary to the actions themselves (Hooker 1991:331). Judas' treachery is narrated in a powerful economy of verses (only v10-11). This sharpens the dramatic effect of his betrayal.

### **2.3.3.2. The Male followers fail to keep awake and pray in Gethsemane (14:32-42)**

This Gethsemane pericope serves two purposes; it reveals something of Jesus' own struggle and torment, as well as disclosing the weakness of the male followers. In Gethsemane, Jesus leaves all his followers behind and proceeds deeper into Gethsemane escorted by Peter, and the sons of Zebedee. These are the only witnesses to Jesus' desolation (v33). These three have been Jesus' closest followers throughout the Gospel story. They witnessed Jesus raise the dead (5:37f), his transfiguration (9:2f) and together with Andrew heard Jesus' prophecy on the future persecutions for all his followers (13:3f). These three have also all boasted of their ability to share in Christ's suffering (James and John at 10:35-40, and Peter at 14:29). Now the time to prove the sincerity and faithfulness of their discipleship has arrived (Hooker 1991:347-8).

Jesus' words to these three male followers about being 'deeply grieved, even to death' highlights to them the real nature of his suffering Messiahship (v34). These are extremely apposite words<sup>15</sup> to these three who between them denied Christ's first prophecy (8:29), and asked for seats of glory (10:35f). Jesus commands them to 'remain here and keep awake' (v35)<sup>16</sup>, whilst he goes still deeper into Gethsemane, this time alone, to pray to 'Abba Father' (v36). On his return, Jesus finds the three followers sleeping.<sup>17</sup> I suggest that the fact that Jesus spoke specifically to Simon Peter at this juncture (as opposed to James or John) shows what high hopes Jesus had for Peter above the others. It is as if Peter, of all the Twelve, ought not to have fallen asleep (14:37). Jesus' counsel (v38) describes the dualistic struggle of the flesh versus the spirit, and how far short one's actions fall from one's intentions and wishes. This dualism neatly encapsulates the dilemma of the followers of Jesus: crossing the chasm

---

<sup>15</sup> Cole suggests that they are an echo of Psalm 42:5, 11 (1989:296).

<sup>16</sup> As noted 1.5 above, this is another call to faithful discipleship.

<sup>17</sup> Note the change in how Jesus addresses 'Peter' as 'Simon' in v37. Perhaps it is a note of condescension in that he is no longer to be called 'Peter', which is his discipleship name (3:16b), because he is not behaving like a true follower so Cole 1989:298, Hooker 1991:349).

between having the will to follow Jesus faithfully and yet not executing that will (Hooker 1991:349).

A second time (v39) Jesus leaves to pray to his God. On his return he finds them sleeping again and ‘they did not know what to say to him’ (v40a). They had no answer to Jesus pleas to stay awake. Their guilty silence here mirrors an earlier guilty silence on the way to Capernaum (9:34)<sup>18</sup>. On both occasions their silences betrays their guilt. A third and final time<sup>19</sup> Jesus leaves this trio awake, to pray alone and returns to find them asleep (v41a). Emphatically, Jesus declares ‘Enough!’ (v41b): the only occurrence of this word in the Gospel, and signals the first of the male followers’ three final failures (Thompson 1989:117).

The disciples have failed three times to stay awake when Jesus had commanded them to do so. In succumbing to tiredness and sleep they have violated another of Jesus’ teachings – the crucial importance of keeping alert and awake at all times cf. 13:33, 35, 37 (Hooker 1991:348). Despite their vehement protestations of loyalty and a willingness to stand by his side (14:31), Jesus’ prophecy that they would ‘scatter’ (14:27) is rapidly coming to fruition.

### **2.3.3.3. The Male followers’ abandon Jesus at his arrest (14:43-50)**

Just then Judas ‘one of the Twelve’ arrives with an armed rabble and the religious authorities to arrest Jesus (v43). The irony of ‘one of the Twelve’ leading the mob is poignant. The act of betrayal (v44-46) is with a kiss – this was a common form of greeting between a disciple and a rabbi (English 1992:222)<sup>20</sup>. It is the most ignominious and infamous failure of any of the followers. But in fact they all share culpability in Jesus’ arrest, because whilst it is certainly true that Judas alone of the male followers is responsible for Jesus’ betrayal, none of the others acts to prevent it (Suggit 2002:95). This, then, is the second final failure of the male followers of Jesus (Thompson 1989:117).

---

<sup>18</sup> When they argued as to who was the greatest among them (9:34).

<sup>19</sup> In my opinion the three failed attempts at faithful discipleship here in Gethsemane, continues the motif of the three-fold failure by Jesus’ followers throughout the Gospel. As noted above, they failed to behave like true followers in the three boat scenes, and they also failed to understand Jesus’ three passion-resurrection-prophecies.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that the rabble do need a signal from Judas to identify Jesus. Whether it was because it was dark, or because Jesus was not widely known in Jerusalem we can only hypothesize (Hooker 1991:351).

The reaction of ‘one of those who stood near’ in lashing out at the slave of the high priest and slicing off his ear (v47), hints at the great tension and volatility of this scene. Mark does not record whether it is one of the Twelve or one of the other male followers, only that it was a man<sup>21</sup>. This unnamed man could have been anyone of Jesus’ male followers who out of fear of this situation and through a misguided perception of what was happening, thought that standing by Jesus meant fighting a victorious battle against his enemies and thus decided to launch the first assault, rather than showing loyalty and solidarity with Christ through his arrest, trial and death.

It reiterates once more that even at this pivotal moment in Jesus’ life, the disciples still do not understand his true messianic nature. They cling to deluded hopes that he will turn out to be a heroic warrior-type figure. Jesus three prophecies about his death have had no effect on his closest disciples.

Peter was usually, as the first among equals, the first to act or speak, at pivotal moments in the narrative and often rashly so (e.g. his Confession at 8:29. And also being the loudest and boldest in protesting his loyalty at 14:29 & 31). This is not a watertight argument, but it would not have been unlike Peter to commit such an impetuous action. Alone of all the Gospels the Markan Jesus offers no rebuke to the attacker<sup>22</sup>. Jesus addresses the mob (v48-49), and explains to them (and to his followers) that he is no warrior Messiah, nor a revolutionary, much less ‘a bandit’ (v48). The mob came armed because they expected (like Jesus followers) to have to use physical force to carry out the arrest, but there is none.

Mark concludes this scene with the note at 14:50 that ‘all of them deserted him and fled’. Jesus is abandoned, alone and vulnerable at the mercy of this mob. His own words of 14:27 have come true. The flight of his male followers proves that they ultimately have no faith in Jesus as the suffering Messiah, for they cannot see how the Messiah of God can be arrested by religious authorities, nor how the Messiah can escape from such a plight as this. They confirm their persistent failure in the narrative, when at this critical juncture they abandon Jesus to his fate, and in so doing they have also abandoned Jesus himself, his servanthood Messiah, his new ethic of discipleship, and all that they have witnessed from him.

---

<sup>21</sup> Matthew (26:51) also makes no mention of whom this attacker is. Luke (22:49-50) indicates that it is one of the male followers. And John (18:10) records that it was Simon Peter who slashed off the slave’s ear. Perhaps for the Synoptic writers it was too soon (in terms of the individual’s safety) after the historical event for the man’s identity to be revealed, and only by the time of John (95-100AD) could the truth come out (Cole 1989:300).

<sup>22</sup> Compare Matthew 26:52-54, Luke 22:51a, John 18:11.

#### **2.3.3.4. Simon Peter's denial of Christ (14:66-72)**

Jesus trial is held (v55-65) and he is condemned to death (v64c). Simultaneously, Simon Peter who has followed as far as the courtyard (v66) will soon be facing his own 'trial' of truth. Malbon (in Anderson & Moore 1992:34) suggests these two trials are 'intercalated'. A servant-girl sees Peter and recognises him to be one of Jesus' followers. The text does not reveal where she may have recognised Peter from, but she tries to 'out' him as a follower of Christ. Thus, she accuses Peter of having been with Jesus (v67). Peter lies and denies any knowledge of Jesus (v68), in direct contradiction of his confession at 8:29. The servant girl perseveres with the truth and identifies him as a follower of Jesus to the other bystanders (v69). Peter lies and denies again (v70a), and in so doing he appears as something of a coward (Thompson 1989:118). Now the bystanders take up where the servant girl left off (v70b), which forces Peter to 'curse, and he swore an oath' and denied it a fateful third time (v71). This swearing of an oath terminates his relationship with Jesus (Waetjen 1989:234). The cock crowed a second time (v72a) fulfilling Jesus' prediction of 14:30, and Peter's words of v29 & 31 have proved to be hollow. Peter's reaction (v72c) is full of pathos, and shows his remorse and total desolation at ultimately having failed to follow his rabbi. This denial is the third of the final failures of the followers in Jesus' Passion (Thompson 1989:118).

And this is the final picture Mark gives of any of the male followers in the Gospel. None of them reappear in the remainder of the narrative, which depicts the trial before Pilate (15:1-15), Jesus' torture by the soldiers (v16-20), his crucifixion (v21-41), and his burial (42-47), and finally his resurrection (16:1-8). This final scene leaves behind a very sad memory of the male followers of Christ. Jesus has ultimately failed to turn them into a band of faithful followers.

That closes the third theme of the male disciples behaviour – their unwillingness to suffer. I have thus far in this exploratory study been considering the portrayal of the male followers of Jesus. Now It is helpful to follow this by considering other individual male figures in the narrative, whose characterisation is markedly different from that of the male disciples of Christ. By comparing the male disciples with these individual men it will help to throw into sharper relief the failures of the male disciples, which is the purpose of this chapter.

#### **2.4. A short survey of some individual male characters**

Having completed the study into the characterisation of the male disciples, the study turns to a list of individual men whose actions and words differ markedly from the ‘group characters’ in both the manner and style of their interaction with Christ. In the order in which they appear in the narrative, I would cite the following as examples of these individual male characters:

1. The leper (1:40-45) who ‘spread the word’ (v45) after Christ healed him from his leprosy.
2. Levi, who is called to follow after Jesus (2:14) in the same manner as both Simon and Andrew (1:17) but is not mentioned as one of the Twelve. Hooker (1991:94) suggests that Levi and James son of Alphaeus, who is included among the Twelve (3:18), might be brothers on the strength of the fact that they are both named as sons of Alphaeus (cf.2:14).
3. Legion (5:1-20) who, when liberated through exorcism from extreme demonic possession, begins a new life evangelising widely in the district of the Decapolis (v20). Interestingly this is after Jesus refuses his desperate plea to let him ‘be with him’ (v18) i.e. to join the ranks of the Twelve (cf 3:14) and become one of Jesus’ closest followers.
4. Jairus (5:22-24/35-43) the synagogue leader who had faith enough to supplicate Jesus on behalf of his ill daughter and also to accept Jesus’ word ‘do not fear, only believe’ (v37) when faced with the fatal and seemingly irrevocable news of her death. Perhaps because of this faith, Jairus and his wife are permitted to witness the resurrection of their daughter together with Peter, James and John (v40), thereby momentarily joining the ranks of the followers of Jesus.
5. Blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52) who persistently, even stubbornly, begs Jesus’ help, despite efforts by Jesus’ followers to silence him (v48). The unusual reference to Jesus as ‘Son of David’ (v47,48) suggests he genuinely believes Christ to be Israel’s Messiah descended from the Davidic monarchy (Hooker 1991:252). The symbolism of casting his cloak away (v50) when summoned by Jesus alludes to him casting away his old life and preparing to enter a new

existence in the Kingdom of God (Waetjen 1989:178). This is confirmed after the restoration of his sight, by the note that he followed Jesus ‘on the way’ (v52) which is a signifier of true discipleship<sup>23</sup>.

6. The scribe (12:28-34), who, by his faith-fuelled insight and wisdom, is affirmed by Jesus as ‘not far from the kingdom of God’ (v34). Jesus discerns his theology as being accurate and faultless. The wisdom of this scribe suggests that he does not belong to those scribes that Jesus has prophesied as wanting to condemn him to death (cf. 8:32 & 10:33).
7. Simon the leper (14:3-9), who offers hospitality to and shares table fellowship with Jesus in Bethany.
8. The Roman Centurion (15:33-39) who witnessed the agonising manner of Christ’s death on the Cross (v34, 37) and confessed the truth (v39). It could be assumed that this character witnessed the cohort of Roman troops torturing Jesus (v16-20), and then escorted him to Golgotha (v22).
9. Simon of Cyrene (15:21) who is forced to carry the cross of Christ. Unusually Jesus does not bear his own cross as was expected of criminals (Hooker 1991:372). That might well have been a cause for further shock and scandal to witnesses, that someone alleged to be a messiah would need another to bear his cross for him (English 1989:233). Yet, this stranger who is not mentioned before this incident, nor again after it, becomes the first person in the Gospel who is recorded as fulfilling the words of Jesus at 8:34, by taking up his cross and following after Christ<sup>24</sup>, albeit he was conscripted to do so. Perhaps Cole is correct to suggest that he is a figurative picture of every disciple (1989:315).
10. And finally Joseph of Arimathea (15:42-46) proves himself to be a truer follower of Jesus than any of the Twelve, by his courageous and humble service of taking Jesus’ body down from the cross, and burying him in a tomb. Such was the duty of disciples<sup>25</sup>.

All these nine individual male characters have very small fleeting narrative roles. Yet their part in the plot is telling indeed. For they display a level of faith and conduct that is expected of but never displayed by the male groups of characters, in

---

<sup>23</sup> See 1.2.3. above.

<sup>24</sup> cf Luke 23:26 which states that he actually followed behind Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> Compare John the Baptizer’s disciples after his execution at 6:29.

particular the Twelve. In other words they achieve faithful discipleship according to Jesus' new ethics of discipleship.

In overview, I suggest that one can begin to discern a sharp divergence in the nature of discipleship between the male groups and some of the male individuals in Mark's text. I do not suggest that it is absolute in any sense, but there does appear to exist in Mark's writing a notable pattern in the portrayal of interaction with Christ by male groups over and against the portrayal of interaction by male individuals as outlined above.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

I have tried to distinguish between the various groups that followed Jesus, as well as elaborate on why they may be labelled the 'male followers' of Christ. Furthermore I have cited some of the examples in the narrative of Mark's Gospel that I contend show the male followers of Jesus consistently failing to adhere to Christ's new ethics of discipleship.

The negativity of their characterization cannot be in doubt – it permeates Mark's story of Jesus. The male followers are the ones who fail to understand Jesus' parables, his nature miracles or his passion-resurrection-prophecies; they bicker amongst themselves, are easily seduced by the grandeur of the Jerusalem Temple, and fail to exorcise a young boy; one of their number betrays Jesus, another denies him thrice-fold, and all desert him at his hour of greatest need. And by the time of his death, all have vanished from the plot completely. Their discipleship is a failure and a tragedy. As a helpful contrast I also very briefly highlighted ten individual men who appear to fulfil the new ethic of discipleship, and do enjoy positive and life-transforming encounters with Jesus. I intended this contrast to emphasise the misunderstood and flawed discipleship of the male disciples. That this composite list of ten could achieve Jesus' new ethic, one would expect the male disciples to do likewise.

In the next chapter, I shall examine the individual female characters that interact with Jesus, to ascertain whether they are any more successful than the male groups in fulfilling Jesus' new values of discipleship.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **JESUS AND WOMEN IN MARK**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter I focussed on the role of the male followers of Jesus, and attempted to show how their concept of discipleship was for a variety of reasons inadequate. In this chapter I explore the interaction between Jesus and some female characters in the narrative of the Gospel. I focus specifically on the occasions when female characters are directly involved with Jesus in the plot during his Galilean ministry<sup>1</sup>, and my broad intention is to ascertain how Mark portrays Jesus' interaction with women followers.

In order for this study to be as fruitful as possible I think it is essential to adopt a purely feminist perspective, and work against the grain of androcentricism in Mark. Some scholars have suggested that Mark is an intensely androcentric text (Schussler Fiorenza 1984:15, Krause in Levine 2001:38), where masculinity is taken 'as the human norm and femininity is deemed inherently inferior, considered less pure and a serious threat to male purity', so concludes Dewey (in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:470) who sees the Gospel as written by men, for men and about men.

So, in this chapter I start by attempting to establish the status and position of women in Jewish society in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE. This, after all, is the social milieu in which Jesus and his encounters with women are being played out. Then, I shall briefly analyse each of the occasions that I have chosen of Jesus and women interacting in the Gospel.

#### **3.2. A brief study on the status of women in 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Jewish society**

In a concise and detailed exposition of this topic, Witherington elucidates that the 'exclusive sphere of influence' for women in Jewish society in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE was the family (1984:2). Some of the duties expected of women in the family

---

<sup>1</sup> I shall consider the significance of the women characters at the cross (15:40-41), burial (15:47) and empty tomb (16:1-8) in the next chapter.



included grinding flour, baking bread, weaning children, washing clothes and working in wool (Corley in Levine 2001:200).

Jewish marital custom was regulated heavily in the husband's favour (1984:4). However within a marriage contract the husband had an obligation to provide food and clothing for the wife, as well as to meet her other needs. She was not merely an extension of his property (1984:4). Indeed some women were permitted in certain cases to own property in their own right, and to inherit property, although male heirs had precedence over them (1984:5).

In matters pertaining to religion, a woman's place and function were extremely limited. According to Jewish law a woman should neither bear witness, instruct children, nor pray at table; a woman was not even bound to keep the whole Torah<sup>2</sup>. With regards to synagogue worship for example, this was largely due to the biological fact of menstruation and the severe restrictions laid down in Leviticus 15 (1984:8). The religious functions that women could perform were mainly those which took place in the home. Those that did attend worship in synagogues were assigned special places behind a screen<sup>3</sup>.

Corley (in Levine 2001:200) suggests that women who belonged to the 'working poor' and peasantry sectors of society did practice different kinds of trade outside of the home; such as shop-keeping, weaving, professional mourning, butchery to name but a few. In rural areas they may have been involved in the running and maintenance of farms for example where all available forms of labour were required, and in urban areas women may have even shared in the operation of small businesses, but they would rarely have earned enough to secure financial independence (2001:200).

Overall, then, in Jewish society of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, a 'low view of women' was predominant (Witherington 1984:10) and often women were 'greatly despised'<sup>4</sup>; such was the societal view of women in which Jesus lived and worked.

### **3.3. A concise analysis of Jesus' encounters with women**

---

<sup>2</sup> Oepke TDNT p782

<sup>3</sup> Oepke TDNT p782

<sup>4</sup> Oepke TDNT p781

Having established an overview of the position and status of women in the society in which Jesus lived, I shall now consider instances of Jesus relating to, and engaging with, female characters in the narrative of the Gospel. I have chosen six instances in all where Jesus interacts with different women. With each one, I shall focus on how the Markan Jesus and the woman relate to each other i.e. what effect does Jesus have on the woman, and what effect does the woman have on Jesus? I shall also explore what kind of ministry she may offer Jesus. And other issues such as whether the experience of being with Jesus changes or transforms the woman for better or for worse; whether Jesus' attitude and behaviour toward each woman is positive or negative.

### **3.3.1.Simon Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31).**

The first instance I wish to cite also marks the first appearance of a female character in the Gospel. On leaving the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples go to 'the house of Simon and Andrew' (v29). Inside lies 'Simon's mother-in-law' who is sick with a fever (v30a). In accordance with the proper social convention of her society, she is identified not by her name, but rather by her relationship to her male kinsman (Miller 2004:17, Tolbert in Newsom & Ringe 1992:354). Witherington concurs that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, a Jewish woman's legal significance was defined by such things as her relationship to male members of her family, marital faithfulness, and domestic responsibilities (1984:2). It is significant that she is found in the home for two reasons: first, this is an important motif in the Markan narrative symbolising the place where the new community that Jesus is building enjoys the 'horizontal relational dynamics' of a family (Waetjen 1989:83); secondly, three out of four of the healings that Christ performs for women occur in the setting of a home (Munro 1982:227).

The adult males have enough love for the mother-in-law that they intercede to Jesus on her behalf (v30b). After this supplication the story moves in an unexpected direction (Kinukawa 1994:102). Jesus responds to the request immediately by going to her, and treating her with gentle care, takes her hand in his hand (v31a), and raises her from bed-ridden sickness to health and newness of life (v31b). Miller (2004:20) suggests that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE a fever 'was believed to be a serious and life-threatening condition', and therefore by healing the mother-in-law Jesus is saving her

from the clutches of death. The physical proximity of Jesus and the woman is highly notable; it expresses something of Jesus' deep concern for her life and well-being (Kinukawa 1994:102). This first encounter between Christ and a female character is a positive one. Jesus demonstrates a care and compassion for the sick woman, by the immediacy of his response to the supplication for her, and by the manner of his healing act – not just a 'touch or tap' (Kinukawa 1994:102) but taking hold of the woman's hands, which I suggest is as if Jesus were embracing her in her illness, with solidarity and companionship.

The verb used to describe Jesus' act of healing here (*egeiren* meaning 'lifted her up' v31a), is the same verb used at 5:41 where Jesus resurrects Jairus' daughter with the command *egeire* ('get up!'), and also at 16:7 where the angelic figure in the empty tomb describes the manner of Christ's departure (*egerthe* meaning 'He has risen!'). So Jesus' healing here of the mother-in-law contains overtones of Jesus' resurrection power and alludes to his own resurrection from the empty tomb (Witherington 1984:67). In other words use of this verb in this first female healing suggests that the power with which Jesus heals the mother-in-law is the same power which will raise Jesus from death.

In performing the act of healing Jesus is guilty of violating the Jewish Sabbath laws, and also of making himself ritually unclean (Witherington 1984:66). However Christ's rejection at this juncture of these kinds of taboos that hinder his opportunities to heal those in need, suggests that, even at the start of his ministry, he has an inclusive perspective with regards to who he would offer his ministry. Both women (such as the mother-in-law here), and men (e.g. 1:23-26, 1:40-42) will be the recipients of the fruits of his ministry.

Having watched Jesus violate the Sabbath to attend to her needs the mother-in-law now violates the Sabbath to attend to his needs and those of his disciples as can be seen from the concluding clause of the pericope that 'she began to serve (*diekonei*) them' (v31b).

The precise nature of the 'service' that the mother-in-law undertook after her healing has caused much scholastic debate, and rightly so because it is an important issue. Different scholars have offered opinions: Taylor (1966:180) suggests that her service is a return to her conventional role in the household. Therefore her service is a simple continuation of the domestic chores she did before her sickness. Witherington (1984:68) concurs that the mother-in-law's service was most probably domestic work,

which Jesus accepts as being appropriate and good. Waetjen (1989:83) opines that her actions go far beyond mere table service, and that her deeds create ‘serenity, joy, comfort, well-being and communion for them all.’ Evans (1983:50) suggests that the essence of her service was a very personal form of service including such activities as hospitality and provision of food. In other words it was showing active Christian love for one’s neighbour.

Feminist scholars have generally interpreted her service as a ‘utopian ideal’ wherein the mother-in-law is an early female disciple of Christ and a model of faithfulness (e.g. Dewey in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:367). King (1998:61) suggests that the service of the mother-in-law is the kind of service that will be expected of the Twelve and all of Christ’s followers because it goes above and beyond waiting on tables, but the first to show it in the Markan narrative is a woman. Kinukawa ventures to go a step further, by suggesting that ‘*diekonei*’ in v31 is in the imperfect tense, and thus it implies a continuous sense of serving, both now in the immediate context of hospitality, and thereafter in the future praxis of discipleship (1994:104). Tolbert (in Newsom & Ringe 1992:354) makes the rather canny observation that ‘*diekonei*’ in 1:31b is the same verb that is used to describe the angels’ ministry (*diekonoun*) to Jesus in the wilderness at 1:13c. Tolbert deduces that these verbs should be rendered the same in English; to do otherwise (i.e. to translate ‘*diekonoun*’ as ‘ministered’ for the angels but translate ‘*diekonei*’ as ‘served’ for the mother-in-law) would be to devalue the service of the mother-in-law<sup>5</sup>.

Munro (1982:233) suggests that the various occurrences of ‘*diakonein*’ cannot be limited to a single meaning throughout the Markan narrative because it’s meaning ‘varies according to context’. Krause (in Levine 2001:43) supports this conjecture by pointing out that the various forms of the verb ‘*diakonein*’ conjure up a wide range of meanings, which differ according to the object of the verb and its context, and thus to equate all the occurrences of ‘*diakonein*’ such that they render exactly the same meaning is to err greatly. In other words, ‘*diakonein*’ means different things in different places in the text for example it can imply the domestic chores of women (as here at 1:31) or it can mean women performing ‘liberated roles’ of active discipleship to the ministry of Christ (as at 10:45, 15:41).

---

<sup>5</sup> Although this argument might be countered with the idea that angels are capable of ministering to Jesus in a manner far beyond that of any human, and thus although the verb ‘*diakonein*’ is used in both 1:13 & 1:31 their respective ministries to Jesus are not necessarily equal.

Munro further asserts that at 1:31 considering the setting of a home, it is likely that the mother-in-law, being subservient to her male relatives and guests, fulfils the position of providing a service of hospitality and table service to Christ and his disciples (1982:233), which was a highly honourable role to perform. Krause (in Levine 2001:41) also agrees with this point and suggests that 1:31 reveals the ‘patriarchal ideology’ of Mark. And the occurrence of ‘*diekonei*’ at this juncture implies that the mother-in-law fulfils a ‘patriarchally organized gender role’. By way of an aside, Krause counters Tolbert’s opinion of 1:13c (the ‘*diekonoun*’ of the angels in the wilderness), by suggesting that the action of the angels ought to be rendered as ‘served’ since the angels themselves are subordinate beings to Jesus ‘the son of God’ (1:1) in Mark’s ‘theological and cosmological perspective’ (in Levine 2001:44), in the same way that the mother-in-law, being subservient to her male relatives and guests, ‘began to serve them’ (1:31).

The good news, so to speak, of this verse lies in the fact that it contains a glimmer of a ‘utopian moment’ of Jesus tending to a woman’s need for healing. After which, she continues to function in a traditionally prescribed role (in Levine 2001:47). She becomes the only person in the Gospel who serves Jesus in response to her healing. In other instances Jesus orders the healed persons to return home (e.g. 1:45, 5:19, 34, 7:29). Thus her service is a positive response to Jesus’ act of healing (Miller 2004:30). She receives his ministry of healing, and it transforms her life from illness to strength and health, and further I suggest it acts as a direct catalyst for her to offer her own faithful ministry of hospitality. This ministry of hospitality has been born out of Jesus’ divine ministry. Unable to perform it whilst ill, she has entered a new life as a faithful minister of hospitality to Jesus. For whichever special nuance of ‘*diekonei*’ is meant here by Mark, its very occurrence is important in itself. For it is a signifier of discipleship (Miller 2004:23). So whether it implies merely food preparation and waiting on tables, or a broader sense of commitment to and attending to all the needs of Jesus and the disciples, either way she is proactively engaged in the actions of a follower of Jesus.

Overall, then, both Jesus and the woman emerge favourably from this encounter. Jesus reveals himself to be a man who is willing to heal a sick woman’s body, irrespective of the religious laws of the day. And, the mother-in-law, for her part, receives healing from her illness, and gains a new strength and wholeness from Christ to live anew and fulfil her responsibilities in the home, by bestowing

hospitality on her guests. Thus, right at the start of his ministry Jesus shows that women as well as men will be the beneficiaries and recipients of his messianic ministry.

### **3.3.2. The Bleeding Woman (5:24-34).**

The second example of a female character in the narrative that I wish to cite is the solitary and anonymous figure of the Bleeding Woman. The text reveals little else about her aside from her gender and her ailment – it is the only account in the narrative that connects a specific disease to a person’s gender (Miller 2004:56), and apart from a lack of her name there is also no information about her social class (Selvidge 1990:84).

This pericope is sandwiched by the pericope of Jairus’ daughter (5:22-24 & 35-43), and there are significant commonalities that link these two stories of a young woman preparing for her ‘femaleness’ and an adult woman who is suffering from hers (Kinukawa 1994:34). Cotter (in Levine 2001:55) has highlighted these very concisely; firstly, both pericopae revolve around female characters in need of healing; secondly, the number ‘twelve’ holds important symbolism in both stories, denoting the number of years the woman has had the illness (v25), and the age of the girl (v42); thirdly, the label ‘daughter’ occurs in both pericopae, as Jesus’ reference to the healed woman (v34), and the relation of the sick girl to Jairus (v23).

The Bleeding Woman is characterised entirely by her suffering and affliction (Haber 2003:180), and as Cotter (in Levine 2001:57) has pointed out, the text discloses the exact nature of her ailment and her intentions in six precise pieces of information:

- 1) She has suffered hemorrhages<sup>6</sup> for twelve years (v25).
- 2) She has ‘endured much’ from many different physicians<sup>7</sup> (v26).
- 3) She had ‘spent all she had’ and impoverished herself in her failed attempts to be healed from her afflictions (v26).
- 4) Instead of improving her condition had grown ‘worse’ (v26).

<sup>6</sup> Possibly vaginal bleeding (so Haber 2003:181, Hooker 1991:148), which would have made her ‘gloomy’ as well as unhealthy (Kinukawa 1994:34).

<sup>7</sup> Not least from a certain degree of shame through exposing her body to these physicians who in all likelihood would have been male (Kinukawa 1994:34).

- 5) She had heard of Jesus (v27)
- 6) She decided to approach him and touch his cloak (v27).

The four-fold description of her suffering (1 – 4 above) emphasises the magnitude of her affliction (Myers 1988:201). A better way to understand the immensity of the woman's affliction is to consider Selvidge's assertion that the words for 'body' (*somatikos* – v29)<sup>8</sup> and 'blood' (*aimatos* – v26)<sup>9</sup> and 'endure much' (*polla pathousa* – v26)<sup>10</sup> are only ever used in the Gospel of this woman and Jesus referring to his passion (1990:105). Mark recognised the suffering of this woman to be as great as that of Christ in his passion (Malbon 2000:51), and this account of her suffering actually foreshadows it.

It is highly important to appreciate fully the life she has had to endure for twelve years because of her bleeding. According to the Levitical Purity laws which were written down in the post-exilic period (Kinukawa 1994:35), she would have been ostracized from her religion (Leviticus 15:25), which would have declared her to be in a state of perpetual impurity (Tolbert in Newsom & Ringe 1992:355). Her bleeding would also have threatened her family and her community's cleanness according to Leviticus 15:26-27 (which states the number of different ways that anyone who came into close proximity with an unclean person such as this would themselves become unclean), and therefore this woman would have been isolated from her family and home community as well. In Leviticus 15:31 one can see that death is the penalty for failure to adhere to these Cultic laws of ostracising the unclean. Through her illness this woman has become greatly stigmatised by her religion, her home community and her family. Kinukawa describes her as a victim of 'discrimination, degradation and dehumanisation' and one who was enduring a living death physically, socially, economically, and religiously (1994:37). She has plunged the depths of human suffering, and for this woman her reality has become so desperate that I suggest Jesus represents something of a last chance, her only hope of healing and deliverance from her plight. Through her faith she has become aware that Jesus can help her when all other sources of help have failed. In other words I suggest

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf 14:8 & 14:22 ('*soma mou*') and 15:43 ('*soma tou Iesou*').

<sup>9</sup> Cf 14:24 ('*aima mou*').

<sup>10</sup> Cf 8:31 ('*polla pathein*') & 9:12 ('*polla pathe*').

that she can see that Jesus can do what no one else can – his power far supersedes that of other people.

Verses 26-29 are unique in Mark in that the narrative is told purely from a woman's perspective<sup>11</sup>. For once we enter a female worldview and see things albeit briefly as a woman saw and experienced them. Even her inner thoughts are revealed to us. Considering the heavy androcentricism of Mark this is all the more remarkable and heightens the impact of this story.

The narrative reveals that she had heard about Jesus (v27) and all that he has done. Hearing about Jesus was enough for her to follow him, and she had the faith to believe that all she had to do is touch his cloak to be healed (v28)<sup>12</sup>. This faith has led her into a risky and dangerous situation (of which she would have been fully aware), of being an unaccompanied woman touching an adult male Jew in a public place, and it is a potential scandal for Jesus too, as an unmarried male being touched by a strange woman. One may even say that Jesus allowed her to touch him, even though he was not permitted to do so by Levitical law. Her motivation for touching Jesus lies in a desire for 'wholeness and holiness', a holistic healing implying both a return to physical health and a recovery of social and religious wholeness (Kinukawa 1994:41).

The shocking aspect of her action is that she has not asked Jesus for help in dealing with her affliction herself by touching him midst of the jostling crowd, and has rendered Jesus unclean. Furthermore in so doing, she has had the temerity to deliberately and consciously violate a 'patriarchal social taboo' (Kinukawa 1994:42). I suggest that it underlines her desperation and faith that she is even willing to risk anger and condemnation for breaking the purity codes (Miller 2004:58, Tolbert in Newsom & Ringe 1992:355).

The divine power that resides within Jesus ensures that he is not made unclean by her touch, and that she herself is fully healed, for after touching Jesus' cloak, her bleeding stops and 'she felt in her body' that she had been healed (v29). I suggest that it is a small gesture by the woman such as touching his cloak, yields a massive transformation in her life. At that precise moment Jesus, too, is aware of a surge of power (v30a), almost as if he had no control over his power. The instance of healing,

---

<sup>11</sup> Although King (1998:64) disagrees: he suggests that the whole pericope is told from this woman's perspective with the exception of v32-34.

<sup>12</sup> Although Hooker queries the real nature of her faith by making the interesting observation that the woman's belief in being healed by merely touching Jesus' cloak borders on a superstitious belief in magic (1991:148).



and Jesus' awareness of a loss of power, occur simultaneously. Jesus and the woman connect in the release of divine power. They experience an intimacy and oneness on a level far beyond that of the myopic disciples. To me, it is almost as if Jesus and the woman are momentarily alone in a private world, and one scholar concurs (King 1998:65). Kinukawa suggests that the miraculous power has been 'reciprocal and not unilateral'. In other words Jesus has been as physically affected by the healing of the woman as the woman herself has been (1994:43). This unifying contact symbolises that all religious codes segregating the pure from the impure have been smashed through. Such demarcations and delineations have no place in the new community of faith Jesus is creating. I suggest that entry to this new community is determined by the quality of one's faith, rather than categories of 'clean' and 'unclean'.

In asking the crowd who touched him in that way (v30b), Jesus is publicising the fact that he has been touched, and therefore publicises that there is a chance (depending on who touched him) that he has become unclean (Evans 1983:47). The disciples in contrast to the woman's faith and action, have missed the point entirely. They have not noticed this woman in the crowd, and by their reply (v31) they clearly think Jesus' question is foolish and absurd (Hooker 1991:148). This shows that they do not have the faith of the woman, and do not 'see' that to touch Jesus with faith is to tap into miraculous power, which is very different from incidentally bumping into him.

Jesus ignores their retort and waits for the person to step forward (v32) so that he can exemplify her faith to the crowds and ironically his disciples as well (Witherington 1984:73). This woman sought out Christ, now Christ seeks her out (Kinukawa 1994:45). Cotter (in Levine 2001:58) suggests a degree of tension at this juncture, between the woman who wants to stay hidden and the healer who wishes to know the healed. Eventually the tumultuous experience of being healed moves the woman to come forward and confess the whole truth (v33) and this is the first 'one-to-one' dialogue between Christ and a female character in the Gospel (Cotter in Levine 2001:77). The woman is full of 'fear and trembling', because she knows the condemnation that awaits her for her behaviour. Instead Jesus responds not by criticizing her but by commending her actions as being justified by her faith (Witherington 1984:73). The traditional value system of holiness has been turned upside down (Kinukawa 1994:46), and Jesus has set a new precedent for the abandonment of the purity of regulations (Miller 2004:53).

Jesus affirms her new status as a person in her own right by calling her 'daughter', establishing a new personal relationship between himself and the woman. This is unique laudatory reference in Mark<sup>13</sup> that signals her inclusion in the new family of faith to which she now belongs as a fully whole person once again. No longer is she anonymous or without status. On a previous occasion Jesus has defined his family as those who do God's will (3:35), thus he affirms this woman has having done God's will by having the faith to win her own healing. Jesus' command to her to 'go in peace' and be healed (v34) marks her entry into God's Rule (Waetjen 1989:121), henceforth she is beginning a new redeemed life as a daughter in Jesus' community of faith.

The woman's actions show her to be a model of faith (Malbon 2000:51), and unique among all the Markan miracle stories it was her faith alone that was the catalyst for her healing and not the direct intention of Jesus (Miller 2004:59). It is this faith that Jesus affirms in v34 as one that has triggered a miracle, for he played a passive role in this healing pericope. Jesus has only responded to her initiative and actions. As one scholar puts it the 'honour' of the healing belongs to the woman (Cotter in Levine 2001:60).

In conclusion, then, this encounter between Jesus and the Bleeding Woman, shows them both in a favourable light. Jesus participates in being 'a boundary breaker'<sup>14</sup> between the clean and unclean, and reacts to her controversial behaviour by affirming it as being the will of God, commends her for her actions and her faith, and welcomes her into his community. The woman, too, emerges favourably from this encounter, for through her courageous faith she has won for herself an extraordinary transformation, being restored to fullness of life. Now made whole and dignified, she is empowered to participate fully in Jesus' new community of faith (Witherington 1984:75).

### **3.3.3. Jairus' daughter (5:22-24 & v35-43).**

The third appearance of a female character is Jairus' daughter, in the pericope that sandwiches the intercalation of the Bleeding Woman pericope. This pattern of

---

<sup>13</sup> Cotter (in Levine 2001:59) describes it as sensitive, non-erotic and tender.

<sup>14</sup> Kinukawa (1994:47).

stories being intercalated into other stories is a familiar feature<sup>15</sup> of Mark's narrative (Hooker 1991:147), and it supports the notion of their being thematic links between the intertwined stories<sup>16</sup>. The daughter of Jairus remains nameless, she is only characterised by her relationship to her father (v23), and then her mother (v40) and finally her age (v42).

Jairus, who is a synagogue ruler and hence a man worthy of respect and honour, falls at Jesus' feet (v22). Despite his exalted position in society Jairus shows considerable humility and desperation (and perhaps undignified behaviour for a synagogue ruler) in supplicating Jesus in this manner. This is significant for two reasons: first the fact that an influential Jewish ruler would pay such homage to Jesus shows that Jesus' ministry helped those at the top as well as the bottom of Jewish society (Witherington 1984:72); and secondly it reveals that Jairus has faith in Jesus' authority as someone who has the power to help and heal (Hooker 1991:148). So Jairus begs Jesus for help on behalf of his dying daughter who he wishes to 'be made well, and live' (v23). He performs the role of males being responsible for the women in their household (cf. 1:30). Jesus consents to his request and moves off with him (v24a).

After the healing of the Bleeding Woman, Jesus' attention returns to Jairus' plea for help by news reaching them that his daughter has died, and thus Jesus need not be bothered (v35). His reply of 'do not fear, only believe' (v36) seems to advocate an impossible degree of faith. Jairus is 'grieving and distraught with the horrible truth of his daughter's death' (Cotter in Levine 2001:75). How is he not supposed to fear the worst? Jesus takes his three most senior disciples with him and they continue on to Jairus' house (v37).

At the house Jesus declares the daughter to be sleeping despite the presence and noise of the mourners who know that she has passed away (v39). In spite of their mockery Jesus sends them all out, and only with the daughter's parents and his three disciples enters her bedroom (v40). It appears to be a deliberate attempt on Jesus' part to separate faith from unbelief, or the faithful few who would be able to understand the miracle healing and the unbelievers who would not. It emphasises what become clear at 6:6 – that miracles can only occur where faith is present (Miller 2004:63). To

---

<sup>15</sup> See Mark 3:21-35 & 11:12-25

<sup>16</sup> See 3.3.2 above.

extend this further I suggest that Jesus' new community is open to all who have faith – irrespective of class or gender.

Witherington cites the importance of only five witnesses being present for this miracle of resurrection. Christ deemed these five people as being capable of interpreting the imminent miracle properly through the eyes of faith. It is highly significant and a testament to her faithfulness that the girl's mother is recognised by Jesus as being as 'equally worthy' as the synagogue leader and as Christ's three leading disciples to do so (1984:74).

Jesus takes her by the hand (cf. 1:31a) and commands her 'to rise' (*egeirai*)<sup>17</sup> in v41-42. Cotter (in Levine 2001:75) points out that Christ did not make a prayer of supplication to God when performing the miracle. Unlike previous resurrection miracles in the Old Testament by prophetic figures such as Elijah<sup>18</sup> and Elisha<sup>19</sup>, being the divine Messiah Jesus had no need to. He was simply able to issue the command to rise. Even in the face of the finality of death there yet remains hope.

The five witnesses are 'overcome with amazement', and after issuing a command to secrecy Jesus orders the girl to be given some nourishment as a signal that she is indeed alive and well once more (v43)(Hooker 1991:131). Jesus' concern for her nutritional requirements suggests a return to normality after the miraculous event (Witherington 1984:74).

As Miller (2004:62) notes the healing of Jairus' daughter follows a similar pattern to that of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. The little girl is powerless in the clutches of her fatal illness, just as the mother-in-law was powerless when bedridden with fever. Jesus takes the girl's hand and raises her to new life, out of the grasp of death, in the same way that he had taken the mother-in-law by the hand and pulled her out of the clutches of the fever. I suggest that the command '*egeirai*' in v41 actually foreshadows the angelic annunciation of Jesus' own resurrection from the empty tomb (cf. '*egerthe*' 16:5), alluding to the notion that the little girl is resurrected by the same divine power which will later raise Jesus. And just as the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law ended with a meal and table fellowship, so too does this healing end in

---

<sup>17</sup> Hooker (1991:147) suggests that the words of Jairus' plea in v22 (*sothe*) and Jesus' command here in v41 echo the resurrection hope of the early Christian community.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24 when Elijah revives the widow's son especially vv20-22 & 24 for his prayer to the Lord.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 4:8-37 when Elisha revives the Shunammite's son, especially v33 for his prayer to the Lord.

a celebratory meal (Miller 2004: 62). Both female characters are recipients of Jesus' miraculous healing ministry and are empowered to begin a new lives.

I suggest that the Bleeding Woman's suffering foreshadows Jesus' passion and the girl's resurrection foreshadows Jesus' resurrection. Witherington suggests that the healing from suffering of the former climaxes with the resurrection of the latter (1984:72); and whereas the Bleeding Woman tried to keep her healing a secret yet was forced to confess it publicly, so the resurrection of Jairus' daughter will be a cause for huge publicity and yet her family are told to keep silent (Hooker 1991:131)<sup>20</sup>.

I suggest that the key similarity linking these pericopae is that Jesus is involved in the healing and restoration of ritually impure, unclean female bodies. And in so doing he is shown a highly favourable light. Jesus did not view his physical contact with a corpse as defiling, in the same way that he did not view being touched by the Bleeding Woman as defiling, and therefore by implication, the requirements of Levitical law indicating that such contact would defile a person are rejected by Christ (Witherington 1984:75). Jesus saw these two females as people in dire need of his help. Both these encounters 'affirm Christ's respect and commitment to humankind, in the here and now' (Cotter in Levine 2001:75). In other words he respects the value of human life in the present condition.

The use of his messianic power in these two miracles is governed by a 'deep *humanitas*' (Cotter in Levine 2001:76) or compassion. In these instances his compassion is for suffering females, elsewhere in the Gospel it is for suffering males. Thus Jesus emerges here as the Messiah who is willing to help all people. And the manner in which he uses his messianic power reveals the compassionate nature of his Messiahship. I concur with Cotter (in Levine 2001:77-78) who suggests that Jesus is the Messiah who is incapable of denying the 'salvific transformations' of his power to those in desperate need.

In conclusion, with regards to the female characters who are the recipients of Jesus' compassion, the 'key commodity' (Witherington 1984:75) in securing the assistance of Christ is faith in his identity as a Messiah who can help. The Bleeding

---

<sup>20</sup> Myers adds a slightly different twist on the thematic link between these stories: he sees the major link between the two pericopae being the issue of class. Jairus represents the affluent wealthy class, and the Bleeding Woman is firmly entrenched at the other end of the spectrum as she is poor, alone, unclean. These two characters are 'archetypal opposites in economic status and honour' (1988:200). And yet when Jesus is on his way to help a member of the upper class, he interrupts that mission to help restore one of the lowest class in society. It is an extraordinary 'reversal in dignity' (1988:202).

Woman was commended for her bold faith, and it was faith that motivated Jairus to supplicate Jesus on his daughter's behalf, and one hastens to add it was faith that allowed the girl's mother to witness her resurrection. Her faith is thus shown to be equal to that of the synagogue leader and the three male leading disciples of Christ. It qualifies her to briefly join the ranks of Jesus' inner circle of companions. Thus, she too emerges from this pericope positively, as the faithful mother of her risen daughter.

### **3.3.4. Syrophenician Woman (7:24-30).**

The fourth instance of a woman appearing in the narrative that I wish to cite occurs when Jesus travels to the most northerly point mentioned in the Gospel of Mark (New Bible Atlas 1985:75). He has journeyed to Tyre, a Phoenician city on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea far North West of Galilee (v24a). Jesus has entered true Gentile territory. He has travelled this far away to retreat from the pressure of the crowds (Waetjen 1989:134).

However, he is unsuccessful. For despite his wish to remain anonymous (v24b-c), word spreads that he is there and he is supplicated by a woman on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter (v25), who falls at his feet and makes her request. One scholar<sup>21</sup> has suggested that this may not be a respectful posture for her to assume as it was the kind of action only acceptable among men (cf. Jairus' approach to Jesus at 5:22). Further still this 'invasive solicitation' (Kinukawa 1994:55) is a serious *faux pas* in another way, because it should be the alpha male of the household who requests help for the women therein (cf. Simon Peter and Andrew at 1:30 & again Jairus 5:22-23), and not a solitary woman who appears thoroughly isolated from any kind of family support (Ringe in Russell 1985:70).

Her characterisation in v26 is defined in three ways; by her gender, her motherhood and her ethnicity, that she is a 'Gentile, of Syrophenician origin'. Scholars suggest that each of these characteristic details classify her as an outsider to the Jews; being born a female (Kinukawa 1994:55), a non-Jew and therefore likely to be a pagan by religion (Rebera in Levine 2001:101), and as a mother of a demon-possessed daughter which may have made her 'untouchable' by virtue of being contaminated (so to speak) by her daughter (Kinukawa 1994:55).

---

<sup>21</sup> Kinukawa 1994:54.

The fact that she has a daughter (rather than a son) is also a further disadvantage. In ancient Israel daughters were usually seen as something of an expensive liability and not very highly valued. Yet this mother loves her daughter enough to seek her healing and restoration here (Ringe in Russell 1985:71). Kinukawa extends this further by suggesting that this mother shares in her daughter's suffering because 'daughter's issues are mother's issues', and so accordingly, both mother and daughter are triply oppressed through their gender, religion, ethnicity and possession by an unclean spirit (1994:55).

Nonetheless, despite these barriers she bravely makes her request to Jesus (v26b). The significance of her request is that she is pleading for Jesus' assistance outside of his ministry and vocation to Israel. It might also be that she is simply taking advantage of a miracle worker who is passing through the area (Hooker 1991:182).

Her request seems unacceptable to Jesus. In his 'parabolic' reply (Schussler Fiorenza 1983:137, Miller 2004:98) in v27, Jesus uses an allegory of a food saying highlighting the woman's ethnicity as the obstacle to healing as she appears as an unworthy recipient of his messianic ministry. Jesus turns down the request, using the allegory whereby the children symbolise the Israelite people, to 'be fed' is symbolic of receiving the good news and salvation of God, and 'the dogs' are all non-Israelites. Miller (2004:96) suggests that Jesus' words are 'shocking in their severity' as he appears unwilling to heal the sick child, whereas previously he has been quick to heal those in need (e.g. 1:29-30, 40-45, 2:1-12 et al).

Witherington labels this verse as a 'hard saying' of Christ because it is both 'unexpected and surprising, and so seemingly out of character in the portrayal of Christ that we have had so far (1984:134). Referring to the woman's ethnic group as 'dogs' who are unfit to partake in what belongs to the Jews is a clear insult with racist overtones especially when spoken by a Jew to a Gentile (Witherington 1984:65). Elsewhere in Biblical texts, the term 'dog' is a term of abuse for Gentiles e.g. 1 Samuel 17:43 & 2 Kings 8:13. The offensive nature of the remark may suggest that it was preserved in a tradition from a real incident in the life of Christ (Rebera in Levine 2001:103).

One feminist scholar is highly critical of Jesus' response to this woman: she notes that use of the term 'dogs' is offensive in the extreme, and one that utterly defies justification. In her opinion there is no way of reconciling Jesus' unacceptable behaviour at this juncture, and that one can only assume that Jesus was momentarily

‘caught with his compassion down’ (Ringe in Russell 1985:69). Certainly Jesus’ use of the term ‘dogs’ at this juncture is a clear rejection of the ‘otherness’ of the woman, and all that makes her an outsider to Israel (Rebera in Levine 2001:104). It may be hard to accept as an uncomfortable story to read because it shows Jesus, momentarily at any rate, in very negative light.

However it must be remembered that Jesus does not deny outright ‘food’ to the Gentile child, but simply states that the Israelites must eat first and be sated, thus adding a note of priority as to who shall feed first (Miller 2004:97-98). As scholars have suggested, Jesus’ ‘passionate dedication to the fulfilment of Jewish need’ (Waetjen 1989:135) rings rather hollow in lieu of his having already explicitly healed at least one other non-Jew in ‘the country of the Gerasenes’ (5:1f), when he exorcised Legion and ‘only (the Syrophoenician woman’s) gender differentiates her’ from Legion (Malbon 2000:52, Tolbert in Newsom & Ringe 1992:356)<sup>22</sup>.

How then to explain Jesus’ curt snub? Perhaps Jesus was still feeling the pressure from the Jewish authorities with whom he has been recently locked in contentious argument over the concepts of cleanliness and un-cleanliness in dietary activities (cf. 7:1-13) and personal defilement from within (cf. 7:17-23) (Kinukawa 1994:51). Thus the controversial issue of purity could explain this exclusive attitude to outsiders (Rebera in Levine 2001:102). At the very least Jesus appears stubborn and dismissive in his reluctance to help the woman, and it marks the only occasion in the Gospel narrative of Jesus’ refusing to meet a human need<sup>23</sup>.

The woman, however, through her maternal love for her daughter is resolutely undeterred by Jesus’ attempt to reject her. She counters that even ‘the dogs’ (i.e. herself and her daughter) deserve some crumbs of salvation (v28). This is a stunning return to Jesus’ insult. But her reply is more than a witty retort; in using the term ‘dogs’ she accepts Jesus’ terms of reference (children and dogs) and in so doing recognises that salvation belongs firstly to Israel (Hooker 1991:188) – but she also sees that this should not be exclusively so. For she is aware that historically the Jews are indeed ‘first’ in as much as the promises of God’s Kingdom were first made to Israel. But the woman has sufficient insight to be aware that she can ‘trust in the

---

<sup>22</sup> Myers offers an alternative reading of this story. This Gentile woman ‘deserves’ the insult because she has the affront to disturb the privacy of this adult male Jew (particularly as they are strangers to each other). Furthermore, the fact that this woman then proceeds to contend with Jesus’ ‘proverb’ of v27 is all the more galling and increases the offence caused. To top it all, how perverse it is of Jesus to then accept her retort as valid and grant her healing (1988:203-204).

<sup>23</sup> Rebera in Levine 2001:102.



abundance of God's mercy' (Williams 1996:338), so that even her daughter can still share in the graces of God's rule now, because the dogs eat the crumbs from under the table whilst the children are still eating (Waetjen 1989:135). In making her reply she unexpectedly defends the rights of her people (Kinukawa 1994:58).<sup>24</sup>

For once Jesus does not have the last word in a conflict story (Schussler Fiorenza 1983:137). The woman has 'bested' Jesus in this exchange and actually changed his mind (Malbon 2000:181) – the only person in the Gospel to achieve such a feat (Tolbert in Newson & Ringe 1992:356). He grants her request 'for saying that' (v29) i.e. it was not only her faith or persistence which secured the act of healing, but her bold statement of truth (Dewey in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:485), to the effect that the Gentiles too can be saved with no loss to the Jews (Malbon 2000:53). And so ends the longest dialogue between Jesus and a woman in the Gospel (Evans 1983:51).

The woman faithfully takes Jesus at his word and returns home in full confidence of having gained healing for her daughter (Witherington 1984:65), who has indeed been liberated from the demon (v30). It is the only healing in the Gospel to occur at a distance (Malbon 2000:51), which is perhaps indicative of how salvation for the Gentiles comes from afar.

I suggest that the character of this Syro-Phoenician woman is a highly positive example of a woman demonstrating faith and wisdom, which none of Jesus' male disciples ever manages to emulate<sup>25</sup>. She has, through her strength of character and determination, independently (notably without any male help), and of her own initiative sought and found Jesus, confronted him with her supplication, endured his racist jibe, taught him that Gentiles too can share in the salvation of the Jews and finally changed his mind. Her daughter's healing is a sign of the effect she has had on him. She is to be commended for her logic and reasoning, and also for the manner in which she was not silenced by Jesus in v27, but rather spoke up for herself and her daughter in v28 (Malbon 2000:53).

One feminist scholar has suggested that her extraordinary faith – which managed to transcend the racial, religious chasms between herself and Christ – was based upon an awareness of her maternal power to love, nurture, and protect. And it was this power that enabled her to challenge and confront Christ with the legitimacy

---

<sup>24</sup> I would suggest that there is a continuation of the theme of food here, which began at the feeding of the five thousand (6:32-44) where twelve basketfuls of bread and fish were leftover. These leftovers might be 'food' for the 'dogs' since the 'children' have now been fed so there is hope for others too.

<sup>25</sup> Except perhaps for one fleeting moment at Mark 8:29.

of her request (Rebera in Levine 2001:108). Ringe describes her as an ‘uppity’ woman, who wins both her daughter’s restoration and Jesus’ authentication of the validity of mission to the Gentiles (in Russell 1985:65).

For once Jesus does not emerge favourably in this encounter with a female character. His rude remark in v27 reveals him to be the blinkered product of his society and culture. Only by the woman’s challenge to him in v28 is he made aware that all ethnicities and both genders have equal membership in his new community of faith (Rebera in Levine 2001:106). She liberates Jesus from his own patriarchal upbringing and in so doing empowers him to alter the axis of his ministry as he duly does in v30 (Waetjen 1989:136). She enables Jesus to be a boundary-breaker once again with regards to the demarcation between Jew and Gentile in demonstrating that non-Jews can and must share in the salvation from Israel’s Messiah (Kinukawa 1994:60).<sup>26</sup>

I suggest that this exchange is in some ways reciprocal in that Jesus is assisted to grasp the urgent importance of including the Gentiles in his mission, and the woman wins the exorcism of her daughter. So I offer the view that it is a mutually beneficial encounter. Christ expands the dimensions of his messianic vocation, and the woman gains her child healed and whole once more.

### **3.3.5. The Poor Widow (12:41-44).**

The fifth instance of a female character that I wish to cite in the Markan narrative is the two-verse pericope of the Poor widow whose characterisation is defined by her relationship to her late husband and her economic status. Although there is no direct contact or physical encounter between Jesus and this female character, I deem it as significant because of what it reveals about Jesus’ attitude to a particular group of women.

The pericope opens with Jesus, who ‘sat down opposite the treasury’ (v41a), and watched intently those coming forward to make their donations to the Temple coffers. The wealthy put in vast amounts (v41b) and the Poor widow puts in a tiny

---

<sup>26</sup> This story could be a remnant of a once very large Christian women’s storytelling tradition, of which this particular unit was inserted into a heavily androcentric Gospel (Dewey in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:487).

sum<sup>27</sup>. According to the NRSV her gift amounted to ‘two small copper coins, which are worth a penny’ (v42). These copper coins were ‘*lepta*’ and were ‘the smallest coin(s) in circulation in Palestine’ (Hooker 1991:296).

In his teaching (v43-44) Jesus declares that she has actually put in more than all the rich folk who gave much out of their huge wealth, because even though she was impoverished she still gave all she had to live on.

Jesus’ words on the giving of the Poor widow have traditionally been interpreted as praiseworthy in one form or another<sup>28</sup>, lauding the piety of the poor over and against the piety of the rich. One scholar (Wright 1982:257-8) has even categorised five different ways in which traditional scholarship has interpreted Jesus’ remarks as being praiseworthy:

1. Jesus is actually pointing out that the corresponding quality of both sets of gifts lies in ‘how much remains behind’.
2. Jesus is commending not the amount given but the ‘spirit’ in which the gift has been offered.
3. Jesus is highlighting the virtue of ‘giving everything’.
4. Jesus is hinting that one’s giving must correspond to one’s means.
5. Jesus is emphasising the importance of ‘giving’ as a general rule.

Thus, in so many different ways has the Poor widow been exalted for the total and self-sacrificial nature of her act of giving.

Yet, the context of this pericope reveals another polar opposite interpretation of her actions. In v38-40, immediately prior to this pericope, Jesus condemns the actions of scribes who ‘devour widows’ houses’ (v40a) – that is scribes who cause financial loss for vulnerable widows. In light of his denouncement Christ sees a widow’s house actually being devoured (Wright 1982:261) i.e. Jesus witnesses a widow who loses the last of her worldly wealth to the Temple. I suggest that Mark creates a sharp contrast here between the greed and corruption of the scribes with the sacrificial gift of the widow. Furthermore, in the succeeding verses of 13:1-2, immediately following this pericope, Jesus predicts the impending destruction of the

---

<sup>27</sup> King (1998:71) notes that all donations made were ‘publicly and loudly recorded’. So the larger the financial gift the greater would be the admiration and flattery of the onlookers, and vice versa

<sup>28</sup> e.g. Cole 1989:271, English 1992:201-2, Hooker 1991:296-7, Suggit 1997:31, Waetjen 1989:196 to cite but a few.

Jerusalem Temple. Thus the Poor widow's offering of her final two '*lepta*' is ironic, pathetic and 'wasteful' (Wright 1982:263).

So while it may be the case that the widow's gift is sacrificial as she submits herself to abject poverty by giving her two '*lepta*' i.e. her whole life, nonetheless when one considers how this pericope is set in the context of 12:38-40 and 13:1-2, then a new avenue of interpretation of Mark's theme here emerges: namely, that Jesus' comments are not praising the widow for her giving, but lamenting the fact that she is now utterly pauperised through the exploitative Temple practice of offerings (Myers 1988:322). To put it another way, Jesus bewails the sight of this Poor widow offering the last vestiges of her financial resources to an extortionate Temple value system (Wright 1982:262). Her gift is all the more pathetic and evocative because it is a freewill offering and therefore completely voluntary (Witherington 1984:18). Christ is deploring the Temple religion that motivates and perpetrates impoverishment on those who most need its support. His lament is an 'ironic twist of rhetoric' in which Jesus shows compassion for the widow, and utters a rejection of the injustices of the Temple religion (Kinukawa 1994:77). According to this interpretation Jesus' comments are in no way praiseworthy, nor does he exemplify her actions as deeds that others must seek to emulate (Wright 1982:262-3).

There can be little doubt about Jesus' critique of the Temple treasury from these verses. It continues a theme that began with his cleansing of the Temple at 11:17 (Miller 2004:123). Accordingly therefore, this Poor widow's act is not so much a heroic act of giving, but rather she is a victim of the exploitative and patriarchal power of the Temple (Kinukawa 1994:75). She becomes a silent challenge to Jesus, in the manner in which she endures her unjust situation (Kinukawa 1994:76). I suggest it is significant that Jesus does not intervene in the widow's plight, nor offer her any direct words of silence, hope, or promise of eternal reward for her self-sacrificial giving. Perhaps Mark intended to leave the image of the widow condemned to impoverishment, unable to escape. This may be a foreshadowing of Jesus' saying at 14:7 'the poor you will always have with you'. Her act of giving provokes Christ into committing his whole life to changing the societal reality for the likes of this Poor widow. In other words, she is inspiring Jesus to be the Messiah.

In conclusion, then, Christ is portrayed favourably in this pericope, for in his attitude towards women he shows himself to be an impassioned supporter and advocate of a specific group of disadvantaged women – namely widows

(Witherington 1984:17). The Poor widow emerges as a victim of patriarchal power, and in her victimisation she is an example to Jesus of all for whom he must dedicate his life as the Messiah.

### **3.3.6. The Anointing Woman (14:3-9).**

The sixth and final example of a female character that I wish to cite is the Anointing woman. The pericope featuring this character opens with Jesus sharing table fellowship in Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper<sup>29</sup>. When suddenly and unexpectedly, a nameless, silent and solitary woman enters. She receives no direct characterisation of any kind aside from her gender – and hence she has been labelled by one scholar as one of the ‘most obscure ... figures in the New Testament’<sup>30</sup>. She approaches Jesus and in so doing pierces the closed male gathering<sup>31</sup>. She then proceeds to anoint Jesus’ head ‘with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard’ (v3)<sup>32</sup>. Both Kinukawa (1994:83) and Witherington (1984:11) note that only the highest quality ointment was preserved in alabaster jars. So the ointment can be considered a luxury item, and the description of its monetary value of ‘more than three hundred denarii’ in v5 reveals that it was almost worth a year’s salary (Hooker 1991:329). Clearly this woman had access to considerable resources to be able to obtain such a gift (Tolbert in Newsom & Ringe 1992:357)<sup>33</sup>.

This act of anointing can be understood on a number of different levels (Kinukawa 1994:83):

1. It can be understood as a simple expression of hospitality.
2. It can be interpreted as part of the preparation of a corpse for burial (cf. Jesus’ remarks in v8).

---

<sup>29</sup> The text does not reveal whether Simon is someone who has been healed of his leprosy or is still afflicted by it. Waetjen (1989:263) conjectures that this may be the leper of 1:40-45. In any event the point to note is that Jesus is in open companionship with a person who, on account of his leprosy, numbered among the most despised and dehumanised in the society of Christ’s day (Waetjen 1989:11).

<sup>30</sup> Moltmann-Wendal 1997:94.

<sup>31</sup> So Kinukawa 1994:83, Moltmann Wendal 1997:94, Waetjen 1989:204 et al although the text does not state that this is a specifically all male gathering.

<sup>32</sup> It was Jewish custom to pour oil on the head of dinner guests in the homes of affluent families.

<sup>33</sup> If it be the case that she was a rich woman, then one would be able to contrast her attitude with that of the Rich Man (Mark 10:17-22) who valued his possessions too much to answer the call to discipleship. This woman is completely willing to part with her material wealth in order to honour Jesus.

3. It can be understood as an act of healing (Kinukawa 1994:84), in as much as it is an echo of the apostolic ministry of the Twelve who ‘anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them’ (6:13). In this instance the woman becomes a healer and carer for Jesus, anointing him with the ointment of healing thus comforting him before his passion commences.
4. Most significantly it can be taken as a designation of messianic status. In this interpretation the woman assumes the male role of an Old Testament prophet anointing the head of a Jewish King<sup>34</sup> (Schussler Fiorenza 1983:xiv). Such an anointing signified the divine election of the anointed one to hold sovereignty over Israel (Waetjen 1989:205). Thus, the actions of the woman become a prophetic confirmation of Jesus’ true identity: that he is the Christ, the Anointed One.

The behaviour of this woman has been described as ‘eloquent’ and ‘determined’ and results in her violating a strict social prohibition (Waetjen 1989:204). This may explain the outrage of a group of dissenters<sup>35</sup> begin grumbling at what they perceive to be wasted ointment, and the loss of a chance to give to the poor. And they ‘scolded’ her (v5). By their own words one may deduce that these dissenters do not grasp the significance of the anointing on any of the four levels highlighted above.

Jesus’ response (v6-9) to the dissenters is effusive. He springs to her defence, fully affirming her ‘good service’ (v6). This good service that she has rendered is to be the first character to see Christ’s need for the anointing. She has had the prophetic foresight to perceive the necessity of Jesus’ suffering and death and hence the need for anointing his body for burial (Macdonald in Levine 2001:131). It is the kind of service Jesus never receives from any of the Twelve. Indeed in the two pericopae that frame this story, one of the Twelve whom Jesus has called and commissioned as an Apostle joins the growing conspiracy of enemies against Jesus (cf. 14:1-2 & v10-11). So this woman’s deed is sharply and dramatically contrasted with Judas’ evil conspiracy. It is highly appropriate (and both ironic and pathetic) that an anonymous

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Kings 1:39, 2 Kings 9:3 & 6 for example.

<sup>35</sup> They are quite likely to be the male disciples, but the exact identity of these dissenters is not clear – it maybe the Twelve, other disciples or it may be outsiders (Hooker 1991:329) but cf. the version of this pericope in the Fourth Gospel where the lone dissenting voice is identified as that of Judas Iscariot (John 12:4-6).

woman anoints Jesus – as he had spent so much of his ministry among the minorities and the lowest in society, and now he is humble enough to receive this gift from one of their number. Perhaps one can go as far as Dewey who suggests that she empowers Jesus to fulfil the climax to his messianic ministry (in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:501).

Jesus' words to her critics that there will always be the poor in the world (v7) indicate that they ought to have greater sensitivity with regards to this moment in Jesus' life, and also appreciate the poignancy of what this woman has done for Jesus. Now the time is right for Jesus to be anointed for his burial (v8); the time will come again to help the poor. The anointing woman's gesture is therefore perfectly timed, showing that she was aware of what she was doing in anointing Jesus at this moment in his messianic mission. She had the faith and spiritual insight to anoint him at this time above all other times (Evans 1983:53). Moltmann-Wendel concurs in declaring that she knew Jesus' messianic secret (i.e. the meaning of his three passion-resurrection-prophecies and what will happen to him in Jerusalem) before any of his disciples did (1997:99).

Jesus' laudation of her actions, are consistent with his teaching on new ethics of discipleship. This woman has shown great self-denial by sacrificing the huge sum of money to perform the anointing, in fulfilment of Jesus' command at 8:34 that his followers are to deny themselves. Thus she becomes an example of following Christ (Malbon 2000:57)<sup>36</sup>. Jesus' final commendation of her is to state that her act will become an integral part of the Gospel itself. Her deed will be told in memory of her (v9), although ironically she remains forever nameless. Nonetheless her anonymity is not the point, for it is not who she is that is significant, but what she has done (Hooker 1991:330). Dewey notes, with a fair degree of profundity, that Christian tradition has tended to undermine this action by over-sentimentalising it as a sweet little gesture and a nice moment, rather than what it actually is – a powerful and dramatic statement by an anonymous prophet of God that Jesus is the Christ (in Schussler Fiorenza 1994:502).

In conclusion this encounter between Jesus and the Anointing woman is another positive instance of Jesus and women characters in the narrative. It shows Jesus being ministered to by a female prophetic figure sent by God to prepare him for his passion. Jesus, for his part, fully embraces her actions interpreting them in a

---

<sup>36</sup> Myers agrees that the anointing woman is a paradigm of discipleship because she shows the virtues of service (v6) and endurance in withstanding the scorn of the onlookers in v5 (1988:359).

highly significant manner, declaring that her action will forever be remembered as a part of the Gospel story. Jesus has shared a poignant moment in his life with this woman, revealing the inclusivity of his ministry, whereby he is willing to share his life with both women and men.

### **3.3.7. A brief summary of Jesus' encounter with women.**

In the analysis offered above I have attempted to show how positively Jesus related to and interacted with some of the female characters in the Gospel of Mark. The six examples cited above, I suggest, illustrate this. In the first four examples (3.3.1, 3.3.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4) female characters each receive some form of physical healing. In the fifth and sixth examples (3.3.5, 3.3.6) the female characters are lauded and commended for their actions. In four of the six examples (3.3.2, 3.3.4, 3.3.5, 3.3.6) female characters take decisive actions to which Christ responds. In these actions and in the reactions of the female characters in 3.3.1 and 3.3.3 to Jesus' initial actions these female characters demonstrate the true demands of what one scholar has called 'followership', which can be defined as showing bold even risky faith in order to win healing or help for oneself or for a loved one (Malbon 2000:181-182).

Furthermore, the fact that four of the six examples involved Christ making physical contact with female bodies may suggest that he did not consider female bodies to be ontologically unclean or inferior as Jewish religious law declared them to be. Rather, his willingness to help alludes to the respect and value he held for all women as human beings in their own right. And all these six examples help to illustrate the special care and compassion that Jesus had for women who were suffering.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to highlight how Christ interacted with women in Mark's Gospel during his Galilean ministry. Against a backdrop of the lowly role and status of women in Jesus' day and age, I have cited six examples of Christ relating with different women which indicate the affirmative and life-giving relations he enjoyed with them, and the extent to which he shared his life with them. Jesus' relationships with women were a highly significant part of his life and character. He



related to women as human beings in their own right, with an intrinsic ontological value equal to that of men. Such an attitude was completely alien to the prevailing Jewish thought of Jesus' day, and it shows how shocking and even revolutionary many of his dealings with women were to those who witnessed them<sup>37</sup>. For their part, almost all the female characters experienced a dramatic transformation in their lives as a direct result of their encounter with Jesus. For them he is a source of new life and healing for themselves and their loved ones.

In the next chapter I shall analyse in greater depth the difference between Jesus' relations to the female and male characters in Mark's Gospel, in an attempt to support the central tenet of my thesis – that in Mark's Gospel the women characters are the genuine followers of Christ.

•

---

<sup>37</sup> Evans 1983:45-46.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **AN EVALUATION OF THE FEMALE AND MALE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

My study began in Chapter 1 with a brief exploration of the theme of discipleship in Mark's Gospel. I particularly focused on the key words that signify this theme in the text, and the new ethic of discipleship Jesus promulgated in the so-called discipleship section of Mark's narrative. The aim was to outline the new standard that Jesus had set for his disciples, in order that the study ascertain thereafter which of his followers had successfully reached this new standard.

And so in pursuit of this aim, I explored in Chapter 2 the characterization of the male disciples of Christ, especially analysing some of the different flaws and failings in their following of Jesus. And further to this in Chapter 3, I explored the portrayal of all the female characters who follow Christ in Mark's Gospel, concentrating specifically on their reaction to Christ and the ministry they rendered unto him.

Now in this final chapter, this study will evaluate the female followers and male disciples in Mark to determine who has succeeded in meeting this new standard of discipleship. To this end, I shall carry out an evaluation exercise, in which Jesus' own teaching on discipleship will provide the standards by which the quality of discipleship of the female followers and male disciples will be analysed. I have selected, in all, four standards of behaviour that collectively encapsulate Jesus' teaching on his new ethic of true discipleship. These standards of behaviour are the necessary criteria for a character in the narrative to become a true disciple of Christ. For each of the four standards of behaviour, I cite instances in the text where female and male characters can be seen to be emulating that particular mode of conduct. In other words it is a comparative exercise whereby the conduct of the female and male disciples is matched up against the four criteria of true discipleship.

This evaluation is a straightforward way in which to clarify which gender of disciples match up to each of the four standards of discipleship more often than the other,

and therefore which gender of disciples are the more successful followers of Christ. The intention of this evaluation exercise will be to show why I suggest that women were the true followers of Jesus, and that it is they who best illustrate the true practice of discipleship in Mark's Gospel.

As part of this exercise I shall also be exploring – where relevant – what scholarly opinion suggests the issues were, that Mark may be addressing in his own church community i.e. the context within his own church, specifically the status and role of women therein, that may have motivated Mark to portray female disciples so favourably, and the male disciples often so negatively.

After an exploration of each of these four criteria of true discipleship, I shall draw all these reflections together in my conclusion. First, though, it is necessary to explain further the evaluation exercise, what it is intended to do and how it will operate.

#### **4.2. Introduction to the Evaluation Exercise**

I shall conduct this evaluation exercise by utilizing four standards of behaviour which form the hallmarks of Jesus' teaching on worthy behaviour that he deems both necessary and appropriate for a person to be his disciple. These four criteria or standards of behaviour are indicators of the practice of faithful discipleship in the narrative; that is, they signify occasions when Markan characters are actually fulfilling the requirements of the new instructions on discipleship that Jesus has given them. The four indicators will assist in determining which characters are faithful and which are not. They are as follows (see 1.6 above):

1. A willingness to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus (cf. 8:34)
2. A willingness to be last of all, servant of all (cf. 9:35) & be a servant, slave of all (cf. 10:43-44)
3. The first shall be last and the last shall be first (cf. 10:31)
4. A willingness to keep alert and awake (cf. 13:33, 35 & 37)

Each of these indicators exemplifies a standard of behaviour or a way of living that is in full accordance with what Jesus has taught about being his disciple. With each of the four indicators listed here I shall show which disciples in the text match up to each particular nuance of true discipleship. This exercise will also, on occasion, be reflecting on what issues Mark may be addressing within his own community through his positive portrayal of the behaviour of female followers of Christ which may reflect the role of women in Mark's community (Miller 2004:11), and his largely negative portrayal of the male disciples. I turn now to the first criterion.

#### **4.2.1. The First Criterion: A willingness to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and follow Jesus (8:34)**

The first indicator or criterion of true discipleship originates from Jesus' first bout of preaching on the new ethic of discipleship in Caesarea Phillippi (8:34). It sets a very high standard for discipleship, calling for a profound commitment to Jesus. The summons to deny oneself, take up one's cross and follow Jesus emphasizes the extremely costly nature of true discipleship. For a true disciple there is no room for any other allegiance or fidelity apart from one's devotion to Jesus. It must be the *raison d'être* of one's existence.

So then, for this first indicator I begin with the female characters, focusing firstly on an all female character group, and secondly on an individual female character, both of whom I argue best put this criterion into practice i.e. they physically live it out. Then I turn to the male disciples, and particularly an all male character group, who I argue are less successful at emulating this facet of discipleship than the women characters.

##### **4.2.1.1. An evaluation of the female characters in relation to the First Criterion.**

When one turns to the female characters in Mark's narrative, there are three characters who stand out above all the others with regards to fulfilling the three nuances of this first criterion of true discipleship. These are three women characters who first appear in the text at 15:40-41. At this juncture the text reveals that:

‘... Mary Magdalene, and Mary ...and Salome ...’ (v40)

‘... used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.’ (v41)

So Mark discloses that a group of women have been trailing Jesus since his early Galilean ministry and stayed with him even on this final journey to Jerusalem. I suggest that this points strongly to the notion that these characters, who have been with Jesus all this time, have had to make great sacrifices to do so. These sacrifices would include abandoning homes, family relationships, and former lives in Galilee (Miller 2004: 116). In order to accompany Jesus throughout his messianic ministry these women had to make a difficult choice, for if they chose to follow Jesus they would have had to break patriarchal societal convention and cultural expectations that dictated that a women’s place was in the home (Witherington 1984:2). As 15:40-41 reveals, they indeed took the courageous decision to break with socially conditioned roles and lifestyles, and have begun a radically new existence completely orientated to serving and following Jesus on his travels around Palestine.

One scholar has succinctly pointed out that the first of the three requirements of this first indicator – ‘let them deny themselves’ (8:34) – is not in fact a call for self-sacrifice *per se* (Dewey in Levine 2001:33). In the society of Roman Palestine in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE the basic unit of society was not the individual but what Dewey terms the ‘kinship group’ (in Levine 2001:33), which may be understood as a clan or extended family. And so, Jesus’ command to deny oneself, was actually a clarion call to renounce all ties, bonds and relationships with one’s clan or kinship group. This sense of renouncing kinship ties comes out much more clearly in the corresponding verses of Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:35-38 and especially Luke 14:26-27. To deny oneself meant to deny one’s own kith and kin. And thus it was a rejection of ‘the basic social-political-economic structure of ancient society’ (Dewey in Levine 2001: 35). Jesus is issuing a radical call to place oneself outside of the accepted socio-political order of the day and thereby present oneself as a threat to it (Dewey in Levine 2001:35). As people consigned to an inferior status and role in these patriarchally-organised kinship groups (because of

no other reason than their gender) I suggest that for these women characters, Jesus' call to relinquish all familial ties and bonds in patriarchal kinship groups was a liberating and salvific summons to renounce oppressive lifestyles and roles, and to enter a new kinship community of faith with Jesus and fellow disciples (cf. 3:35).

So these women disciples have denied themselves by throwing off oppressive kinship ties; they have taken up their cross in as much as they assumed for themselves the duty or ministry of providing for all the needs of Jesus such as they arose; and they have followed Jesus as 15:41b makes clear, both physically in the sense of accompaniment and devotionally as followers. These three women disciples and the 'many other women' (15:41b) can be considered as being the followers of Christ who succeeded in satisfying the three-fold demands of the first indicator of true discipleship. They have responded correctly and faithfully to Jesus' call for disciples who are willing to dedicate their whole lives to him, despite the cost and difficulties of such a way of life.

With regards to the context in Mark's own church community, two feminist scholars have suggested that the portrayal of these three women beginning at 15:40 alludes to how Mark felt about Christian women in general and especially their role as leaders of church communities. Schussler Fiorenza (1983:334) suggests that Mark's highly favourable portrayal of Mary Magdalene, Mary and Salome, whom she labels as 'apostolic women', may stem from the way that in Mark's church community they were revered as 'exemplary disciples of Jesus' who had numbered among the leaders of the Palestinian Jesus-movement. And the manner in which the women disciples in Mark break the social custom of the day and leave behind the social structure of the household in order to follow Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem, shows that they were 'boundary-breakers' (Miller 2004:203). This may well have resonated very strongly with women in Mark's community who were inspired by their good example to be boundary breakers in their own right, and break away from oppressive roles by becoming Christians and even Christian leaders (Miller 2004:203), and thereby no longer fulfilling traditional roles of women in society (Miller 2004:205). Thus one may conclude that Mark comes across as a strong supporter of female membership and leadership within his own church, who valued and respected the ministries offered by female church leaders.

Aside from this fine example of female characters who have denied themselves, taken up their cross and followed Jesus, I wish to turn to another female character who deserves a mention. The Poor Widow (12:41-44) also behaves in a way that comes close to emulating the three-fold criteria of this first indicator. Her discipleship is made clear in the totality of her sacrificial giving into the temple treasury. I suggest that this brief pericope illustrates well that this poor widow has denied herself even the most meagre of consolations or comforts that can be gained from 'two small copper coins' (v42); in so doing she has taken up her cross by voluntarily submitting herself to a deeper state of impoverishment, in order to complete her faithful duty. She has held nothing back for herself but demonstrated a wholehearted and absolute commitment to God, as proven by her gesture of giving. She has paid the full cost and made the full sacrifice. It is no exaggeration to suggest that in making her small financial gift the poor widow has actually offered her whole life to God (Miller 2004:118).

The poor widow has best exemplified the costly nature and sacrificial demands of true discipleship. I suggest that the spirit or ethos of this first indicator is well demonstrated by the holistic self-giving of this poor widow. Her faith-fuelled sacrifice has been to such a degree that she has voluntarily entered a crisis of worsening her daily existence by having increased her impoverishment.

With regards to the situation in Mark's church community, one feminist scholar has suggested that this pericope reveals an urgent issue in the Markan church. Miller (2004:116) has speculated that the manner in which Jesus called his disciples to witness the poor widow's act, and then issued them with a word of moral instruction on her actions (v43) is suggestive of the fact that Mark is addressing his own community at this point. Mark may well be calling the disciples' attention to the plight and poverty of this poor widow, because widows were a vulnerable and at times despised group within his church (Miller 2004:116). I suggest that this notion that the welfare and status of widows was a pressing concern in Mark's community is supported by evidence from the text where, in the preceding verse to this pericope (v40), the Markan Jesus issues a warning of impending condemnation on those who exploit vulnerable widows. This may suggest that the problem of widows being exploited by unscrupulous persons did indeed exist in the Markan church, and that Mark had a strong degree of compassion for their vulnerability

and perhaps too a sense of injustice at the abuse of helpless impoverished widows. And so Mark may be exhorting his community to follow the example of the poor widow, who is presented as positive role model for the disciples, and ‘to support those in the same situation as her’ (Miller 2004:116).

Having duly explored the female disciples who I contend live out this first facet of true discipleship, I turn now to the male disciples, and how far their conduct matches up to this particular nuance of discipleship.

#### **4.2.1.2. An evaluation of the male disciples in relation to the First Criterion.**

When reflecting upon the conduct of the male disciples a helpful way to evaluate their portrayal is to consider the perspective of David Rhoads (ed Kingsbury 1997:83ff), who espouses a Markan theory of ethics. Rhoads suggests that within Mark there exists an ethical dualism of good and bad. Or to put it another way there are two conflicting orientations to life. The first is a lifestyle that God wills for people i.e. an ethic of what Rhoads labels ‘losing one’s life for others out of faith’, and the second is a lifestyle in which people will things for themselves i.e. an ethic of ‘saving one’s life out of fear’ (Rhoads in Kingsbury 1997:83)<sup>1</sup>. The positive moral in this dualism is best exemplified by Jesus in the manner of his dying on the cross, losing his life for the sake of others, and teaching his disciples to do likewise. Whereas the Jewish religious leaders best illustrate the latter moral of self-centred will. The point of this is to note that Rhoads contends that the male disciples ‘vacillate’ between these two polarities (in Kingsbury 1997:85) i.e. they are portrayed both favourably and unfavourably in the Markan narrative. Their characterization is neither exclusively negative, nor exclusively positive, but a fusion of both.

Initially the portrayal of the male disciples is positive: the first four disciples Simon, Andrew (1:18), John and James (1:20) all respond immediately and affirmatively to Jesus’ call to ‘fish for people’ (1:17). They follow him, forsaking family and homes in Galilee and careers as fishermen. Later Jesus calls twelve male disciples, and

---

<sup>1</sup> To Rhoads (1997:83) these moral values are implicit in the narrative world and point to the purpose of the Gospel as a whole.



commissions them to be his closest allies and share in his messianic ministry (3:13-19). Subsequently they are dispatched in pairs to fulfill this ministry on Jesus' behalf (6:7-13), and this they do with great success (6:30). As Rhoads and Michie (1981:124) point out throughout the plotline of the Gospel narrative the male disciples are often depicted as obedient to Jesus instructions on where to go (6:45), assist in the mass feeding miracles (6:39,41 & 8:6), and generally appear supportive and helpful (e.g. finding the colt to enter Jerusalem 11:1-7, preparing the Passover meal 14:12-16). The leading male disciple speaking on behalf of the Twelve momentarily musters enough insight and spiritual awareness to confess Jesus as the Christ (8:29), and proclaims that they have shown a degree of loyalty and faithful allegiance to Jesus, and a certain willingness to make costly sacrifices to follow Jesus (10:29). And at that juncture in the narrative his words are borne out by the actions and behaviour of the male disciples (Telford 1995:109).

Thus I suggest that the male disciples do adhere to this indicator of true discipleship. They have certainly denied self and abandoned former lives and occupations to follow Jesus. The Twelve have also taken up the cross of being chosen and commissioned for a special role in Jesus' mission, and thereafter have followed Jesus on his itinerant travels. And so the male disciples are on occasion portrayed favourably in the narrative as true disciples, however they nonetheless fail in that role (Rhoads & Michie 1981:123). For they fail to comprehend the parables (4:13,34 & 7:17-18), and the miracles (9:18-19,28-29) despite having been given power to perform them themselves (3:15, 6:7). And especially they appear dense as to what the miracles reveal about the identity of Jesus and this density of the mind prevents them from knowing that Jesus is the Christ, for the first half of the Gospel (Rhoads & Michie 1981:125). Their chronic lack of ability to understand is fuelled by the twin motifs of fear and lack of faith, which appear frequently and continue throughout the narrative: both fear (6:50-51, 9:6, 32, 10:32, 14:50 et al) and lack of faith (9:19, 11:22 et al) are the major flaws in the discipleship of these male characters. It is one of the main causes of their status-consciousness (9:34) and desire for seats of honour (10:37).

This flawed discipleship of the male disciples reaches its nadir in Gethsemane with their betrayal, abandonment and desertion (14:50), when faced with the prospect of arrest, suffering and death as the price to pay for being a disciple of Jesus (Rhoads &

Michie 1981:123). I suggest that it shows that ultimately when the moment of truth arrives the male disciples have swung to the negative moral in Rhoads' ethical dualism i.e. that of 'saving one's life out of fear'. It has prevented them from fulfilling unconditionally this first indicator of true discipleship, and they are unable to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Jesus into his passion. As Rhoads & Michie note, the male disciples 'have great difficulty in being true disciples' (1981:124).

When one considers Dewey's (in Levine 2001: 33) assertion that to deny oneself is to renounce one's kinship ties, then it is possible to glimpse an insight into the reason why the male disciples, especially the Twelve, struggled to deny self as successfully and unconditionally as the aforementioned women characters appeared to have done. In any kinship group men would have been the leading members of a clan or extended family fulfilling the roles of father, husband, brother etc. Men would have held the power positions. The text provides evidence for this with references to 'the house of Simon and Andrew' (1:29) and 'Simon's mother-in-law' (1:30). It would appear that Simon and Andrew were the senior males and thus would have dominated their kinship groups. Therefore in such patriarchally-aligned entities as kinship groups, men would have had the most to lose by renouncing and abandoning such ties. Holding the positions of seniority, authority and honour, it is not difficult to see why the male disciples should wish to cling to kinship roles and ties.

I certainly accept that some of the male disciples such as the twelve did manage to physically forsake such ties (as outlined above), and follow Jesus as disciples (e.g. 1:17,20). But it is worth recalling that to deny oneself is a two-step process involving firstly a forsaking of one's biological kinship ties, and secondly (and equally importantly) an entering into a new kinship community of faith, which required one to embrace a new lifestyle of serving and following. This new life-orientation can be best summarized by the positive moral in Rhoads' ethical dualism, namely 'losing one's life for others out of faith' (in Kingsbury 1997:83). And whereas the women disciples were able to undergo this two-step process wholeheartedly, the male disciples were only able to achieve the first step. This in essence is where the male disciples failed and women followers, by comparison, succeeded. For the male disciples, I suggest that what I should like to call a 'kinship mentality', may well have still lingered among them and influenced their

behaviour and especially their relating to each (9:34) and to Jesus (10:37), and thus hindered them from allowing their kinship renunciation to penetrate their hearts and minds. For the women disciples who occupied inferior or lower positions in their respective kinship groups, Jesus' call to renounce such shackles as these was good news indeed. But for the male disciples it was less such good news.

With regards to the portrayal of male disciples in the narrative and its relationship to the context in Mark's church, Telford (1995:142) neatly summarizes two theories, which offer reasons for the negative characterization of the male disciples in the Gospel. The first is the 'pastoral theory' which suggests that the flawed discipleship had a didactic function allowing the Markan Jesus to clarify his teaching to the Markan church (4:13-20, 7:17f). In other words 'in the conduct of the disciples, Mark sees reflected that of his own community whom he wishes to address, instruct, edify and exhort' (Telford 1995: 142). The negative portrayal of the disciples helps the Markan Jesus to expand and illustrate the theme of discipleship. This notion is supported by Rhoads & Michie who state that the failures of the male disciples was a 'primary literary device' that Mark employed to have Jesus reveal and emphasize his new standard of discipleship (1981:123). For much of his discipleship teaching is a corrective and warning against the waywardness of the male disciples. According to this theory, then, Mark is a pastor writing primarily to offer encouragement to his own church community (Telford 1995:142).

The second is the 'polemical theory', which states that there was a heresy in Mark's church which urgently needs addressing. Telford's (1995:142) view is that the Gospel is an attack by 'Gentile Christianity' on the 'Jewish Christian tradition'. The latter are represented in the text by the Twelve and Jesus' family (Weeden 1971:26). Thus in the characterization of the Twelve and the family of Jesus, Mark is polemicizing against a 'Son of David –Royal Messiah Christology of the original Jerusalem church' (Telford 1995:143). Weeden (1971:25) concurs that in the negative portrayal of the Twelve there is evidence of a polemic against the Jewish-Christian group in Palestine clinging to long-established Jewish practices and neglecting the necessity of missions to the Gentiles. The Jerusalem church has claimed authority over the infant Gentile Christian movement – of

which Mark's community was a part – and this hegemony was bitterly resented by Mark's church. These tensions are evident in the text (Telford 1995:143).

Thus this evaluation of the female followers and the male disciples' behaviour, in lieu of this first indicator of true discipleship, concludes that the three women (together with their unnamed fellow followers) and the poor widow were far more successful than the male disciples such as the Twelve, at adopting this pattern of discipleship as a way of life. In terms of denying one's self, taking up the cross and following Jesus, it is the three women disciples and the poor widow and not the male disciples who succeed in living it out accordingly.

I continue this evaluation exercise with the second criterion of discipleship.

#### **4.2.2. The Second Criterion: A willingness to be last of all, servant of all (9:35) & be a servant, slave of all (10:44).**

The second indicator of true discipleship is a call to humility from the 'servant Messiah' (Cole 1989:65-66). It is a challenge and a warning to all that the path that leads to true discipleship is a path that leads to servility. For only when one has enough faith and love to humbly serve others is one truly following the example set by Christ himself. In this part of the evaluation exercise I shall analyse firstly two individual female characters and an all-female character group, and then follow that with an exploration of the male disciples of the Twelve, and in particular the conduct of two members thereof.

##### **4.2.2.1. An evaluation of the female characters in relation to the Second Criterion.**

This reflection on women followers in Mark and their success in living out this second criterion of true discipleship – namely, being the last of all, servant of all (9:35) and being a servant, slave of all (10:34-44) – will begin by focusing on the all female character group of women at 15:40-41, and also Simon Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31). For it is my contention that they best illustrate what it means to be last of all, and servant of all, in other words they put into practice very clearly. As mentioned above (see 3.3.1) the verb '*diakonein*' is a discipleship term in Mark's Gospel that signals a deep

involvement in Jesus' mission (Miller 2004:28), and a clear obedience to God (English 1992:58). This verb is only ever used of Jesus (10:45), the angels (1:13), and these women followers (1:31, 15:41). Miller (2004:193) suggests that it is a key characteristic of some of the women who associate themselves with Christ. So near the start of his mission (1:31) and right at the end of his earthly life (15:41), Jesus is accompanied by women who served him (Miller 2004:23). One scholar has made the intriguing point that this close association in the Markan narrative of women followers and the verb '*diakoneo*' may well show that women in the Markan church were themselves in leadership roles because the 'the cognate noun *diakenous* is used in the early church' e.g. Romans 16:1, 1 Cor 3:5, 2 Cor 3:6, Colossians 4:7 (Miller 2004:203).

The nature of the serving needs some discussion. Some scholars suggest that it implies table service and food preparation as the main activity (e.g. Cole 1989:115, Hooker 1991:70), but in Mark the verb '*diakonein*' has much wider significance (Miller 2004: 195). In my view, when Jesus twice called his disciples to a life of service as a way of following him (9:35, 10:43-44), it was intended to have a wider meaning than food preparation. I suggest that it is important to remember that these women have abandoned conventional household roles such as table service and food preparation to follow Christ. Their serving Jesus is a broad and multi-faceted ministry of which food preparation is but one small part (Miller 2004:163). For just as the angels were sent by God to help Jesus survive the harsh desert conditions by ministering to him and sustaining him in his struggle with Satan (1:13), so too the women adopt a similar role for Jesus in his conflicts with human enemies (Miller 2004:165). The service of the angels can be said to foreshadow that of the women, beginning with the healed mother-in-law in Capernaum, and continuing from there right through to Jerusalem and the three women of 15:40-41 (and the many female characters as well, whom the text mentions but does not give names to). I suggest therefore that these women take over from the angels the humble service of being a source of sustenance and strength to Jesus in his messianic mission. It may well have included nutritional sustenance, but it also encompassed emotional and physical sustenance too.

With particular regard to the three women and their unnamed fellow female followers of Christ, specific mention must be made of the nature of their commitment

unto Jesus. All their service is directed to him, and him alone. The Greek emphasizes this by repeating the single male pronoun ‘*auto*’ (him) twice in 15:41 (Miller 2004:166)<sup>2</sup>. These women especially have shown a wholehearted dedication to the person of Jesus, and his needs. He has been the recipient and beneficiary of all their efforts and energies. So these women played a crucial and unseen part in terms of being a part of Jesus’ mission by their humility, and willingness to be least of all, servant of all in carrying out these lowly and unsung tasks to support and help Jesus. I suggest that they were able to understand that in serving they became like Christ himself, the Servant Messiah, who is the ‘first’ and, by the same rationale therefore, on account of their profound servility, and their practice of true discipleship, they are among the ‘first’ of Jesus’ genuine followers. As Miller writes (2004:193), Jesus uses ‘*diakonein*’ in the context of his own mission (cf 9:34, 10:45), and therein lies a paradox; the sacrificial loss of self brings life to others. That is an essential nature of the Markan Jesus. And this is central to the message he preaches, and wishes his disciples to appreciate. In my view, the three women, by their faithful serving of Jesus, embrace the loss of self in order to give life and strength and succour to Jesus, so that Jesus can in turn do likewise to them and others. A symbiotic relationship emerges. Such loving discipleship on their part is a model for others of how to be last and servant of all.

At this juncture I should like to cite another instance of a female character being least of all, servant of all – that is the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24-30). In this pericope Rhoads & Michie (1982:131) have offered a different interpretation of how to be last of all, servant of all that does not directly stem from this notion of serving Christ. This woman has supplicated Jesus to help her demon-possessed daughter (7:25, 26). Jesus responds by insulting the woman, a Gentile, as a dog (v27). The woman shows extraordinary faith, by firstly, accepting the insult i.e. accepting as a valid notion, that she is a Gentile woman, and therefore in the eyes of this adult male Jew, she is a dog. And secondly, she herself then uses the term to refer to herself and her daughter, in order to continue to demand ‘crumbs’ from ‘under the children’s table’ (v28). She persists by faith that even her child – who is a Gentile (and therefore a dog according to Jesus’

---

<sup>2</sup> In the pericope regarding Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, the Greek states that she served ‘them’ (*autois*) implying not only Jesus, but perhaps also Simon and Andrew as the senior members of the household for example.

terminology) – has right to be healed by the Jewish Messiah. Thus, she is willing to diminish herself, to make herself least in order that she can serve her daughter (Rhoads & Michie 1982:131). She endured Jesus’ insult, and then forced herself to repeat it once more, referring to herself and her daughter, for the greater good of healing her child.

Her love for her child and her astonishing depth of faith in the divine healing power that resides in Jesus, and to which she has laid claim – signify her as a character who understands the necessity of profound humility, of being least, and servant of all (Rhoads & Michie 1982:131).

So I offer Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, the Syro-Phoenician woman, and the three women (and their unnamed fellow followers of Christ) as examples of women in the Markan narrative who epitomise this aspect of true discipleship – being the least of all, servant of all, and of being servant and slave of all. Now I address the male disciples, and compare and contrast their conduct with that of the women characters in lieu of this criterion of discipleship.

#### **4.2.2.2. An evaluation of the male disciples in relation to the Second Criterion.**

The second criterion of discipleship originates from two bouts of preaching Jesus gave to his male disciples to rebuke and correct their misdemeanours. They emphasise the strong link between the motifs of ‘discipleship’ and ‘servanthood’ in Mark (Santos 1997:452). In teaching his disciples to become servants of all, Jesus instructs them to foster a care and compassionate awareness of the needs of other people (Trakatellis 1985:278). One scholar has called this service ‘the highest and noblest function and purpose of human existence’ (Trakatellis 1985:278).

The first bout of preaching on being ‘last of all and servant of all’ (9:35) is a consequence of an incident that occurred when Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Capernaum, whereupon the disciples became involved in an argument amongst themselves as to which of them was the greatest i.e. they were boasting as to who amongst them was the best disciple of Christ (9:34). This argument exposes their personal ambitions for seniority and power ‘and their craving for the highest possible rank’ (Trakatellis 1985:276). Such an argument is the very antithesis of what following

Jesus is all about. They are shown to be disciples who have singularly failed to grasp the implications of which Jesus has already explained to them on a previous occasion (8:34-37), and what changes and effects that necessitates in their life orientations (Hooker 1991:227). One scholar has noted that this argument may reflect a tension within the Markan community over the order of precedence among the Markan church leaders (Hooker 1991: 227).

It is worth considering the reason for the difficulty the male disciples experienced in accepting and responding to Jesus' teaching here about the one who wishes to be first must be 'last of all, and servant of all' (9:35). In this teaching Jesus 'stands worldly human values on their heads' (English 1992:169). He issues a call to adopt a new orientation in the lifestyle of his disciples, one which requires a drastic change in perspective (Trakatellis 1985:277), because it is 'diametrically opposed' to the one prevailing in the society of Jesus' day (Trakatellis 1985:278). In other words, as Santos makes clear, the rationale behind this teaching on service is that 'the authoritative one is the one who serves, and the proof of that authority is in the service rendered on behalf of others' (1997:453). Thus the 'greatness' of a disciple is directly proportional to the degree of service s/he renders unto others. That is the heart of the paradox, which the male disciples fail to comprehend. It is the reason that they find it difficult to accept this paradoxical nature to discipleship. They cannot conceive that true greatness is measured according to one's servility. They must undergo a change of mindset to understand discipleship as service and not in positions of ruling power (Trakatellis 1985:278). The pursuit by the male disciples for worldly authority is akin to wishing to 'save one's life' (8:35), and that is not Christ's way (Santos 1985:458).

The second bout of preaching on being a servant and 'slave of all' (10:43-44) is a consequence of an exchange between Jesus and two of the Twelve – James and John, and the subsequent reaction of the other ten members of the Twelve. Whilst on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus makes his third and final passion-resurrection-prophecy to the Twelve (10:32-34), after which James and John approach him with a request to occupy the seats of honour when Jesus enters his glory (10:37). As with the argument about greatness on the way to Capernaum, this request exposes their inclinations for status and seniority (English 1992:181), for their interest is only in their reward in the messianic kingdom



(Hooker 1991:246). I suggest that because James and John (and for that matter the other members of the Twelve as well) may have occupied seats of honour in their social kinship groups, they wish for more of the same in Jesus' Kingdom. On two previous occasions Jesus has clarified for them what following him entails (8:34-37, 9:35), and both teachings – judging by the request of James and John and the anger<sup>3</sup> of the remaining ten – appear to have not been well understood – as the Twelve continue to be motivated by petty selfish concerns (Cole 1989:242).

Further to this I suggest that the chronic inability of the male disciples to understand the nature of discipleship that Christ expects, and the type of disciples they ought to be i.e. the lifestyles they should be adopting, finds its root in their misunderstanding of the type of Messiah figure that Jesus is. At 8:32-3, when Peter rebukes Jesus for his prophesy of suffering and death, and at 9:32 when the text narrates that the male disciples 'did not understand (the second passion-resurrection-prophesy) and were afraid to ask him', and again at 10:37 with this request for seats of honour, it appears likely that the male disciples subscribed to populist preconceptions that swirled around the expected Messiah figure rather than the Messiah as revealed in Jesus (English 1992:160).

Throughout Mark's Gospel, the male disciples show little sign of attaining this second criterion of true discipleship. The verb 'diakonein' is never used to describe their behaviour which appears to suggest that it is a distinctive nature of the role of women followers of Jesus (Miller 2004:193). Where the women followers serve, the male disciples seek status and honour amongst themselves and for Jesus. Thus, there is a chasm of difference in the behaviour of the genders with regards to this second criterion of true discipleship (Miller 2004:194).

I would suggest that these women had a natural aptitude for service on account of their lowly status in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine (Malbon 2000:60-61) whereby they are much more in tune with Jesus' message of being servant of all and least of all. They are able to accept it and respond to it much more readily than are the men. On account of their subjugation by patriarchal society Jesus' message is, in a sense, tailor-made for them.

---

<sup>3</sup> This anger may be on account of the ten having been upstaged by James and John (English 1992:182), or at the sons of Zebedee having 'stolen a march on them' (Hooker 1991:247).

Where in the past they were conscripted to serve in patriarchally created roles, now in Jesus community of faith they are called to a new kind of service in faith and freedom. And it is this kind of new service that leads to greatness and being 'first'. By contrast to these women characters, the male disciples do not attain their high calibre of discipleship in relation to this second criterion. This new kind of service goes against the grain of their patriarchal culture in which they enjoyed positions of seniority over others.

In other words when compared to the male disciples, it is the three women, Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and the Syro-Phoenician woman who are able to do what these men cannot do, and able to behave in a way that the men do not. I suggest this is because they are able to understand what these men cannot understand i.e. they can discern exactly the type of Messiah figure that Jesus is, and therefore they are able to respond to him in the correct manner. These woman characters can see Jesus' true messianic nature much clearer than do the male disciples, and as a result they offer the desired response to him, with regards to this second criterion of discipleship.

Having analysed the female characters and the male disciples in light of the second criterion I now continue this evaluation exercise by exploring the third criterion of true discipleship.

#### **4.2.3. The Third Criterion: The first shall be last, and the last shall be first (10:31).**

The third criterion of discipleship comes at the end of Jesus' teaching (10:27-31) on his encounter with the Rich Man (10:17-22), and has been labelled by one scholar as a 'wisdom saying' (Telford 1995:61)<sup>4</sup>. It comes as a final twist to a bout of preaching that has greatly perplexed his disciples (v24, v26). This criterion – unlike the other three – is not a case of Jesus advocating a pattern of behaviour to be emulated by his followers per se. Rather he is expounding on how things will be in his community of faith. In this teaching Jesus is revealing the transformation that will occur in his new community, and the inherent justice that exists therein. This criterion introduces the notion that the value system by which people are valued and merited in his faith community are completely

---

<sup>4</sup> Together with 2:21-22, 4:21-22 & 8:35-37.

opposite to the value system which exists in the society of Jesus' day. The new values that Jesus is preaching offers hope to those who by society's standards have none.

For this third indicator of true discipleship, I shall focus on an individual female character, who I suggest, best exemplifies the second half of this criterion, that the last shall be first, and then I shall turn to the male Twelve disciples who I shall argue, more loosely illustrate the first half of the criterion, namely that the first shall be last.

#### **4.2.3.1 An evaluation of the female characters in relation to the third criterion.**

In this part of the evaluation of female characters, I will focus on one character only – the Bleeding Woman (5:25-34). For it is my intention to show that she powerfully illustrates the positive transformation that occurs in this third criterion of discipleship: how the last become first.

The text reveals the extreme nature of her condition; twelve years of haemorrhaging (v25), which as one scholar has noted 'the woman's condition of a constant flow of blood implies that she is a *'zabah'* (Miller 2004:55). This long period of physical suffering has had religious and social implications that have served to greatly increase her suffering (Kinukawa 1994:37).

Firstly, the religious ramifications are that, according to the Purity Laws, her disease was considered to be so contagious that anything she touched would be made unclean 'even household utensils' (Miller 2004:55). Her bleeding symbolizes a form of death for her, because it resulted in her total isolation from all the common routines of life, and thus she would have been feared and shunned by all who came across her (Kinukawa 1994:36). This sense of her isolation can be further seen, I believe, by the manner in which she appears as a solitary figure (i.e. with no male companions), hidden in the crowd amongst the many people who were pressing in on Jesus (v24 & 25), thinking her own secret thoughts (v28) (Miller 2004:56).

Secondly, the social implications of her bleeding are that she has become financially impoverished through the failure of 'money-seeking' physicians (Kinukawa 1994:34), and which has resulted in the worsening of her condition (v26). So in my view,

through her physical condition and the subsequent religious and social consequences she is 'last' in the sense that she has been dehumanised, ostracized and is without hope.

And yet despite being 'last', despite the afflictions in her life, verse 28 shows that she yet had faith to believe that the power of Jesus is stronger than the defiling forces of her disease, as well as the religious and social prejudices of her day (Miller 2004:55). She has faith to know that one touch will heal her. This extraordinary faith is not based upon a firsthand witnessing of Jesus' miracles and parables, but rather on merely having 'heard about Jesus' (v27) from others. Perhaps through the pain of her long-term suffering 'she has perceived who Jesus really is' (Kinukawa 1994:42). And in daring to believe she has decided to 'stake her whole life on Jesus' (Kinukawa 1994:41), for she risks great condemnation by thronging with the crowd, touching and contaminating Jesus and therefore disgracing him. She has violated the Purity Laws which have ostracized her (Miller 2004:64) and in so doing she is threatening the purity of the members of the Israelite community (Kinukawa 1994:41).

It is her brave faith that is the catalyst for her taking the risk of overcoming socio-religious barriers and 'consciously defying the established system of holiness' (Kinukawa 1994:42). And her touching Jesus is neither rejected nor condemned by him, for instantaneously and immediately her twelve year period of haemorrhaging ends (v29). Jesus wishes to know the identity of the person who has touched him with such faith as to draw miraculous power out of him. An irony is evident here, as it was the woman who first sought out Jesus, now he seeks her out (Kinukawa 1994:45). And so the woman comes in 'fear and trembling ... and told him the whole truth' (v34). I suggest that the courage which led her to touch Jesus' cloak, also leads her to confess the truth. As has been noted above fear and trembling are characteristic human responses to the revelation of God, however the important difference in this case is that this woman – unlike other characters in Mark's narrative – boldly overcomes her fear to confess her faith (Miller 2004:60).

Jesus responds to her confession by calling her 'daughter' (*thugater* v34), thus establishing a close personal relationship with her and signalling her inclusion into Jesus' new faith community (Haber 2003:184). Earlier in the narrative Jesus declared that all who do the will of God are his close family (3:35); therefore in calling this woman

‘daughter’ at this juncture, suggests that she did the will of God by violating the strict Purity laws to gain her healing. Jesus, like the woman, also becomes a ‘boundary breaker’ by affirming the woman’s potentially scandalous behaviour (Kinukawa 1994:47). Certainly an interesting precedent is revealed by this encounter, for Jesus has set aside the Purity laws in order to save and restore human life (Miller 2004:60). One scholar has even suggested that Jesus’ setting aside of the Purity laws to save the woman may signify that the Markan community may have rejected the normal conventions of their society (Miller 2004:60). Furthermore if one considers the lowly status of women in the social hierarchy of Jesus’ day it is likely that within the Markan community women were in a position ‘to bear more poignantly’ this criterion of the last becoming first (Malbon in Levine 20001:123).

I suggest that this woman who was ‘last’ according to the socio-religious prejudices of the day has now become ‘first’, for she has begun a new life as a ‘daughter’ in Jesus’ faith community. No longer afflicted and shunned on account of her condition, through her bold faith she has been accepted, healed, transformed and ushered into Jesus’ community of faith. In this sense she can be said to epitomize this third criterion whereby the last shall be first<sup>5</sup>. She has been called from the very fringe of society to the centre of a new community of faith (Kinukawa 1994:47). Jesus’ command to her to ‘go in peace’ (v34) can be literally understood as ‘go *into* peace’ (*upage eis eirenen* 5:34), which carries the connotation of entering a new form of peaceful existence no longer afflicted by a physical ailment and socio-religious discrimination (Miller 2004:61).

So this woman exemplifies the transformation from last to first that occurs in Jesus faith community, and she can also be said to foreshadow all Jesus’ true followers who ‘will lose everything but paradoxically will save their lives’ in fulfilment of Jesus’ teaching at 8:34 (Miller 2004:67). I shall now address the male disciples and what can be discerned in their pattern of behaviour when measured against this criterion.

---

<sup>5</sup> One may view her transformation from ‘last’ to ‘first’ in another way: after agreeing to the request for help from Jairus the synagogue ruler, and setting out to fulfil that request, Jesus cuts off from that task, for the sake of this unclean and impoverished outcast woman. Thus from being the ‘last’ in society’s eyes she is literally now the ‘first’ in Jesus’ eyes and attention (Miller 2004:64).

#### **4.2.3.2. An evaluation of the male disciples in relation to the third criterion.**

When considering the Twelve male disciples in light of this criterion, it is necessary to begin by exploring the incident in the text in which the criterion is found. It will allow for a wider appreciation of the reasons for the Twelve's misunderstanding of Jesus' preaching at this point.

This paradoxical wisdom saying (Hooker 1991:247), which acts as a 'mystery and a challenge' to Jesus' disciples, comes at the climax of Jesus teaching about the rewards that will be given to those who sacrifice everything and follow Jesus (10:29-30). The text reveals in v30 that the rewards will come in two ages; in this present age will be given homes, familial relationships, and fields as a substitute for all such things as may have been sacrificed to follow Jesus, and in the age to come the reward will be eternal life.

In one sense this is a word of assurance to the Twelve who have, as Peter rightly exclaims, 'left everything and followed you' (v28) (Hooker 1991:243). The uncertainty and confusion of the Twelve came about as a result of the exchange between Jesus and the Rich Man. The Twelve would have thought that 'a devout law-keeping rich man' would certainly enter the kingdom of God (English 1992:178), but Jesus has just taught them that this is not so (v23-25), hence their bewilderment. This Rich Man would have been 'first' in the eyes of his society on account of his wealth, and 'first' in the eyes of his religion because of his faultless observance of ancient Jewish law (Cole 1989:239). Much to the disbelief of the Twelve, the Rich Man was not able to become a follower of Jesus, and therefore did not become one of the 'first' in Jesus' new community. Thus the rich man becomes an important example to the Twelve of how things are ordered in Jesus' faith community. So the teaching about rewards (v29-30) ends with the wisdom saying of 10:31 which is a warning to the disciples (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:14), that even though they have sacrificed everything to follow Jesus, they ought not to think of themselves as 'superior disciples' to other followers of Jesus (English 1992:178), nor are they guaranteed being 'first' in Jesus' new community.

I would offer the suggestion that the main reason that the disciples do not experience this 'last' to 'first' metamorphosis is because of their lack of faith. When

comparing the Twelve disciples to the Bleeding woman, the difference in their respective qualities of faith stands out. It was the courageous faith of the woman that led her to experience the transformation from ‘last’ to ‘first’ (Miller 2004:64), and the Twelve never attain that level of faith. Instead the Twelve do not see themselves as ‘last’ but rather succumb to the temptation for self-serving worldly power (Miller 2004:200), by remaining competitive with each other seeking to establish their reputation over their colleagues (9:34), and two of their number even have the audacity to ask for seats of honour and prestige in the kingdom of God (19:37), incurring the jealous anger of the other members of the Twelve (10:41). They show signs of being exclusivist to others who do not follow Christ, by being unwilling to share the apostolic ministry of exorcism with them (9:38).

And so though they may be deemed to be ‘first’ in the society of the day on account of their gender, I suggest, that due to the deficiency in their quality of faith and the discipleship they offer to Jesus, they are not confirmed by Jesus as being first in his new community. Indeed the flaws in their faith ultimately lead them to betray (14:45), desert (14:50), and deny (14:72) in his hours of most desperate need. The eleven remaining members of the Twelve (after the demise of Judas Iscariot) require a special post-resurrection reconciliation with Jesus in Galilee, in order to repair their relationship with him, and re-establish their places in the faith community. Accordingly therefore, I suggest that one may even conclude that they have become ‘last’ among the true followers of Jesus.

And now, having concisely explored the female characters and male disciples in lieu of this third criterion, I shall continue my evaluative exercise by addressing the fourth and final criterion of true discipleship in Mark’s narrative.

#### **4.2.4. The Fourth Criterion: A willingness to keep alert and awake (13:33, 35, 37).**

This fourth and final criterion of faithful disciples comes at the end of what a number of scholars appear to refer to as the ‘Little Apocalypse in Mark 13 (e.g. Cole 1989:271, English 1992:203, Telford 1995:22). Broadly speaking Jesus has used this ‘predictive prophecy’ (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:15) to foretell the impending

persecutions for all his followers (v5-13), the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (v14-23), and the coming of the Son of Man (v24-27). He then ends by issuing a clarion call to his followers, exhorting them to keep alert and awake in their discipleship whilst waiting for all these things to come to pass; a constant emphasis in Mark's Gospel (Cole 1989:281).

So for this final indicator I begin with the female characters, focussing on the Anointing woman and the three women followers of 15:40-41, illustrating that they are positive examples of characters who keep alert and awake to Jesus and the poignancy of the moments they share with him. Then I turn to the male disciples and intend to show that they do not keep awake and alert at the critical moments in Jesus' ministry.

#### **4.2.4.1 The female characters in relation to the fourth criterion.**

Jesus' command to keep alert (*agrypeite*) in v33 and to keep awake (*gregoreite*) in vv35, 37 has been interpreted in various ways by different scholars. It has been understood as a call for 'ethical watchfulness' (Telford 1995:137); as a call for constant vigilance and 'patient waiting' (Hooker 1991:302); and as a call for his followers to show a commitment to one's Christian duty, to faithful witness and endurance in the face of opposition, and to wakeful duty (Hurtado in Longenecker 1996:16-17). All of these express in different ways the essential notion of being a faithful doorkeeper – for the task of a doorkeeper is to watch (Cole 1989:296). And to watch faithfully one has to be alert and awake in order to anticipate the return home of the master (v35).

I start this section of the study of the female characters with the Anointing Woman (14:3-9). Whilst being 'sat at the table' (v3) in Simon the leper's house, there entered an anonymous, silent, solitary woman with very expensive ointment. The woman makes no request to Jesus for healing or any other form of help, for herself or anyone else; she simply proceeds to anoint his head. Her silence and anonymity add a mysterious aura to the act of anointing (Miller 2004:128). Munro (1982:240) has speculated as to the identity of this woman – that she may be a member of Simon the leper's household, or even one of the 'many other' women followers of Jesus mentioned at 15:41b.



Miller (2004:129) notes that the woman's deed is an extravagant devotional act of love to Jesus, who is facing increasingly dangerous human opposition (note the growing conspiracy of the chief priests and Judas 14:1-2, 10-11), and yet it arouses the cynicism and anger of onlookers to the anointing, who rebuke her (v4-5). However Jesus silences the critics and goes on to affirm and praise her actions as a 'good service' (v6b), for 'she has done what she could' (v8a). So the woman earns greater praise than any other character in the narrative because her service will be henceforth remembered as part of the Gospel story of Jesus (Miller 2004:131).

In taking advantage of the opportunity to anoint Jesus, the woman becomes a mysterious prophetic figure (Kinukawa 1994:86) expressing the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, and foreshadowing this revelation in Jerusalem (cf. 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32) (Miller 2004:133). Through being a prophetic figure she had the insight and awareness to realise this poignant moment in Jesus' life, just prior to his Passion (English 1992:213). By adopting the role of a prophetic figure she has perceived Jesus' true messianic nature (Telford 1995:111), and I suggest she has understood what the Messiah needed at this point in his life, and acted accordingly to ensure his need is met. Jesus' lavish laudation of her actions in v8-9 emphasise the fact that her timing is perfect: she has performed a noble deed at the correct moment. The difference between her and the onlookers who criticized her actions is stark indeed – they seem completely blind to the solemnity of this moment in Jesus' life, and the tremendous significance of her actions.

I should like to point out at this juncture a few noteworthy similarities that exist between the Anointing woman, the Bleeding woman and the Syro-Phoenician woman. All three appear in the text as solitary and anonymous figures, and all have taken the initiative to seek Jesus out. In so doing they can all be said to have been alert and awake to seizing the chance to find Jesus when the opportunity presented itself. The Bleeding woman took her chance to touch Jesus whilst thronging in the crowd (5:28), the Syro-Phoenician woman grabbed her opportunity when Jesus ventured to the Gentile land of Tyre, presumably seeking some rest, and she tracked him down finding him in a house (7:24). And so too the Anointing woman has seized her chance and found Jesus in a leper's house in Bethany (14:3). All three women can be said to have been ready and able to share an encounter with Jesus. They all chose the right moment to do so, and as a result

they all experienced transformative exchanges with Jesus. To extend Jesus' parable, one may conclude that they have all acted like faithful doorkeepers (v34), whose vigilance has paid off and were found awake and alert when the master returned home.

Further to these three women, there are also three other women worthy of mention who demonstrate alertness and wakefulness at critical junctures in the Gospel story. These are the three women of 15:40-41. They number as the last remaining followers of Jesus (Miller 2004:153), for the male disciples are noticeable only by their absence since they fled at Gethsemane (14:52). These 'watching women' (Hartin 1993:44) observe the three climactic events in the Gospel – the crucifixion and burial of Jesus and the discovery of the empty tomb – even though the death and burial of Jesus must have seemed like the defeat and failure of Jesus' mission and ministry (Miller 2004:153), and so even in the face of apparent failure the women remained faithfully alert and kept watching. One scholar has noted that these three events form the key points of the Christian keygma such as we find in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 'Christ died for our sins ... and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day' (Kinukawa 1994:94), which underlines something of the tremendous significance of the events that the women witnessed.

The verb 'to see' defines the women's behaviour in these final stages of the Gospel (Kinukawa 1994:109), and occurs in all three events. Firstly, the three women saw (*theorousai* v40) the crucifixion in spite of the dangers of being 'arrested and executed as followers of a political insurrectionist' (Schussler Fiorenza 1983:320). I suggest that their willingness to risk endangering themselves demonstrates their faithful courage and the strength of their allegiance to Jesus. Secondly, they saw (*etheoroun* v47) Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus in a new tomb. The women remained passive and uninvolved in the act of burial, but their presence alone put them at risk of being arrested (Miller 2004:169), so here as well they show their boldness and great loyalty to Jesus. And thirdly after the Sabbath had ended, the three women returned to the tomb to perform the anointing which Joseph of Arimathea had neglected to do (Miller 2004:177). They saw (*theorousin* 16:4) the stone rolled away. On venturing into the tomb, they find an angel who gives them the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and tasks them with imparting the news to the male disciples. I suggest that the fact that the women have seen

these events signifies that they have kept a faithful vigil of witnessing to all that has unfolded.

One scholar has suggested that the verb ‘to see’ may well denote more than mere observation, but imply seeing with a special knowledge and understanding – expressing the quality of relationship that existed in previous encounters (Kinukawa 1994:109). Throughout all their watching they kept sight of who Jesus is, and the significance of these events. Whilst being powerless to intervene as the drama unfolds (Kinukawa 1994:94), they yet remain alert and awake to each event. One scholar has noted intriguingly, that the women are actually fulfilling one of Jesus’ reasons in calling the Twelve to be his special followers and friends: he had wanted the Twelve ‘to be with him’ (3:14). It is these three women who fulfil that at the end of his life (Miller 2004:161).

It is ironic that according to Jewish law a woman’s testimony or witness was deemed unacceptable (Cole 1989:329), and yet as the sole witnesses to all three events of the death, burial and empty tomb of Jesus, they are transformed into a key source for the proclamation of the Gospel, and furthermore the reinstatement and restoration of the male disciples depends on their faithfulness as apostles of the resurrection (Miller 2004:208).

So these three women, I suggest also faithfully fulfil Jesus’ command to keep alert and awake. These women do so when the male disciples have failed to, and they do so during the most tense and dangerous moments. They have been with Jesus since the earliest days of his ministry in Galilee (15:41) and have seen it all through to the empty tomb (Cole 1989:236, Hartin 1993:95). Their faithful vigilance all this time, and especially at the climax in Jerusalem, suggests that they too are faithful doorkeepers, awake and alert anticipating the master’s return.

I now address the male disciples’ success in keeping alert and awake.

#### **4.2.4.2 The male disciples in relation to the fourth criterion**

I suggest that the male disciples’ behaviour in relation to this final criterion of faithful discipleship can best be illustrated by analysing the pericope of Jesus and the disciples in Gethsemane (14:32-42). After the Last Supper (v22-25) and Jesus’ prophecy

on the Mount of Olives (v26-31), Jesus and the disciples venture ‘to a place called Gethsemane’ (v32). One scholar mentions that Jesus needed his disciples with him at this point in time, to stand by him in his hour of need (Cole 1989:296). Instructing nine of the Twelve to ‘sit here while I pray’ (v32), Jesus takes Peter, James and John and moves off deeper into Gethsemane, where he experiences emotions of deep distress and agitation (v33). He instructs these three to ‘keep awake’ (*gregoreite*), the same command he issued to all his disciples at the end of the discourse on the Mount of Olives (cf. v35 & 37). In so doing Jesus continues the theme of his parable of the doorkeeper in 13:34-36 (Hooker 1991:398). On his return to the three disciples (v37) after solitary prayer (v35-36), he finds them sleeping ‘heavy with fear as well as tiredness’ (English 1992:221). The familiar theme of the failure of the male disciples surfaces again here, for they were commanded to keep awake, yet they sleep (Hooker 1991:349). As noted above<sup>6</sup> sleep symbolises a state of un-readiness or unfaithful discipleship, which I suggest is the very antithesis of Jesus’ commands at 13:33, 35, 37, 14:34. Jesus reacts to their slumber by speaking words of rebuke. Peter who had boasted so vigorously of being able to stand by Jesus even unto death (14:31) and asserted his ‘separateness and exemption’ (Catchpole 1977:4) from the prediction in 14:27 that all will desert Jesus (14:29), is singled out for special criticism for failing to support Christ. In calling Peter by the name Simon, his ‘natural’ name rather than his discipleship name (Cole 1989:298), Jesus may be hinting that he is not a genuine disciple (Hooker 1991:349).

Jesus reissues the command to keep awake (v38) and to pray in order to avoid trials. And he outlines the dualistic struggle between one’s willing ‘spirit’ and one’s weak ‘flesh’. The failure of the three disciples to keep awake, and their falling asleep is symbolic of the nature of this dualism (Miller 2004:167). On Jesus’ second return to these three male disciples (v40), he once again finds them asleep, and so they have failed to obey his command twice ‘and they did not know what to say to him’. This silence of the ‘shamefaced disciples’ (Cole 1989:298) reveals their guilt (cf. 9:34). On his third return, they are found asleep a third time, to which Jesus responds ‘enough’ thereby giving a sense of finality and completeness to all their failures (Cole 1989:298), for their three-fold failure here to keep awake emphasises their failures of the male disciples

---

<sup>6</sup> See 1.5 above

throughout the narrative (Hooker 1991:349). One scholar notes well that if they failed to obey Christ here by keeping awake in Gethsemane, then indeed under further trial ‘the sheep will be scattered’ (14:27), and Jesus prophecy will have to come to pass (Hooker 1991:349).

The male disciples have not kept awake and alert to the suffering of Jesus in Gethsemane. They chose to slumber rather than keep vigil through Jesus’ distress. Unlike the Anointing woman (14:3-9) and especially the faithful women of 15:40-41 they have failed to emulate the faithful vigilance of the doorkeeper in Jesus’ parable (13:34-36). I suggest further to this that they have offered Jesus no support or companionship in his agonising time of prayer in Gethsemane. Their decision to sleep on these three occasions means that they have failed to offer any solace or solidarity at this crucial hour, which may have given him a modicum of comfort in his distress. Thus their inability to keep awake and remain vigilant meant that Jesus had to face his desolation alone, and so I suggest that their lack of attentiveness and watchfulness in their discipleship actually becomes a source of greater suffering to Jesus in Gethsemane.

Having concluded this study into the four criterion of true discipleship, I now draw my reflections together in the conclusion.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

The intention of this chapter was to evaluate the conduct of the female characters and male disciples in Mark’s narrative. To this end I outlined four standards of behaviour that encapsulate Jesus’ teaching on his new ethic of discipleship. In each of these four standards of behaviour, I have compared the female characters’ words and actions with the male disciples words and actions in order to discern which gender best emulates each of the standards. In each case I have argued that the female characters are far more successful in achieving the standard of behaviour than the male disciples.

It is my conclusion therefore that the genuine followers of Christ in Mark’s Gospel are not the male disciples but the aforementioned female followers.

## CONCLUSION

I began this study of women characters who follow Jesus in Mark's Gospel because of my experiences in Swaziland. As I outlined in the Introduction, the plight of Christian women in rural Swaziland was a key motivation in undertaking this dissertation. I wished to discover if the Holy Scriptures might have something to say about their context of oppressive cultural practices such as *'lobhola'* and polygamy. Even within rural churches in Swaziland the problem of gender inequality still exists, despite the irony that according to my first-hand observation women make up the majority of rural congregations.

In the four chapters that form the bulk of this study, I have tried to extrapolate two points; what 'following Christ' means, and whether men or women are more effective as disciples. The bottom line that I have laboured at length to argue is that, in light of what Markan discipleship therefore entails, the women's following of Christ far supersedes that of the men with regard to its quality. The argument for saying such is largely based on the two verbs that describe the nature of their allegiance to Jesus at 15:41 – namely *'akolouthein'* (to follow) and *'diakonein'* (to serve). This can be said to be the key text for alluding to the existence of women disciples in Mark's Gospel (Philips in Kitzberger 2000:17), because it is the clearest example of how and why the women fulfil the criteria for discipleship. These two verbs describe the women as following and serving Jesus consistently as part of his entourage from the beginning in Galilee through to its climax in Jerusalem. Mark deliberately refers to these women in discipleship terms (Miller 2004:165). These three named women disciples and the 'many others' of 15:41 were constant members of the 'discipleship group' who accompanied Jesus on his mission (Miller 2004:168, Hartin 1993:94). This notion of close companionship between Jesus and these women is emphasised by the occurrence of the prefix *'oun'* (with). It stresses the closeness between Jesus and the women disciples in the same way that its occurrence at 3:14 emphasizes the bond between Jesus and the Twelve disciples (Miller 2004:158).

These women disciples show a faithful adherence to the commands of Jesus; to follow (8:34) – the women are disciples in this regard because at this juncture in the narrative they are 'the last remaining followers of Jesus' (Miller 2004:162); and to serve (10:42) – the verb *'diakonein'* is only ever used for the women in Mark's Gospel but never of the Twelve (Miller 2004:166). And so Munro rightly labels them

'serving-followers' of the suffering Servant (1983:398), who at this late stage in the Gospel story fulfil a role of 'continuing disciples of Jesus' (1983:400). In so doing they become a model of discipleship for others to emulate (Miller 2004:168). The women disciples have understood right from the beginning what discipleship entailed, and they are able to live it out far more effectively than the Twelve (Hartin 1993:95). As one feminist scholar puts it succinctly 'the female disciples seem courageous, loyal, and loving; the male disciples cowardly, apostate, and selfish' (Philips in Kitzberger 2000:16). In other words if the praxis or conduct of female followers is much closer to Jesus' ideal of discipleship than the male disciples (as I contend that it is), it means therefore that 'the true disciples' in Mark's Gospel are the women disciples (Schussler Fiorenza 1983:230). That being the case, and if one accepts this premise as an acceptable position to hold, and in light of the motivation for this study, a question subsequently arises: what, then, are the implications of this for Christian women in rural Swaziland?

For it is my contention that there are very significant consequences for the membership of each and every Christian Church. The contrast that I have attempted to highlight in this study between the male disciples and female characters following Christ, reveals that there is an urgent call from the Gospel of Mark to transform the way men and women relate to each other in every sphere of the church. The Gospel is urging us to increase the pace of transforming the gender relations that exist in the Church first, and then to use such internal transformation as a springboard to transforming some of the external unjust realities that exist in rural Swaziland. There is a very strong call to transform the relational dynamics between the genders, both for laity and for clergy, and to create a new egalitarian community in the Church. Therefore, by way of conclusion to this study, I shall offer a few suggestions in this regard.

In what follows I shall refer mainly to the situation in the Anglican Church in Swaziland. The Anglican Church was one of the first churches to appear in Swaziland in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and has many churches and mission stations in the most rural and undeveloped corners of Swaziland. The plight of Christian women in rural Swaziland is as relevant and pressing a concern for the Anglican church as for any other.

In an attempt therefore to unpack some of the consequences I suggest arise from my enquiry in this study, I should like to begin by very briefly outlining the present state of gender relations that currently exist within the Anglican Diocese of

Swaziland, and how this context was reached in order to get a complete understanding of how and why things stand as they do today. And where the Church may go from here.

### **A short summary of the Anglican Diocese of Swaziland<sup>1</sup>**

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the missions and ministries of the Anglican Church in Swaziland had been organised and directed by the Diocese of Zululand<sup>2</sup>. In March 1968 a Synod was held at All Saints Cathedral, Mbabane, Swaziland which was presided over by the Bishop of Zululand and Swaziland, the Right Reverend Alpheus Zulu. A resolution was passed requesting the Metropolitan of the Church of the Province of South Africa, the Most Reverend Robert Selby Taylor, Archbishop of Cape Town to ‘permit the creation of a diocese of Swaziland’.<sup>3</sup> And so the Diocese of Swaziland was duly born on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1968, and consisted of seven parishes and twenty-two clergy (seven of whom were Swazis).<sup>4</sup>

The first Bishop of the newly created diocese of newly independent Swaziland was an Englishman by the name of Anthony Hunter, who was consecrated in 1968. He was succeeded by the first Swazi to be Bishop of the diocese – the Right Reverend Bernard Mkhabela in 1975. The Rt. Rev. Lawrence Zulu succeeded him in 1994, followed by two Vicar-Generals in 2001-2002. Then the 4<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Swaziland was consecrated in October 2002 – the Rt. Rev. Meshack Mabuza. Needless to say that between the years 1968-2002 the clergy of Swaziland had been exclusively male of course – only men had ever been ordained in the Diocese of Swaziland. (It needs pointing out that a few female Deacons from the United Kingdom had served in the diocese during the latter part of this period, but they had entered the diaconate in UK dioceses before serving in the diocese in Swaziland).

---

<sup>1</sup> All historical data of the diocese comes from an unpublished document written by one J.S.M. Matsebula entitled ‘The Church of the Province of South Africa (the Anglican Church) in Swaziland’, which was printed in January 1976. The booklet was never released for commercial sale but written merely for the edification of the diocese. Copies of this booklet are kept in the Diocesan Office, Mbabane, Swaziland. It remains the only attempt to record the activities and early growth of the Anglican Church since its first forays onto Swazi soil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, through to the birth of the Diocese of Swaziland in 1968, and into the mid-1970s.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished document; ‘The CPSA in Swaziland’ (Matsebula 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished document; ‘The CPSA in Swaziland’ (Matsebula 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished document; ‘The CPSA in Swaziland’ (Matsebula 1976).



Between 1968 and 2002 the alignment of power and authority within the structures of the diocese were patriarchally distributed amongst the all-male clergy, with most of the authority naturally being invested in the senior clergy such as the Bishop and the Archdeacons. Thus during this period the Anglican Church was an all male bastion of power wielding. Patriarchy, therefore, saturated this period of the church history and patriarchal attitudes and decisions would have been the catalyst for the diocese's entire mission and ministry.

This point is important because one must be aware that by the very nature of the parochial framework of the diocese, the clergy were, and still are today, by and large the 'face' of the parish in which they live and work. They dominate every part of the life of the church within the parish – it is the nature of the office of parish priest in the diocese. Therefore throughout this period there had always been a male priest occupy this central role in each and every parish, who inevitably continued this pattern of patriarchal leadership, decision-making and power-wielding in his own corner of the diocese.

In such a Church as this there cannot be said to exist equal gender relations, wherein men and women are thought to be equal as sisters and brothers in Christ. Now having summarised a very brief history of the gender inequality in the Anglican Church in Swaziland I now turn to see what role women played in the development of the church in this period.

### **The Role of Women in the Diocese of Swaziland (1968-2002)**

At this juncture it is necessary to briefly encapsulate the role of women in this period, for they flourished in two roles especially; as laity and as religious.

As members of the laity, women in the diocese in Swaziland had fulfilled almost every conceivable role. Perhaps most emphatically as members of the ever-faithful guilds the Mother's Union and the Anglican Women's Fellowship, two mighty pillars of the Anglican Church in Swaziland. Women have also fulfilled challenging yet critical roles such as lay ministers, church wardens (and Parish Church Councils members). As well as the vital role women have performed as Youth leaders and Sunday School teachers, seeking to instil Christian values into the formation and upbringing of young Swazi children. So in diverse yet often unsung

and underrated roles such as these, lay women have contributed fully to the life and growth of the Church, through out its short history.

In terms of the religious life of the diocese, women have played a crucial role. Between 1968 and 2002 there have been three Religious Orders establish Convents within the diocese. The first to arrive was the Order of the Holy Paraclete, who arrived in 1958 in Manzini. Then in the early 1990s the Community of the Holy Name appeared and established themselves at Luyengo. The Community of St. Peter at one stage established a Convent in Shiselweni but they have long since moved onto pastures new. So there remain two religious communities supporting the mission and ministries of the diocese by their praying presence. By way of contrast the diocese is still awaiting the day when the first Anglican male monastic community appears in the country.

So in this very concise synopsis one may catch a brief glimpse of the fundamental and largely underrated role that women have performed since the first inception of the Diocese of Swaziland as laity and as religious. It will not have escaped the attention of the reader of this study that up to this point there remained one glaring omission: the role of women as clergy. I turn to that issue presently.

### **A Day of Transformation**<sup>5</sup>

It was only in the 35<sup>th</sup> year of the history of the diocese that this particular eschaton actually happened. The 12<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Synod was convened at St. Michael's High School in Manzini, Swaziland, starting on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2003<sup>6</sup>.

It was at this Diocesan Synod that the resolution calling for the Ordination of women was first tabled. According to the official minutes of the Synod, the motion calling for the ordination of women was raised as 'Agenda 55'<sup>7</sup> and reads as follows;

### **BE IT RESOLVED THAT THIS SYNOD**

---

<sup>5</sup> All the information in this section, relating to the 12<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Synod, has been gleaned from the Record of Minutes stored in the Register of Diocesan Synods, which is kept in the Diocesan Office in Mbabane, Swaziland.

<sup>6</sup> See p234 of the Register of Diocesan Synods, Diocesan Office, Mbabane, Swaziland.

<sup>7</sup> See p236 of the Register of Diocesan Synods, Diocesan Office, Mbabane, Swaziland.

(a) Recognises and affirms the gifts and leadership of women who have served the church faithfully and diligently demonstrating a high level of ability as layministers, guild leaders, churchwardens, etc.

(b) Recognises and concedes that the time has come for the church to affirm the role of women in the ordained ministry as deacons and priests.

The Proposer was the Revd Canon Josiah Mahlalela and the Seconder was a lay woman Thandi Zulu. A hand written message scrawled underneath Agenda 55 simply reads ‘carried unanimously’.<sup>8</sup>

So it was that the Diocese of Swaziland took a huge leap forward in its mission and ministry. It was a seismic shift for some within the diocese who would henceforth need to refer to their clergy as ‘*Make Umfundisi*’ (Reverend Mother) as well as ‘*Babe Umfundisi*’ (Reverend Father). Less than 30 days after the 12<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Synod had closed the first ever ordination of a woman in the Diocese of Swaziland occurred, when on November 8<sup>th</sup> 2003, a Swazi woman was made a Deacon, and a new chapter was opened in the history of the Anglican Church in Swaziland.

### **Two Ways Forward**

So currently we can say that, in lieu of the above, the Diocese of Swaziland has begun the process of transforming the gender relations in its Church. But the process has a long way to go. Transformation has started, but is not yet complete. I suggest that there are two ways forward to help alleviate the oppression of women in rural Swaziland. These two ways should lead to enhancing and increasing the transformation of gender relations within the Church, in order that the Church be a catalyst for change in society.

### **The First Way Forward**

---

<sup>8</sup> See p236 of the Register of Diocesan Synods, Diocesan Office, Mbabane, Swaziland.

The first way is to greatly expand the role of women in the Church, especially to the one sphere of Church life which up until 2003 they were barred from – the ordained ministry. It was a great step forward for the diocese when female ordination was brought into effect in 2002. But the numbers of women entering the diaconate and priesthood must be increased. The flow of women into the ordained ministry at present is but a trickle – female clergy form only a small minority within the house of clergy in the Diocese of Swaziland. The current reality will not feel like it is being transformed until the number of clergy is for example half female and half male. To have half the parishes in the diocese especially those in rural areas led by a clergywoman and therefore represented by a female ‘face’, would go a long way to offering something new and different to the congregations. It would enable rural women to feel more able to relate to and support the clerical leadership and ministry of the Church. The introduction of female-only vocational programmes to allow all Swazi women to discern whether the ordained ministry is for them.

Furthermore, clergywomen must be admitted to the senior offices of the church, in order that female voices contribute to diocesan decision-making and strategizing, which would effect positive change to the church’s dogma and policy. To have clergywomen appointed as Canons and Archdeacons would be a catalyst for greater transformation in gender relations within the Church and thereafter in rural Swazi society.

To follow this logic to its natural conclusion, there needs to be at some stage, and the time has not yet been reached for this to be agreeable either to the laity or to the clergy, an amendment to Agenda 55 of the 2003 Diocesan Synod<sup>9</sup> that permits women to be eligible to be elected to the one clerical order that they are still barred from – the Bishopric. For the greatest transformation of all would occur if Anglicans in Swaziland had a female shepherd of the diocesan flock. It may well usher in a period of unprecedented change and transformation.

### **The Second Way Forward**

In my personal capacity as a parish priest the second way forward must be to make it a priority to preach and promulgate from the pulpit and Bible study groups an

---

<sup>9</sup> Admittedly there would need to be a resolution passed at a future Provincial Synod first.

alternative hermeneutic of interpretation of the Biblical texts concerning the role and rights of women, and to encourage other clergy to do likewise: to communicate the idea that even though, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE women were subjected to subservient status by socio-religious forces, Jesus still transformed the lives of some of those women whom he encountered, despite the prejudices of society of their day. And just as in Swaziland, especially in rural areas, women are treated as second class citizens., so too can their lives can be liberated from cultural expectations, and oppressive rituals which they are coerced into and which reduce their value as human beings.

The liberation of the minds and freeing of the consciousnesses of Swazi women especially from androcentric understandings of Holy Scripture will empower them to read the Bible with new eyes and find for themselves Jesus' transformative encounters with women. Mark's message for Christian women in rural Swaziland is that they too can emulate the brave faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman, and the Bleeding woman, and the vigilant faith of Mary Magdalene and the other women at 15:40-4, and the prophetic act of the Anointing woman. In other words they can follow Jesus as these women did. Thus they would be able to nurture a positive self-image, and a realisation of their own intrinsic worth, and be made aware of the injustice and oppression caused by certain cultural rituals, and that such rituals conflict with the values Jesus taught and lived by in Mark's Gospel.

Equally critically Christian men in rural Swaziland must be enlightened to the fact that there were indeed female followers of Jesus, and that as this study has shown, women followers were usually more faithful and more effective as followers than the male disciples. Male church members in rural areas must understand that with regards to female clergy a need arises to respect them and allow clergywomen to minister to them, and for Christian men to understand that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE both women and men were welcomed into Jesus' new faith-community wherein existed a relational dynamic of equality, and so it should be with the Church of God.

So, I suggest that if these two ways were followed over time, lifelong attitudes on the subjugated role of women, conditioned by androcentric society and oppressive cultural rituals would gradually be abandoned in favour of a new mentality whereby people would see how critical women were to the life and ministry of Jesus, and therefore how critical they are to the Church. Not at the expense of men, but together with them. For just as the Twelve males disciples were called and commissioned (3:13), and who were duly despatched as Apostles (6:7-13), were crucial to the

ministry of Jesus, so too were the faithful female followers (15:40-41) who remained loyal even to the empty tomb. Following Christ was open to both men and women, and both men and women were welcomed and embraced when they followed Christ. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE it was not their gender that qualified the male disciples and women characters to be followers of Jesus, but the theological significance of the one whom they were following. And so it is today.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Secondary Literature**

- Anderson, J. & Moore, S. (eds) **Mark & Method** (Fortress 1992 USA)
- Best, E. **Disciples and Discipleship** (T&T Clark 1986 UK)
- Best, E. **Following Jesus. Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark** (Sheffield 1981 UK)
- Bowman, J. **The Gospel of Mark** (Leiden 1965 Holland)
- Branscomb, B. **Gospel of Mark** (Hodder & Stoughton 1946 UK)
- Bratcher, R. & Nida, E. **A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark** (Leiden 1961 Holland)
- Burridge, R. **4 Gospels, 1 Jesus?** (SPCK 1994 UK)
- Carrington, P. **According to Mark** (Cambridge 1960 UK)
- Cole, R. **Mark – Tyndale NT Commentaries** (IVP 1989 UK)
- English, D. **The Message of Mark** (IVP 1992 UK)
- Evans, M. **Women in the Bible** (Paternoster 1983 UK)
- France, R. **The Gospel of Mark. A commentary on the Greek Text** (Eerdmans 2002 USA)
- Grundy, R. **A Commentary on His apology for the Cross** (Eerdmans 1993 USA)
- Hare, D. **Mark** (Westminster 1996 USA)
- Hooker, M. **The Gospel according to St Mark** (A&C Black 1991 UK)
- Humphrey, H. **He is Risen! A new reading of Mark's Gospel** (Paulist 1992 USA)
- Juel, D. **The Gospel of Mark** (Abingdon 1999 USA)
- King, N. **Whispers of Liberation** (Paulist 1998 USA)
- Kingsbury, J. **Conflict in Mark. Jesus, Authorities, Disciples** (Fortress 1989 USA)
- Kingsbury, J.(ed)**Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social Scientific Approaches** (Trinity 1997 USA)
- Kinukawa, H. **Women and Jesus in Mark** (Orbis 1994 USA)

- Kitzberger, I (ed) **Transformative Encounters. Jesus and Women Reviewed** (Brill 2000 Holland)
- Lane, W. **The Gospel According to Mark** (Eerdmans 1974 USA)
- Levine, A. (ed) **A Feminist Companion to Mark** (Sheffield 2001 UK)
- Longenecker, R. (ed) **Patterns of discipleship in the New Testament** (Eerdmans 1996 USA)
- Malbon, E **In the Company of Jesus – Characterisation in Mark’s Gospel** (Westminster 2000 USA)
- Mann, C. **Mark** (Doubleday 1986 USA)
- Marcus, J. **The Way of the Lord** (John Knox 1992 USA)
- Matsebula, J.S.M. **‘The Church of the Province in South Africa (The Anglican Church) in Swaziland’**. Unpublished document. Printed January 1976.
- Moltmann-Wendel, E. **The Women around Jesus** (Crossroad 1997 USA)
- Metzger, B. **The Greek New Testament** (American Bible Society 1966 USA)
- Miller, S. **Women in Mark’s Gospel** (T&T Clark 2004 UK)
- Myers, C. **Binding the Strong Man** (Orbis 1988 USA)
- Newsom, C. & Ringe, S. (eds) **Women’s Bible Commentary** (John Knox 1992 USA)
- Nineham, D. **Saint Mark** (Penguin 1963 UK)
- Painter, J. **Mark’s Gospel** (Routledge 1997 UK)
- Rawlinson, A. **St. Mark** (Methuen 1960 UK)
- Rhoads, D. & Michie, D. **Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel** (Fortress 1982 USA)
- Russell, L. (ed) **Feminist Interpretation of the Bible** (Westminster 1985 USA)
- Santos, N. **Slave of All** (JSNT/Sheffield 2003 UK)
- Schussler Fiorenza, E. **Discipleship of Equals** (SCM 1993 UK)
- Schussler Fiorenza, E. **In Memory of Her** (SCM 1983 UK)



- Schussler Fiorenza, E. **Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation** (Beacon Press 1984 USA)
- Schussler Fiorenza, E. (ed) **Searching the Scriptures** (SCM 1994 USA)
- Selvidge, M. **Woman, Cult and Miracle Recital** (AUP 1990 USA)
- Stanton, G. **The Gospels and Jesus** (Oxford 1989 UK)
- Stock, A. **The Call to Discipleship** (Glazier 1982 USA)
- Stock, A. **The Method and Message of Mark** (M. Glazier 1989 USA)
- Suggit, J. **St. Mark the Evangelist** (Mercer Books 2002 RSA)
- Swartley, W. **Mark: The Way for all Nations** (Herald Press 1981 USA)
- Taylor, V. **The Gospel according to Mark** (Macmillan 1966 UK)
- Telford, W. **Mark. New Testament Guides** (Sheffield 1997 UK)
- Thompson, M. **The role of Disbelief in Mark** (Paulist 1989 USA)
- Waetjen, H. **A Re-ordering of Power** (Fortress Press 1989 USA)
- Weeden, T. **Traditions in Conflict** (Fortress Press 1971 USA)
- Weems, R. **Just a Sister Away** (Innisfree 1988 USA)
- Witherington, B. **Women in the Ministry of Jesus** (Cambridge 1984 UK)
- Zerwick, M. **A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament** (Biblical Institute Press 1974 Italy)

- **Journals**

- Catchpole, D. 1977 'The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb' JTSA 18 p4
- Haber, S. 2003 'A Woman's Touch: feminist Encounters with the Hemorrhaging Woman in Mark 5:24-34' JSNT 26.2 pp180, 184
- Hartin, P. 1993 'The role of women disciples in Mark's narrative' Theologia Evangelica 26 pp44, 94-95.
- Milne, D. 1990 'Mark – The Gospel of Servant Discipleship' The Reformed Theological Review 49 p25.
- Munro, W. 1982 'Women disciples in Mark?' CBQ 44 pp226-8, 233.

- Selvidge, M. 1983 'And Those Who Followed Feared' (Mark10:32) CBQ 45 p84.
- Santos, N. 1997 'The Paradox of Authority and Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark' Bibliotheca Sacra 154 pp175-6, 452
- Trakatellis, D. 1985 'Follow Me (Mark 2:14) Discipleship and Priesthood' Greek Orthodox Theological Review Vol 30 No 3 pp276-8
- Williams, J. 1996 'Discipleship and Minor Characters in Mark's Gospel' Bibliotheca Sacra 153 p338.
- Wright, A. 1982 'The Widow's Mites: Praise or Lament? – A Matter of Context' CBQ 44 pp257-8, 261-3.

- **Bibles**

**New International Version** (International Bible Society, Hodder & Stoughton, 1973, USA)

**New Jerusalem Bible** (Darton Longman Todd, 1985, UK)

**New Revised Standard Version Bible** (Zondervan, 1993, USA)

**Novum Testamentum Graece** (OXONII, 1947, UK)

**Revised English Bible** (Oxford U/ Cambridge U, 1989, UK)

- **Concordance**

**The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible** (Nelson, 1984, USA)

- **Dictionaries**

**Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** Ed G. Kittel (Eerdmans 1967 Holland)

- **Other Sources.**

**Register of Diocesan Synods**, Diocesan Office, Mbabane, Swaziland.

**New Bible Atlas** (IVP 1992 USA)