Making Sense of the New Testament

The Four Gospels
This presentation will be available at:  www.rockforddiocese.org.

Click on Education/Adult Faith Formation/Ministry Formation Classes
“The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures”

CCC 125
Holy God, We thank you for the gracious gift of faith. With the apostles before us, we ask that you open our hearts to the power of your Word and increase our faith that we may be bold followers and joyful witnesses to the message and mission of your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Seven Key Moments

1. Exodus
2. Abraham
3. Creation
4. Monarchy
5. Prophets
6. Exile
7. Restoration
7 Key OT Moments Review

- **Exodus** – God is a freedom-giver
- **Abraham** – God is trust-worthy
- **Creation** – God gives life and sustains it
- **Monarchy** – God’s anointed representatives failed yet promises a future ‘messiah’ will come
- **Prophets** – spoke for God: criticized, grieved, anticipated God’s future reign
- **Exile** – ‘time out’ for inattentiveness
- **Restoration** – God is an exile-ender + ‘home-bringer’
Formation of the Gospels – CCC 126

1. The Life and Teaching of Jesus – birth-30
2. The Oral Tradition – c. 30-65
3. The Written Gospels – c. 65-90

“There is no doctrine which could be better, more precious and more splendid than the text of the Gospel.”  CCC 127
Modern Biblical Interpretation

• **Hermeneutics** – art/science of biblical interpretation
• **Exegesis** – “reading out” the meaning of the text
• **3 Criteria** – CCC 109-114 > a. author’s intent, b. literary form, c. context w/ Bible + Church teaching
• World behind the text → TEXT ← World in front of the text
• **Biblical Criticism** (analysis) / Historical-Critical Method
  ✓ Historical Criticism
  ✓ Source Criticism
  ✓ Text Criticism
  ✓ Literary Criticism
  ✓ Form Criticism
Synoptic Gospels

- Syn-optic = can be viewed together
- Marcan priority
- Literary dependence
- “Q” = quelle = sayings source

Two Source Hypothesis

- Mark
- Q
- Matthew
- Luke
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Luke</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots, then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”</td>
<td>Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!”</td>
<td>When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Making Sense of the New Testament

The Four Gospels
1. Mark: Jesus is the Suffering Servant

- Written 60-70 AD
- Christian Community under persecution by Nero
- Modeled on Isaiah 53
- A Key Text: 8:34
- Discipleship: Bartimaeus in 10:46-52
- 15:39 – “Truly, this man was the Son of God”
Mark’s Structure

- Panel 1/Ch 1-8 – Acts of Power + Failure to comprehend
- Link/8-10 – “You are the Messiah”
- Panel 2/11-16 – “Passion and Death”
“The author of Mark was apparently trying to make it clear that no one, not even the disciples who lived and traveled with him for months on end, could understand Jesus apart from his passion. Mk’s gospel is therefore a warning. Any attempt to understand Jesus apart from his passion will inevitably fall into error. The mystery of who Jesus really was (= messianic secret) cannot be penetrated until God himself lifts the veil by raising the crucified Jesus from the dead.” P. Achtemeier
Distinctive Texts

• 3:21 – “he is out of his mind”

• Mk 6:3-6 – “So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there”

• Mk 8:14-21 – “Do you still not understand?”

• 8:22-26 – “I see people looking like trees...”

• 15:22-40 – The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus
Themes in Mark

• **The Cost of Discipleship** – involves persecution and suffering, but leads to vindication. There is no Easter joy apart from Good Friday suffering

• True faith involves *Conversion*: “Reform your lives and believe in the gospel” (1:15)
2. Matthew: Jesus is the Authoritative Teacher

- **Written 80—90 AD**
- **Community: Jewish Christians searching for their religious identity**
- **Jesus = new Moses, fulfills OT Law, speaks with authority...**
- **5 Discourses**
- **Key Texts: chapters 5-7, 16:18, Infancy Narrative**
- **Discipleship: greater righteousness, 5:20**
- **House built on rock vs. sand – 7:24-29**
“This new synthesis of Mark, Q, and M was necessitated by a severe crisis in the author’s church. Stringently Jewish in origins, it had experienced the trauma of separation from the synagogue and a great influx of Gentiles into its ranks. This shift in its Christian existence demanded a new interpretation of old traditions, a new way of looking at Christ and his church, at the Old Testament and salvation history, at discipleship and morality.” — John Meier, Matthew
5 Discourses in Matthew

- **5-7 – Sermon on the Mount**
- **10 – Missionary Discourse**
- **13 – Parables**
- **18 – Community Life**
  - Childlike humility (1-4)
  - Special care for weak (5)
  - Against scandal (6-9)
  - Concern for lost souls (10-14)
  - Fraternal correction (15-18)
  - Common prayer + unity (19-20)
  - Complete, unfailing forgiveness (21-25)
- **24-25 – End of Time**
Discipleship

- 5:20 “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven”

- 23:1-36 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees...”

- Symbolize → hypocrisy, ostentatiousness, legalism, misplaced emphases, self-righteousness

- 28:16-20 “baptize, ... teach”
## Distinctive Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16:18-19</td>
<td>“...you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church... I will give you the keys to the kingdom...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:28-31</td>
<td>“Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 23</td>
<td>“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:23</td>
<td>Jesus is “Emmanuel”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:20</td>
<td>“where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28:20</td>
<td>“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes in Matthew

- Jesus is the **New Moses**, one who teaches *with authority*, the **fulfillment of the Law** and the Prophets (OT promises).

- The inner *life of the Church* is modeled on Jesus and his life giving presence which prompts love, reconciliation, compassion

- *Peter* = commissioned to lead
3. Luke: Jesus is the Universal Savior

- **Written mid-80s; Luke-Acts**

- **Community:** wealthier Gentile urban Christians, in need of reassurance that Israel’s God is their God too

- **Key Text:** 4:16-30 – Jesus offers salvation to all

- **Stylistic features:** Journey to Jerusalem – 9:51-19:27; Meals; Infancy Narrative, parables

- **Discipleship:** 19:1-10
Literary Style – “verbal portrait artist” – “Luke is an economical writer. This evangelist avoids repetitions and superfluous information. He tells a story well, with attention given to rising action, climax, and denouement. His use of Greek is among the finest in the NT, and he is well versed in Greco-Roman literary style. His prose has a nobility that has made this Gospel a favorite of many.”

“The problem is simple but profound, God’s promises had been made to Israel through Abraham. If that historical people was not now in possession of the blessings, and other people were, what did that imply about God’s faithfulness to his promises? Had God utterly betrayed his people? And in so doing, he had also proven himself faithless? ... If God had failed the Jews, could he not betray the Gentiles even more easily?
“[Luke] wanted his readers to know that they [i.e. Gentiles] had been included in God’s plan of salvation from the beginning, even though historically the Jews were the first to hear the message as the channel for all others. The story of salvation unraveled according to the exact plan of God, just as was promised in the Old Testament. It is a journey to the kingdom under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

Luke’s Structure

- Teaching **crowds** w/ warnings of judgment and calls to discipleship; **opponents** w/ parables warning of rejection; **disciples** w/ specific instructions on prayer, hospitality, suffering and possessions = Jesus is forming a true people of God (reconstituted Israel) around himself
Discipleship as Journey

“The primary task of the disciples in this section is to be ‘with’ Jesus (also see Acts 13:31), for only then are they prepared to be witnesses to him. Being with Jesus ‘on the way’ is a favorite metaphor of Luke for what God is doing to redeem the world. The ‘way’ to Jerusalem becomes the paradigm of the church as it seeks to follow the Way of God. Thus, teaching those who are with him on the way is a most appropriate activity.”

D. Barr, New Testament Story, 309
Distinctive Texts

- 4:16-30 – *Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth*
- 19:1-10 – *Zacchaeus*
- 24:50-53, Acts 1:6-12 – *Ascension*
- **Canticles**
  - *Magnificat* (1:46-55),
  - *Benedictus* (1:68-79),
  - *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-31),
  - *Gloria in Excelsis* (2:14)
Luke’s Themes

• **The Holy Spirit** – referenced more than Mk and Mt combined. Influences and empowers the life of Jesus as he will the Church in Acts

• **Prayer** – hymns and prayers abound throughout. Here Jesus prays before every major event. Extensive instructions on prayer (11:1-13, 18:1-14)

• **God’s Extravagant Love shown through Jesus’ Compassion for the Poor and Lowly** – “a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners” (7:34), Jesus openly accepts social outcasts, including immoral women. Luke’s version of the great banquet, the host’s doors are thrown open indiscriminately to “the poor, the lame and the blind,” people incapable of reciprocating hospitality (14:12-24).

• **Jerusalem**: the locus of salvation – the Gospel is the only one to begin and end in Jerusalem with the entire middle part detailing Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, where his passion, death and resurrection take place as well as the beginning of the Church (cf. Acts 1:8).
4. John: Jesus Reveals God the Father

- Written in the 90s
- Community: “expelled from the synagogue” by “the Jews”
- Jesus is the Word made Flesh who comes from the Father to reveal God and then return exalted
- “Maverick Gospel”
- Ch 1-12 = 7 ‘signs’ ch 13-20 = ‘lifted up’/‘hour’
  \( \text{ch 1= prologue} \quad \text{ch 21 = epilogue} \)
- Discipleship = ‘believe’ 15:5
- Key texts: 1:1-18, “I AM” statements
“One of the most striking features of the Gospel of John is its different portrayal of Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels we see much more of the humanity of Jesus. In John, Jesus is a majestic, serene figure, omniscient and totally in control of his destiny at all times.”

Scott Lewis, The Gospel According to John
John’s Structure

- **4 Parts:**
  - Prologue (1:1-18) – major themes and motifs / pre-existent Word
  - Book of Signs (1:19-12) – 7 miracles / signs
  - Book of Glory (13-20) – Jesus’ teachings + his ‘hour’
  - Epilogue (21) – Risen Jesus to Peter: Love me? / Tend Sheep

- **Descent / Ascent** – from God to God, pre-existence – world – lifted up (3:13, 12:31, 3:14, 13:3)
“I AM” statements

- Bread of Life – 6:35, cf. 6:51
- Light of the World – 8:12, 9:5
- Gate – 10:7, 9
- Good Shepherd – 10:11, 14
- Resurrection and the Life – 11:25
- Way, Truth, Life – 14:6
- Vine – 15:1,5
Fascinating People / Models of Discipleship

• Samaritan woman – 4:4-42

• Nicodemus – 3:1-21, 7:50-51, 19:39


• Thomas – 20:24-29

• “The importance of a personal relationship, a faith commitment to Jesus by the individual person, remains paramount.” John O’Grady
Importance of Love – ‘the New Commandment’

• ‘the world’ – 12:31, 14:30, 16:11


• no mention to love enemies, neighbors, or Jews, but cf. 1 John 4:20
Distinctive Texts

- 1:1-18 - Prologue
- 13:34-35 – New Commandment
- 15:1-17 – Vine/Branches, Remain in me
- 19:25-37 – Crucifixion
- 21:15-19 – Jesus and Peter
Themes in John

- **Eternal Life is Now for those who Believe** – 5:24, 10:10, 17:3, 20:31, 10:28
- “**Realized Eschatology**” / “the already but not yet”
- “**Faith in the Fourth Gospel is the human response to the revelation of Jesus.** This faith consists in an active acceptance, seen in the author’s choice of a verb to believe rather than just the noun belief. Jesus demands a decision as he encounters individuals.”
  
  John O’Grady, *According to John*
This presentation will be available at: www.rockforddiocese.org.

Click on Education/Adult Faith Formation/Ministry Formation Classes