

JUNE 12TH, 2016: ELEVENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
II Samuel 12:7-10, 13 Galatians 2:16, 19-21 Luke 7:36-8:3

One of the keys to understanding Matthew and Luke's theology is to employ "redaction criticism." That particular exegetical tool, developed after World War II, tries to surface how each of the two evangelists changed the material he copied from earlier authors in order to convey his unique theology. Matthew and Luke just didn't copy from their sources; they redacted them. Today's gospel pericope supplies us with a classic example of Luke's redaction.

Notice at the end of the passage, the evangelist mentions "accompanying (Jesus) were . . . some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities . . ." He then goes on to name Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, ". . . and many others who provided for them out of their resources."

Though one source which Luke had in front of him when he composed his gospel – Mark's gospel – also mentioned the women who followed Jesus, it doesn't do so until after Jesus dies in chapter 15. It's almost a surprise to discover Jesus had attracted women disciples.

Luke, on the other hand, redacts Mark, moving his remark about the women up to chapter 7, a third the way into his gospel. So whenever Luke refers to Jesus's disciples throughout the rest of his gospel, we're to presume that includes male *and* female followers! Certainly different from what we find in the other three gospels.

We can always count on Luke to give women an even break. He, for instance, not only makes Jesus' mother the ideal Christian, his Jesus also reminds Martha that her sister Mary, by listening to him, has "chosen the better part." And in today's pericope, he praises the faith of the sinful woman who anointed him and bathed his feet with her tears.

As Paul reminds the Galatians in today's second reading, faith is always more important than "works of the law." The Apostle is forced to say this because he's being challenged by conservative Jewish Christians due to his converting non-Jews to Christianity without first converting them to Judaism. These "Judaizers" insist that any follower of Jesus must also follow the 613 laws of Moses. Unless they perform such works they're not "justified:" doing what God wants them to do.

Paul is convinced that justification revolves around giving ourselves to the risen Jesus: making his/her faith our faith. He doesn't object to anyone keeping the Mosaic laws for extra credit. But these regulations certainly aren't obligatory. Faith, for the Apostle, is rooted in our becoming other Christs. And Gentiles can pull that off just as well as Jews.

The key aspect of Jesus' faith was his relationships with people. Those personal encounters, in Jesus' mind, always trumped just keeping religious laws.

Even the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, as we hear in today's II Samuel reading, stressed the priority of relationships. Nathan confronts David over the issue of Bathsheba not so much because the king broke Yahweh's laws, but because the Gentile Uriah had rights as Bathsheba's husband that not even a king could disregard. Only when David recognizes his sin against Uriah does he also recognize, "I have sinned against Yahweh."

The authors of our Christian Scriptures were convinced that the historical Jesus of Nazareth didn't create a new religion as much as he created a new focus. He didn't eradicate the Mosaic Law; he simply taught his followers to focus beyond it.

In Luke's theology, other Christs are expected to uniquely focus on women. His gospel Jesus is always concerned with what he can do for them; not what they can do for him. That's why, according to the late Fr. Frank Cleary, such women would do anything for him – even "provide for (him) out of their resources."

JUNE 19TH, 2016: TWELFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1 Galatians 3:26-29 Luke 9:18-24

One of the keys to learning the minds of our sacred authors is to learn how they use certain words. The same word may have different meanings for different authors. For instance, in today's gospel when Luke has Peter declare that Jesus is the "Christ of God," he's simply saying Jesus is Yahweh's Messiah. But when Paul employs the same word – Christ – in our Galatians pericope, he's referring to the risen Jesus, not the historical Jesus.

It's ironic that the historical Jesus' original disciples had just as many problems with his "Messiahship" as his latter disciples had with his being risen. Both concepts could be horribly misunderstood.

As regards Jesus being the Messiah, there's no one concept of Messiah that runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Each period of history came up with its own idea of what Yahweh's Anointed should be and do. One generation of Jews might not even recognize the Messiah which another generation longed for. During the ministry of Jesus, for instance, most Jews were convinced Yahweh's Messiah would be a military leader who would forcibly get rid of the Romans who were occupying the Promised Land. Yet, when Jesus' followers gave that title to him, they were working from a different definition than most of their contemporaries. So, when Peter says, "You're the Christ of God!" he was looking at Jesus from a unique perspective.

In a parallel way, what did Paul mean when he employed Christ as a title for the risen Jesus? Is the risen Jesus, as many Christians seem to believe, simply a resuscitated historical Jesus? Nothing could be further from Paul's faith. In today's Galatians passage, he gives his idea of what this "new creation" – the risen Jesus - really is. But he basically does so by saying what he/she isn't. "For all of you," he writes, "who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In other words, "If you have become other Christs, you, like he/she, aren't limited by the restrictions people on this planet normally have to labor under.

Capuchin author and lecturer Michael Crosby once mentioned, "It took the church about thirty years before it got rid of the distinction between Jews and Greeks, another 1900 years before slave and free persons fell by the way, and we're still working on the male/female thing."

Though we have no idea who the "pierced" individual is in our Zechariah reading, it's clear that faith in Yahweh entails suffering. Only after a period of "mourning" will God's followers receive the purification for which they're longing. Nothing important in our faith happens unless someone first undergoes pain.

I presume it was painful for many first century Jewish Christians to see people like Paul bring Gentiles into the faith as Gentiles, or for some early 19th century American Catholic religious communities to finally admit that owning slaves is against God's will. It's just as painful today for many traditional Christians to accept gender equality. Yet, if we follow the risen Jesus, we must mirror the risen Jesus.

As I mentioned last week, Luke frequently redacts Mark. He added just one word to the saying he copied from his predecessor in today's passage. Mark's Jesus simply says, "We are to take up our cross and follow him." But Luke's Jesus says, "We must take up our cross *daily* and follow him."

For Luke, we have to carry that cross every day of our lives. Every day we're to endure the pain of discovering the risen Jesus among us.