

humility ‘unless you change and become like little children’. He also reveals the procedure to be adopted over a sinner in the community: they are to be treated like a lost sheep, with love and persuasion the main weapons to achieve reconciliation. There is a quasi-legal necessity that any charge must be substantiated by two or three witnesses before bringing any unresolved matter to the attention of the community as a whole. It is also made clear that no limits are placed on forgiveness.



The Greek word used for ‘community’ is ekklesia, and it is used only twice in the synoptic Gospels, both in Matthew (ch.16 & 18). Although this word in Greek usually has no religious meaning, it is used to translate the Hebrew Qahal which is used of a religious assembly. It is clearly meant to have this significance in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew’s ‘Church discourse’ also stresses the need for community prayer, for the benefits that such prayer brings.

Jesus’ Passover Discourse in John’s Gospel

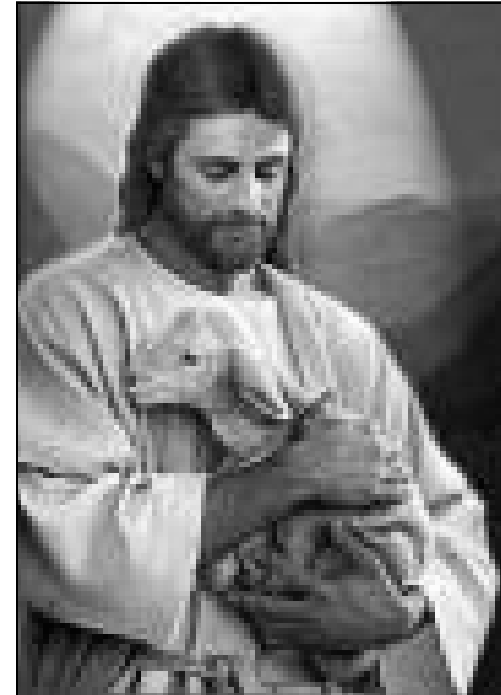
Jesus’ actions and discourse show that he intended his mission to be continued after his death through his disciples. He washes his disciples’ feet (ch.13) to show the type of leaders he wants them to be, he promises them the Holy Spirit to help them in that mission (ch.14, 15, 16), he gives the powerful image of a community bound to him like a vine (ch.15), he tells them of the difficulties they will face (ch.15) and he prays to his father to guide and protect them (ch.17). These are the words of someone who is leaving a continuing community behind him.

Jesus’ Great Command

In Matthew (ch.28) and Mark (ch.16) Jesus gives the great command for the disciples to make disciples of all nations and to preach the Gospel. Luke contains the same command in Acts 1. It is clear that Jesus intended his message to be spread throughout the world. Just as he created an organisation around him in the form of the disciples, so he intended the disciples to create a similar community of believers.

Jesus in the Gospels

14. Jesus’ Creation of the Church



Questions For Reflection

1. Did Jesus really set out to found a Church?
2. What is the importance of Peter’s Profession of Faith in Matthew’s Gospel?
3. What does Matthew chapter 18 tell us about the early Church?

It is sometimes said, when talking about Christianity, that there is no evidence that Jesus ever intended to found a Church. The answer to this depends on what a person calls a Church. If a Church is a community of believers with a measure of organisation under a leadership, then there is evidence that Jesus wanted such a community to exist after his death.



Jesus and his Disciples

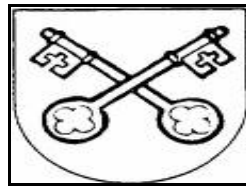
As a great preacher and miracle worker, Jesus had many followers who would accompany him on his journeys. It is easy to get the impression from individual passages of the Gospels and from films we may have seen about Jesus' life that he only had twelve regular disciples. But if we read the gospels carefully it is clear that he was followed by many people, with Luke ch.10 depicting 72 being given a preaching role on one occasion, but that he chose twelve special ones to be a kind of elite inner circle. This is made clear in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels that Jesus handpicked the Twelve, Luke emphasising that this was only after careful prayer (Mk.3 //Lk.6).

It is also clear that Jesus' message was to be spread to as many people as possible. Initially this was only to Jews, as can be seen in the Mission of the Twelve (Mtt.10 //Mk.6 //Lk.9) but later to gentiles too, with the Mission of the 72 disciples (Lk.10).

Jesus Choice of Peter as First Amongst Equals

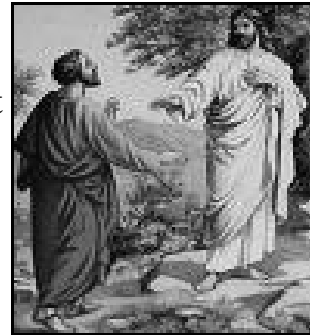
The choice of Peter as leader of the Twelve is based on Matthew 16, after Peter's profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus is shown as giving him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, with power to 'bind and loose'. As this is not given in Mark or Luke, and as it is such a crucial text, then it can be supposed either that Matthew had a source for this that the other two did not or, more likely, that he was creating a situation to add support to Peter for some reason. This view is supported by the fact that Matthew also describes the power to 'bind or loose' being given to all the disciples (ch.18), a power that in

John's Gospel is given after Jesus' resurrection (ch.20). Indirect support for Peter's case as 'first amongst equals' is also made by Matthew in the way that he is shown as the one who initiates a response from Jesus, as at Caesarea Philippi when he is the first to answer Jesus' question; when Jesus walks on the water Matthew (ch.14) alone depicts Peter as the one who goes to meet him; Matthew alone (ch.18) gives Peter as the one asking the question about how often we should forgive someone.



The other Gospels also indirectly show Peter in a leading role, as when he asks the question what is to be their reward for renouncing their former lives to follow Jesus (Mtt.19 // Mk.10 //Lk.18), and when Jesus rebukes Peter for his response about the prophecy of the Passion (Mtt.16 // Mk.8) and when Peter claims he would never run away from Jesus (Mtt.26 // Mk.14 // Lk.22 // Jn.13)) or when he at first refuses to let Jesus wash his feet (Jn.13), or when he actually denies knowledge of Jesus (Mtt.26 // Mk.14 //Lk.22 // Jn.18).

An important factor is the way in which the names of the Twelve are given. Peter is always placed first in the lists (Mtt.10) //Mk.3 // Lk.9). In addition, whenever Jesus only takes a limited number of disciples with him, Peter is always there and always listed first, as at the Transfiguration or at the cure of Jairus' daughter (Mk.5 // Lk.8).



Importantly, at the end of John's Gospel (ch.21) Jesus asks a three-fold question of Peter about his love, with a command at the end of each 'to feed my sheep'. No doubt, John is recording Peter's prime role both amongst the Twelve and within the new community after Jesus' death.

Matthew's Discourse on the Church

Matthew's Gospel (ch.18) contains explicit material about the situation facing the Christian community after Jesus' death. Matthew has schematically grouped together material found in scattered units in the other Gospels. On the subject of leadership, he stresses the need for