



Workshop Title: The Gospels – A brief introduction

Learning Intentions:

- To gain a basic understanding of the structure of the Bible and the place within this structure for the Gospels.
- To understand the differences between the four Gospels in terms of time of writing, audience and key messages.
- To help a person have the confidence to read and explore a Gospel.

Summary of Learning:

The Bible is a collection of books that is best seen as a Library rather than one book. The two main sections of the Bible are the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). The OT is also known as the Hebrew Scriptures and covers God's relationship with the Jewish people until the birth of Jesus. The NT covers the life of Jesus and the history of the early Christian Church. The NT focuses on our relationship with Jesus.

The NT contains four Gospels, The Acts of the Apostles, Letters mainly written by St Paul and the Book of Revelations. The four Gospels all recount the events of Jesus' life and each tries to bring meaning to these events. The Four Gospels, in order of their creation are Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The first three are often referred to as the Synoptic Gospels. When looking at the Gospels it is important to understand when they were written and the audience for whom they were written. We must also remember that they were written after the events and so we need to appreciate the benefit of hindsight held by the author.

Mark.

Generally seen as the earliest Gospel it also the shortest. Written approximately 60 CE it is understood Mark was a second generation Christian. Mark wrote his Gospel to a Gentile community. Gentiles were Christians who had not come from the Jewish Tradition. It appears Mark's community was predominantly in Rome and facing persecution. Its key focus is the person of Jesus and his mission.

Matthew

Matthew and Luke were written at about the same time. It is clear they had read Mark and both seem to also have access to a source academics now refer to as 'Q'. Matthew wrote his Gospel to a Christian Community that had come from the Jewish faith. Matthew begins his Gospel explaining the Jewish heritage of Jesus. It is placed first and it connects the OT to the NT. Matthew is very committed to emphasising these links. Matthew often uses the expression "to fulfil the scriptures". It was written about 85 CE. There is an emphasis on Jesus as the Messiah.

Luke

Also written around 85 CE Luke wrote his Gospel to the Greek speaking gentile Christians. He also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Luke is the only Gospel to tell of the events before the birth of Jesus. His Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem and he uses this sacred city as both an historical and spiritual metaphor. Luke has a strong focus on discipleship and social justice.

John

It is generally accepted that this Gospel was written from within the Johannine community which was a group of Theologians. It was written about 100 CE and is referred to as a spiritual Gospel. It reflects the deeper questions which had developed over the 70 years since the death of Jesus. It has a much greater focus on spiritual meaning rather than historical events.