

# Jesus' followers discover their mission

By Cindy Bassett  
Catholic Courier columnist

"Peter, is Jesus going to leave us?" Andrew asked as he helped his brother pull their boat from the Sea of Galilee.

"It sounded that way the last time he came to see us all," Peter replied.

"But, we've just begun our work in Jerusalem," Andrew continued. "If others could only see for themselves that Jesus has risen and he is alive, I am sure we would gain many new followers."

Peter did not answer this last remark. He was tending to the business of the morning's catch of fish. Soon they were joined on the beach by two other brothers, James and John. Thomas and Matthew were passing by and seeing the group, they both came over, too.

"How's the fishing? Do you plan to go on as before with your business?" James asked.

"The first time I ever met Jesus was right here on the beach," Peter answered. "And he told me that day that he would make me a 'fisher of men.' I suppose that is what I shall do now."

"Well, I would feel better about the whole thing if Jesus were still here with us to tell us just how to go about it," Andrew added.

"Andrew, you are mistaken," John said. "Jesus did teach us what to do while he was with us. And it's up to us now to bring his message to people everywhere."

"I agree," Matthew added. "I'm certainly not going back to being a tax collector for the Roman government. But I am good at record keeping. I could write down everything Jesus did and said while he was here with us."

"We must go to all nations of the world and baptize new followers in Jesus' name," James said. "For anyone who believes in Jesus and is sorry for sins, there is forgiveness and eternal life. That's the great promise Jesus left for all of his followers."

"These people will never see Jesus for themselves. What if they don't believe us?" Thomas asked rather sheepishly.

"We will give them visible signs," James suggested. "Jesus promised us that

we would be given the power to perform the same miracles that he did while he was with us — to heal the sick, to cast out demons."

"And if they still don't believe us, this time I am willing to die rather than deny that I am a follower of Jesus," Peter said.

"Now it sounds like we are all going away," Matthew said. "How shall we all live?"

"By selling our possessions and putting the money in a common fund," Peter said. "We shall be the servants to all as well as to each other."

"Before we do anything, we must wait for the Spirit to come as Jesus promised," Thomas told them. "Then we will truly be

faithful witnesses to all that Jesus taught us."

Everyone reflected on this last thought for a few minutes that morning on the beach. Jesus had changed all of their lives and they would never be the same.

"There is something we can do right now," John said. "It is perhaps the greatest sign of all that we can give to the world to show that we are followers of Jesus Christ. That last night before Jesus died, he gave us a new commandment. He told us to love each other as much as he loved us."

"I guess we are all settled on what we must do," Matthew said, smiling.

"There's just one more question," An-

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drew said.

"And what's that?" Peter asked.

"Jesus promised that he would return for us and all of his followers one day. When do you suppose that will be?" Andrew wondered.

"He never told us," John replied. "So the important thing is to be ready always."

Scripture reference: John 13:34-35.

Meditation: "I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains — but if I have no love, I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2)

## Could there be 'errors' in the New Testament?

### ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY



By Father Richard C. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

For nearly 20 centuries, the church has assumed the accuracy of the New Testament text it has employed for worship, for preaching, for teaching, and for spiritual nourishment.

But perhaps the church has been wrong all this time. Perhaps there are, after all, some fundamental errors in that text — errors so serious that they have led millions astray in their understanding of Christian discipleship.

Given the stubborn insistence of certain types of Catholics that their version of Christianity is the only correct one, and given the fact that their version is at odds with the one we find at key points in the New Testament, we are forced to come to one of two conclusions: either these self-described "faithful," "loyal," and "traditional" Catholics are wrong, or the church's copy of the New Testament is wrong.

Perhaps the strong things Jesus said about wealth are simply textual adjust-

ments made by some anti-capitalist forger, someone not appreciative of the wisdom of Adam Smith and of supply-side economics.

Perhaps Luke 18:25, in which Jesus warns that it is "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God," is a textual corruption. Perhaps the original text had it this way: "... than for a dissenter to enter the kingdom of God."

Perhaps in the original parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) Lazarus was a malingeringer whose union made unreasonable demands on his behalf. Perhaps the rich man was only trying to make Lazarus self-reliant when he refused to give him even scraps from his table.

Perhaps in the textually corrupted parable it was the good-for-nothing Lazarus who went to hell and the hard-working rich man who went to heaven as a reward for his spirit of free enterprise and personal initiative.

Perhaps Jesus never warned us against judging and condemning one another (Luke 7:37-42), but rather praised those who censure and harass God's apparent enemies. "Remove first the big beam in the dissenter's eye before attending to the tiny splinter in your own." Perhaps Jesus did put it that way.

When Jesus was at dinner with some Pharisees, a "sinful woman" came in to anoint his feet. One of the Pharisees grumbled, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a

sinner" (Luke 7:39).

Perhaps the original text has Jesus suddenly pulling away his foot and denouncing the woman for her sexual perversities. "Woman, until you abandon your promiscuous ways and do penance for your sins, you shall not touch me. Out of my sight!" Sound like the real Jesus?

How else account for church regulations forbidding women's feet to be washed at Holy Thursday liturgy? Perhaps someone in the bureaucracy has had the original, uncorrupted text all along.

Perhaps in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) it was really the priest, not the Samaritan, who stopped to aid the man who had been robbed and beaten.

Perhaps in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), when the shepherd realized that he had lost one of his hundred sheep, he said, "Good riddance! It's the dumb sheep's own fault for wandering away from the shepherd."

Perhaps in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) the father refused to welcome back the wayward son and instead threw a party for the other son who had remained on the farm and tended to the father's business.

Perhaps when the rich official came up to Jesus and rattled off all the Commandments that he kept (Luke 18:18-23), Jesus replied: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have kept the Commandments. Better still, you are able to recite them from memory! May every child from this day forward be taught to do the same."

Perhaps it was a socialist redactor who put these other words on Jesus' lips: "There is still one thing left for you: Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Perhaps Jesus never attacked the Pharisees for their slavish devotion to the law while forgetting justice and mercy (Matthew 22:23).

Perhaps Mark 5:36 is backwards. The church's text says: "Fear is useless. What is needed is trust." Should it read: "Trust is useless. What is needed is fear"?

And perhaps what Jesus really said in John 13:35 was: "This is how all will know you for my disciples: your opposition to birth control, your loyalty to Peter and his successors, your opposition to the ordination of women, your denunciation of theological dissent, your contempt for homosexuals, and your hunger for Marian apparitions."

In the original and uncorrupted words of St. Paul: "There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is obedience." No?

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