

3.1 The Disciples

We have noted in the previous unit that the calling of the disciples in the Gospel of Luke does not seem to occupy a place of priority. At least we consider that there are other aspects of the beginning of Jesus' ministry which seem to be of more importance to the narrator than the calling of the disciples. Nevertheless, when the narrator does introduce the first disciples they are introduced in a more elaborate way than in Matthew and Mark. The calling of the first disciples is set in a context of teaching. Jesus uses Simon's boat as a base. Thus we learn that Jesus' teaching had already attracted attention on a large scale before there were any specific followers, before a movement began to gather around him. The calling of Simon (Andrew is not mentioned) then is preceded by the miraculous catch of fish. This miraculous event rather than triggering joy or faith, causes fear and Simon identifies himself as a sinner. In being called to become a follower, he is reassured by Jesus, like Zechariah and Mary are reassured by Gabriel, with exactly the same words 'Do not be afraid' (Lk 5.10).

The disciples are presented as those who know the 'secrets of the kingdom' (Lk 8.10), they are sent to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal (Lk 9.1-6), they are involved in a controversy about their position in the kingdom (Lk 9.46-48), they are blessed (Lk 9.23-24), some teachings are specifically addressed to them (9.43; 12.22), they ask Jesus to teach them how to pray (11.1). In Acts the term 'disciple' is used as the designation for Christ-followers, which means that the narrator emphasizes the inherent link between those who followed Jesus during his ministry in Judaea and Galilee and those who follow 'the way' (Acts 18.25) after Christ's death and resurrection.

Mary and Martha (Lk 10.38-42) as Paradigmatic Disciples

The interpretation of the encounter of Jesus with Martha and Mary has given rise to a variety of interpretations. From the many options the focus here will be on the following options:

Is this a story about:

a) The role of women in the Jesus-Movement/Lukan communities or b) a story about discipleship

a) As a story about the role of women in the Christ-movement a number of interpretations have been promoted. It may be seen as indicating that in this movement women were in an exceptional way encouraged to embrace a role as disciples in that they were encouraged to learn at the feet of their teacher in a way that was not perceived as accurate within their traditional (Jewish) context. This encouragement of Mary thus means that the overcoming of traditional roles of women (serving, Martha) is advocated here. This type of interpretation, which has been put forward by several feminist interpreters is often combined with an anti-Jewish pattern contending that the role of the listening female disciple would have been impossible in Judaism, as women were not allowed to learn/teach Torah. Thus the encouragement of Mary in this role is interpreted as an act of emancipation from Jewish patriarchal restrictions. Not only is this a replication of patterns of Christian interpretation which use Judaism as a negative foil it is also historically incorrect as several recent analyses of the role of women in Judaism have demonstrated (cf. Tal Ilan 2006 on Women as Pharisees). Such an interpretation also seems to accept that Martha in her role of providing hospitality is treated unfairly since in providing hospitality she only did what elsewhere in the New Testament, and also in Luke-Acts is seen as of high significance. Thus the traditional role of women is down-played, and traditional evaluations of the division of work is reinforced. Interpretations which try to demonstrate the significance of women in the Jesus-movement are seemingly in contradiction to other sections of Luke-Acts where activities and values are promoted which actually encourage hospitality and the role of those serving others. For example, in Acts 16.14-15.40 Lydia, another woman is depicted as an important

disciples because she was one of those who offer hospitality to travelling apostles and other itinerant missionaries thereby providing important bases for the movement. And in Lk 22.24-27 Jesus presents himself as the exemplary servant who should be imitated by any true disciple.

b) In interpretations of this story as a story about discipleship rather than about the role of women the literary context is seen as significant. The scene is set in the context of the sending out of the seventy/two at the beginning of the chapter (10.1-12). Verses 7 and 8 are of particular worth noting 'Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you': the disciples are admonished to accept even to expect hospitality as a return for healing the sick and proclaiming the gospel. This clearly emphasized the value of hospitality. In the same chapter (v.25) the question 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' is answered in the parable of the good Samaritan which puts strong emphasis on the active, caring and hospitable dimension of discipleship. Within this context the story of Mary and Martha could be seen as sort of a counter balance. In as much as discipleship requires active responsibility, this narrative serves as an admonishment not to forget in all this activity that there is the need to hear, listen and then do. Thus in all their activity the disciples should not forget to listen to the word of the Lord. Significantly what follows is the scene in which the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. We therefore have here in these chapters 10 and 11.1-22 narrative outlines of what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. Thus the story of Martha and Mary is not directly a story about women in the Jesus-movement, but an example diverse aspects of discipleship.

Nevertheless it does shed light on the role of women in the movement. The fact that a 'women's story' is narrated to emphasize an important aspect of discipleship demonstrates that women must have been present in the movement and present in a way that it must have been acceptable for the male members to have them as main characters in a story of discipleship.

There must have been acceptance and recognition of women in the movement. Other examples indicate that women probably were holding leadership roles of house-churches. Lydia, for example in Acts 16.11-15, is singled out. She is a worshipper of God who meets at the synagogue apparently together with other women. She is named only by her own name which is an indication that she is without male connection/protection! She is presented as running her own business and having control over her own household, and as such she is able to provide hospitality to Paul and his company. Another woman mentioned in Acts 9, 36-43, Tabitha, is praised for her exemplary charity work in similar words as Cornelius' acts of charity are described (Acts 10.2). We learn little about her, but she is the only woman in the New Testament explicitly referred to as a disciple. This is the only occurrence of the female form of the term disciple at all.

The characteristics of discipleship are outlined here in narrative form and referred to later in the narrative in various sections again. The main features are according to Luke the healing activity, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, providing and accepting hospitality, listening to the word of the Lord, and prayer.

Essential Readings

- ** **3.1** Karris, Robert J. 'Women and Discipleship in Luke', in Levine A.J. ed.
 A Feminist Companion to Luke. London, New York: Continuum 2002, pp. 23-43

Further Readings

Tannehill, Robert C., *Luke*. Nashville, TN: Abdingdon Press 1996, pp. 99-101; 170-177; 185-187; 235-255.