

Study 6: Apostleship 101

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Please prepare for our meeting by reading **Luke 8:4-9:17** and thinking about the following questions. If you haven't time for everything, just do whatever you can – no one will check up on you. If possible, please bring a Bible with you to the meeting.

Questions marked with an asterisk are about your personal spiritual life, and intended mainly for personal meditation – you should not feel any pressure to talk about personal things unless you wish to.

In the last two studies we looked at some teachings and encounters recorded by St Luke which are not found in St Mark's Gospel. St Luke now returns to teachings and events which he found in St Mark's Gospel, although he sometimes brings his own perspectives to them. The passage covers quite a mixture of materials – parables, teachings and several miracles – but in many places we see the disciples, and especially the apostles, beginning to adjust their thinking about what to expect from Our Lord and about what Our Lord wants from them. And after a period of watching and listening to their teacher, they have to start doing the practicals.

1. The sower (8:4-15)

- i) If time allows, compare St Luke's version with St Mark's (Mark 1-20). Do you notice any differences?
- ii) The disciples, like the crowds, are hearers of Our Lord's teachings; but they will also be teachers themselves. Does this parable have a special message for preachers and teachers?
- iii) *What kind of 'soil' do you think you are?
- iv) Is there anything we can do to make it easier for the Word of God to take root and thrive in us?

2. Lamps belong on lampstands (8:16-18)

- i) The apostles were presumably aware already that they would at some point share in Our Lord's teaching ministry. But do you think they had realised that this meant that every aspect of their lives would have to become a shining example? How do you think they felt about it?
- ii) *How would you feel if you were told that every aspect of your own life was going to be put on display for everyone to see?

3. Our Lord's family (8:19-21)

- i) How do you think Our Lord's mother and brothers felt about this saying? Does it really exclude them?
- ii) This is a terrifying passage, because it reveals that a disciple may not cling even to his own family. *How do you feel about that?
- iii) This is also a passage of great comfort and hope, because it promises that, if we are faithful, we will be members of Our Lord's own family and that all his faithful people will be a family to us. *Do you feel able to take comfort and hope from it?

4. Winds and water obey him (8:22-25)

- i) Our Lord 'rebukes' the wind and waves as if they were personal, and in Jewish thought the waters often do represent demonic forces of chaos. Can you think of any passages in the Old Testament where God issues commands to the waters?

- ii) We are very afraid nowadays of what wind and water can do, not just to individuals but to whole communities and even whole ecologies. Does Our Lord teach us that we should not be afraid? Does he teach us that we need not care about such things?

5. Our Lord among the Gerasenes (8:26-39)

Our Lord cast out many demons, but this exorcism story is very different from any of the others. Can you think of any reasons for the following unusual aspects?

- i) Our Lord allowed the demons to enter animals and destroy them
- ii) The local people responded to the exorcism by begging Our Lord to go away
- iii) Our Lord instructed the former demoniac to tell his fellow-countrymen about what had happened.

6. Healing a child and a woman (8:40-56)

Our Lord cast out many demons, but this exorcism story is very different from any of the others. Can you think of any reasons for the following unusual aspects?

- i) A woman with a discharge of blood was unclean, so according to law and custom (Leviticus 15:25-30) she should have been particularly careful to avoid contact with others, yet he insisted on drawing everyone's attention to the fact that she had touched him. What message did this give to the disciples and the crowd?
- ii) This is the first time that Our Lord is recorded as singling out Peter, James and John as his special companions. Why do you think he picked out this small group?

7. Practical apostleship (9:1-6,10-17)

Our Lord now for the first time challenges his twelve chosen apostles to step out of his shadow and take personal responsibility for spreading the kingdom of God, putting into practice what they have just been learning:

- sowing the Word where it is welcome and where it is unwelcome;
- living as shining examples in other people's homes, where they can no more conceal any personal failings than a lamp can hide its smoke and smuts;
- doing without family and friends and all the baggage that people rely on for security, privacy and comfort, but trusting in the power of Jesus;
- exorcising and healing, without fear or favour;
- and, finally, taking responsibility for feeding a multitude.

- i) *Can you remember any times when you had to move sharply from learning and following into leading and taking very public responsibilities (e.g. moving from a training course into a teaching or caring post)? How did you feel?
- ii) Is it wrong for Christian leaders to take personal luggage on their travels?
- iii) What do you think the Christian's attitude should be to personal property?
- iv) How did the twelve react when Our Lord made them responsible for feeding the multitude? Compare Our Lady's attitude at Cana (John 2:3-5).
You might also like to compare Acts 2:42-47, where we read about how confidently the early Christians, under the leadership of those same apostles, provided for each others' needs.