

Talk – Evangelists – All age worship

It never ceases to amaze me how the same events, reported differently through different lenses can take on a different character.

For example take the Coronavirus – headlines run from the depressing (“life on hold for 3 months”), to the alarming (“the point of no return”), to the factual (“UK reveals plans for worst case scenario”), to the comic to describe the “dad’s army” plans of bringing retired doctors to the front lines.

Today’s talk is about the Evangelists – the people who wrote the four Gospels. Each Gospel covers the same story; but like newspapers, they look at the same events from different perspectives, and therefore with different points of emphasis that reflect the people writing them (or the owners of the companies that pay their wages).

I’d like to talk about the people they were, what they wrote and what it tells us today in our lives.

Each of them tells us something different about the character of Jesus, which has been illustrated historically by a different animal or being.

MATTHEW

So let’s start with Matthew and his Gospel.

Matthew, or Levi, was one of Jesus’s disciples, it’s believed originally a tax collector – so viewed as an enemy of the Jewish people collecting money on behalf of an occupying force.

The calling of Matthew is a striking biblical story. Jesus went to him and called “follow me”. At those words the tax collector was immediately transformed into a disciple. It’s reported he “left everything” to follow Jesus (Matthew 9:9).

He didn’t just follow Jesus, he had a big feast in his house (Matthew 9:10) and told all his friends; despite the hostility he’d experienced, he preached to the Jewish nation as part of his ministry before travelling to other countries.

Matthew’s Gospel shows us Jesus the person, made in the image of God, working as a teacher and friend to everyone he met.

MARK

Turning to Mark, or John Mark. Mark wasn't one of the 12, but might have been the person who carried water to the Last Supper (Mark 14:13).

Mark was a travelling companion of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25). He also spent considerable time with Peter (Acts 12:12), particularly in Rome, and it's thought by some that he wrote the details of the Gospel from Peter's perspective whilst there.

Through this he helps to provide something of an "eyewitness" account of events, with vivid description and detail. The Gospel of Mark is believed to have been the first Gospel written down, and is used by the other synoptic Gospels to give this eyewitness detail.

Mark's Gospel shows us Jesus the Lion – courageous in opposing the Pharisees, bringing his "pride" of disciples together, and – after dying alone – rising again triumphant.

LUKE

Luke is thought to have been a Greek physician, highly educated and perhaps the only non-Jewish writer in the New Testament.

He came to believe in Jesus through Paul, and was Paul's travelling companion (Colossians 4:14). He used his education and background to carry the Gospel out to a Greek, Gentile audience. He also wrote the book of Acts, and has been hailed as a great historian due to the focus on dates, times, places and names within the Gospel.

His background as a physician led him to focus on the stories of the poor and the helpless in his Gospel. The image of the ox can be used to describe Luke's perspective on Jesus – helping those in need to bear their burdens, and sacrificing himself for others.

JOHN

Finally, to John. This was the apostle of whom it was often said "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (e.g. John 21:20).

Possibly first a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35), John took Mary mother of Jesus into his care at Jesus's crucifixion (John 19:27), and played a prominent part in founding the Early Church, including travelling with Peter (Acts 8:14).

He wanted others to be confident that Jesus is God with us in flesh (John 1:14). In this Gospel you can see Jesus like an eagle – high flying, far seeing, all knowing, ascending upwards.

CONCLUSION

So the four Gospels give us four different perspectives, which show us something about the different facets of Jesus' life.

But all the Gospel writers share a common message - the great historical narratives of these Gospels clearly show that Jesus is both God and Man and is the way we can be saved.

The lives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John speak to us – speak of lives transformed by knowing Jesus, and of people using their gifts to show something of God and Jesus to others.

Whilst we may not be heroes of the Christian faith like the great Evangelists, all of us in our lives are able to use the skills we have and the situations we find ourselves in to share the Good News through what we do and say, and how we live our lives.

How we do it may be as different as a person is to the lion, the lion to the ox, and the ox to the eagle.

AMEN