Length: ca. 5 pages: typed, double-spaced and stapled with your name on it.

Due Date: Papers due at the beginning of class Tuesday May 6.
Late papers will not be accepted.

Assignment: Choose a short passage common to two (or three) Synoptic Gospels. Compare at least two of these versions closely. In your first paragraph, identify which passage you chose and where it appears in the Synoptic Gospels. Then discuss the following issues as reflected in your chosen pericope:

1. How do your parallel passages compare with each other? Where and how do they differ?
2. What does this comparison reveal about the differing concerns, styles, and emphases of the authors?
3. How would you explain these differences in terms of the history and diversity of the early Jesus movement?

Goals of the assignment:
1. To think about Synoptic Gospel comparisons and what they reveal about the aims and ideas of the New Testament authors.
2. To actively practice the methods and approaches to New Testament literature learned in our class.

Suggestions:
• Focus on differences between synoptic parallel passages. We learn most when writers add to, cut, or change their sources. How and why did they do so?
• Be very specific but keep the big picture in mind. Pick a set of parallel passages in which you see clear and potentially important differences. Explain what those differences reveal about the different perspective of each gospel as a whole.
• Note where the passages appear in each gospel narrative. Did the gospel writers place these passages at different points in the narrative sequence? Do they take place at different moments or geographic locations?
• Are there other passages elsewhere in the synoptic gospels that illuminate your chosen passages in some similar way? You may wish to go “outside” your focal passages to bring other synoptic texts into your discussion if you think they help explain your chosen passages.

A sample list of possible texts to compare (in part or in their entirety, as you see fit):

Jesus’ use of parables (Mark 4:10-12; Matt 13:10-17; Luke 8: 9-10)
Confession at Caesarea, passion prediction (Mark 8:27-9:1; Matt 16:13-28; Luke 9:18-27)
Sermon on the mount (Matt 4:24-7:29) vs. Sermon on the plain (Luke 6:17-49)
The anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:3-9; Matt 26:6-13; Luke 7:36-50)
The healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12; Matt 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26)
Stilling the storm (Mark 4:35-41; Matt 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25)
The baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11; Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22)
The death of Jesus (Mark 15:33-41; Matt 27:45-56; Luke 23:44-49)
The healing of a leper (Mark 1:40-45; Matt. 8:1-4; Luke 5:12-16)
The transfiguration (Mark 9:2-10; Matt 17:1-9; Luke 9:28-36)
The last supper (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:15-20)
John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-6; Matt 3:1-6; Luke 3:1-6)
The Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23 (-26)
The women at the tomb (Mark 16:1-8; Matt 28:1-8; Luke 24:1-12)

Or you are free to choose from among the many other synoptic parallel texts not listed above.
**Important Instructions:**

This paper is an opportunity for you to apply historical-critical and literary-critical approaches to interpreting biblical literature. *Do not interpret your texts freely according to “what it may mean to us personally today.”* Your goal is to understand what your chosen passages may have meant for their ancient authors. That is, *your focus must be on specific Gospel texts, and their ancient historical and literary contexts.* Describe how your passages illuminate the views of the specific New Testament authors. For example, if your passages describe a particular event or saying relating to the life and teaching of Jesus, your goal is to describe *how the ancient writers understood that event or teaching, and how they used it to promote their own particular view of the world and their own particular understanding of Jesus’ significance in it.*

Do not make value judgments or groundless claims; make arguments based on explicit literary evidence. Although you should not simply rewrite what the ancient texts say, you should certainly *quote (often) from your selected biblical texts as evidence in support of the arguments you make about them.* When you do so, cite the book and verse # in parentheses after the quote. Don’t cite your Bible edition’s modern publisher, editors, etc. Just cite the gospel and verse #.

Note: If you *don’t use an NRSV* translation for this paper your grade will be reduced by 10%.

Here’s an example sentence, with a quote and its citation:

> Mark on the other hand writes, “On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, ‘Let us go across to the other side’” (Mark 4:35).

Avoid using traditional terminology such as “faith,” “sin,” etc. if this language does not appear explicitly in your text. If you must use such terminology to make your arguments then define what you think the author means *exactly* by this term, based on evidence from the text.

Entire books are written on one sentence in the Bible. If you are having trouble writing enough about your chosen texts, read them again more closely, compare them again more carefully. Look at other passages elsewhere in the gospels that might illuminate your argument about your focal texts. If that fails, choose a different set of parallel passages in which the similarities and differences are clearer to you and, for your argument, more significant.

Focus on the biblical texts, nothing else. You may draw on what we have discussed in class about the synoptic problem and the particular views of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. If you must borrow any ideas from one of our textbooks, you *must* then cite the author and page reference. Do not use any other outside source; if you really wish to do so, be sure to speak with me first, as the book’s approach may not conform to the approach this class takes to the New Testament.

**Important methodological point:** always remember while writing this paper that you are not an ancient Gospel writer or participant in the early Jesus movement. I.e. do not adopt the ancient “four assumptions” about the Bible as your own: for this reading of the Bible you are a modern university student applying historical-critical and literary-critical methods of reading and interpreting. Remember to distinguish between:

(a) Yourself, the writer of this paper VS the authors of the gospels you are reading
(b) The subject and argument of your paper VS the subject and argument of your chosen Gospel passages

*Writing skills:* This paper is also an exercise in developing your writing skills. Structure your essay simply and clearly, with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. In other words, *Say what you are going to say, say it, and then say what you said.* Focus closely on your chosen text. In an essay of five pages, it would be a mistake to raise many points in an undirected way. Keep your biblical passages before you as your anchor, and keep your analysis of them clear and directed.

So, your essay must (a) identify and address your selected texts; (b) have one clear major question or thesis/argument about them; (c) answer that question and support that argument with textual evidence (biblical quotes); d) develop that answer/argument in a clear and linear way; and (e) adhere to the conventions of academic writing, including correct grammar and syntax.

I encourage you to meet with me to discuss this assignment should you wish to do so.
RLST 205 Papers: Outline

Remember: This paper assignment is about how the author of the Gospel of Matthew (and/or Luke) changed a specific passage in the Gospel of Mark, and why.

Basic outline: Introduction. Body. Conclusion. ("Say what you are going to say. Say it. Say what you said.")

I. Introduction (first paragraph)
   Your first paragraph MUST identify the following three things clearly:
   1) **Texts**: Identify your chosen passages by biblical book, chapter, and verse number
   2) **Topic**: Identify the focal issue of your chosen passages and the focal topic of your paper
   3) **Argument or question**:
      - Identify what *specific* point (about your passages) you will make in your paper
      - Or, ask a specific question (about your passages) your paper will seek to answer
   4) Include at the end of your first paragraph a **summary plan** for your paper (a **roadmap** for how your paper will develop its argument or answer its question)

II. Body
   A. **Description** of texts
      Before you try to **explain** your chosen passages, first simply **describe** them
      1. Describe your chosen passage in the Gospel of Mark
         - summarize it in your own words, quoting occasionally if you wish
         - focus on the parts of it that you will discuss below
      2. Describe the parallel passage in the Gospel of Matthew (and/or Luke)
         - summarize it in your own words, quoting occasionally if you wish
         - focus on the parts of it that you will discuss below
      3. Compare the two (or three) parallel Synoptic passages
         - Identify key differences between the parallel passages
         - Describe exactly where and how Mathew (and/or Luke) changes Mark
   B. **Explanation** of texts
      Now develop your “argument” about these differences in parallel Synoptic passages
      - **Explain why Mathew (and/or Luke) changed Mark the way he does**
        - This is the real point of the assignment, the core question
        - Support your explanation with textual evidence from your chosen passages
        - Here you may go outside your chosen passage for support: find other places where Matthew (and/or Luke) changed Mark in a similar way for similar reasons
        - Focus on developing one overarching argument, or answering one major question
          - The less general and more specific that is, the stronger your paper will be

III. Conclusion
   Restate your main argument or answer to the question you asked at the beginning.