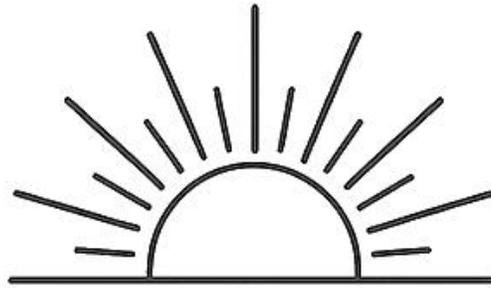


MIDSUMMER
WITH
MATTHEW



SUMMER 2025

WEEK 5

June 22 – June 28

Matthew 7:21 – Matthew 9:17

#29

Sunday, June 22, 2025

Matthew 7:21-29

Hi there, Pastor Nate Abrahamson with Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove and Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. You can't see this but today, I dressed up like a hot dog, and it's for two reasons really.

One, I thought it would be really fun to share with you this fun little tradition we have: I'm the director of Camp Rise, the summer youth camp in Wisconsin, and one of the things we do is each night, when we have our big group games, we dress up in ridiculous costumes. Like a hot dog.

I've got a whole bag of them. I've got a shark fin, a taco costume, and a few others. I'm still deciding what new one I'm going to get this year. That was the first reason I wanted to show you that.

The second reason is that our set of verses we're reading today, Matthew 7:21-29 actually reminded me of these costumes because in those verses you have people who have put on things that look like the Christian faith. You know, they say, "Lord, Lord" and they even do all these amazing Christian looking things. But Jesus says, "I never knew you," and it reminds me of how I could put on a hot dog costume, but I am definitely not a hot dog. And being a Christian isn't about putting on these outward things, these things that we say and we do. It's about actually being a Christian.

Now, the thing that can be challenging about this is it comes in a section where Jesus has been talking about all these ways He would have us live. If we're honest, none of us always live that way. So we can wonder, are we? "Are we really Christians? Are we really going to be the ones that, that are welcomed into heaven?" But the important thing to remember is that while, yes, we do genuinely live out our faith, what makes us a Christian is nothing we do.

The way this is always meant to work is that God created people to receive life from Him. In the beginning, we were to eat from the Tree of Life. When Adam and Eve tried to gain life and wisdom their own way, that's what broke things. But the way we receive it back is simply through receiving life from God again, through faith in Jesus.

He lived for us. He died for us. He rose again to set us right with God. We simply receive that through faith and the Holy Spirit gives us that gift of faith. We now become a new creation. We are born again. We are in fact Christians in Christ who get to have that eternity with Him. It's not just some costume.

It's who we are now.

#30

Monday, June 23, 2025

Matthew 8:1-17

If you're looking for a movie recommendation, *The Prestige* will always be my first answer. It is a 2006 film about two magicians, ex-friends who now compete against each other, trying to reveal each other's secrets and come up with the most daring act. It's got a star-studded cast, and it's directed by Christopher Nolan—my favorite director.

Hi everyone! My name is Jack Pittenger, I'm a student at Martin Luther College and also the son of Pastor Tony Pittenger at Bethany Lutheran Church in Port Orchard, Washington. Today, June 23rd, we are reading through Matthew 8:1-17. I'm going to ask you guys for a little extra work today. Read this section twice. That's the same thing that I did with that movie I was telling you about. As I finished it for the first time, I felt like there were too many details in the movie that I had missed the first time around, so I watched it again. I've probably seen it 6 times now, and talking about it makes me want to rewatch it for a seventh.

On your first read through, see the works of Christ, how he deeply cares for his friends, his brothers and sisters. Imagine the suffering, the pain, the sorrow, the sickness, the rot, the guilt, the sin, all removed *snap* like that. As you read about their story and rejoice along with them, see what Christ has done in your life as well. What sufferings has he taken from you? What ailments has he healed? Feel the comfort that Christ's love brings. But during this, know that even these miracles, even the peace that we feel from Jesus' love, they pale in comparison to our eternal inheritance. These miracles point us towards the day when our tears will be wiped away by our King.

After this, go back and read chapter 8:1-17 again and this time see the faith in this section. See the faith of the crowds, following Jesus down from the mountain, perhaps not knowing where their next sleep or meal would be. See the faith of the leper who took his death sentence to Jesus and walked away free to live again. See the faith of the Centurion who recognized Jesus' authority as the king of Creation. See the faith of Peter's Mother-in-law as she went from bedridden to serving as Jesus laid his hand on her to heal her. See the faith of friends and family who bring their loved ones to Jesus to have them healed, and their evil spirits cast out. Finally, see the object of their faith—of your faith. The man Jesus Christ. His work remains finished and your sins remain forgiven regardless of the strength of your faith or the doubts that plague you. You are redeemed, you are forgiven, you are His.

#31

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

Matthew 8:18–22

It's summer so I know I'm not the only one mowing. Mowing my mother-in-law's backyard is hard. The hill in her yard makes it difficult. Her mower isn't self-propelled so I have to get a running start at it.

It's hard but it needs to be done.

Today's little section is also hard. It's Matthew 8:18-22 and most modern Bibles will give it a heading about the cost of following Jesus.

Next month on July 22, you're going to read something similar, something about denying yourself. Today's reading is more about "following."

Following Jesus means this world is no longer your home. You become a traveler, a sojourner. Following Jesus even means not being too strongly attached to this life and even the people in this life. If a break becomes necessary, breaking with Him or breaking with family, the break's gotta be with them and not Him.

This is hard. Hard but necessary.

Well, I should get back to this hard job and I want to let you get to today's reading, Matthew 8:18-22. And as you think about how hard these things are and about how poorly we are at them, give thanks to God that Jesus did not cling to His home in Heaven but was willing to come here to save us.

#32

Wednesday, June 25, 2025

Hello everyone! Glad to be back with you again for Midsummer with Matthew. We're on day 32 so thanks for sticking with us through this. During the summer here in Minnesota there often violent storms that roll through. We even have tornadoes and really bad thunderstorms. Sometimes they're exciting, but have you ever been in a storm that was terrifying, getting stuck out driving your car and it's raining so hard, you can't even see the road you have to pull over? I know I've been in situations like that or even we thought maybe a tornado was coming towards our house.

Situations like that could be very frightening very scary and we might wonder: "God, we need Your help! Where are You? Why are You letting this happen?"

In the reading from Matthew 8:23-27 today we're shown a terrible storm that the disciples were experiencing. They knew how to handle a boat. Those disciples were fisherman. They've been out in rough waters before, but there was something different about this storm they were they were terrified. They thought for sure: "We're gonna drown."

Meanwhile, Jesus was on the boat with them, but He was fast asleep, which is kind of interesting because it shows the human nature. Jesus was tired, He needed sleep from all the work that He did and somehow He was sleeping though the disciples were freaking out.

They wake up. "Where are You Jesus?"

As we face difficulties and challenges in our life, or similar thing happens, we freak out we're wondering: "Where is God? Why are you sleeping? Why are you letting these things happen to us?"

But we have comfort. I love this section for today because it shows us that Jesus has power over the weather, over the wind in the rain, and also over the storms that you face in your life. And those words: "Be still! Go away!" bring peace to believers and followers of Christ because sometimes Jesus may seem that He's not paying attention, like He's asleep in the boat, but what do we have to worry about if He's with us in the boat?

Come to Him that He may calm the storms in our life.

I hope you enjoy this section for Matthew and rejoice in the fact that He calms the storms in your life. God be with you.

#33

Thursday, June 26

Matthew 8:28-34

Pastor Nate Abrahamson here with Abiding Shepherd Lutheran Church in Cottage Grove and Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. Today we're looking at Matthew 8:28-34. There are at least three things in this reading that make me really go, "Huh?" The first one has to do with the fact that when Jesus sees these two demon possessed men, that these demons want to be cast into pigs. "Why? What's going on? Like, what's the big deal about just being cast out? Why is it better to go to the pigs?" I'm sure there's some really good theories out there, but honestly, I, I'm not totally sure about it. It's one of those things that makes you go, "Hmm. I wonder what's going on there."

I want to encourage you today too, that it's good for us sometimes, even if we don't have a clear set answer to some things in Scripture, just to go, "Hmm." Just ponder it a bit because there's a lot going on behind the scenes in the spiritual world and there's a lot going on that is bigger than we can wrap our minds around.

The second is related. When they ask about the pigs, Jesus says does it. Why does Jesus grant that request? There's probably some good theories out there, but I'm going to be content today just to go, "Hmm..."

Third is the fact that once that happens and the pigs go and they die, we're told that the people there actually came to Jesus and begged Him to leave their region. Think about that. Here is the Messiah, the promised one, God Himself, who is also now fully human here in their town to visit them and they say "Leave!"

Why would they do that? That one I think I can explain a bit more easily because the pigs were their livelihood, and so some people lost income. Also Jesus, being that big and powerful was probably kind of scary. If we think about it for us to, the truth is sometimes believing the gospel, it can mean a change for our lives. There are certain things we won't do. Maybe a career you won't pursue, a different choice you will make for life based on the Gospel and it may cost you at times.

Just embracing the reality that that to be a Christian means to be united to Christ, to be in Christ, to be connected with God himself. That can be scary, especially when we remember our sin. But the truth is, Jesus came into this world to die to take away our sins and rose to give us something bigger than ourselves, better and more beautiful than anything we imagine. That change in our lives and be scary at times, it is worth it.

So today, let's ponder alongside or ponder together what all happened here in these verses and embrace this big, big God who loves us, Jesus, who died for us and rose again, and who has given us more than we could possibly ask or imagine. Alright, let's see you again next time.

#34

Friday, June 27, 2025

Matthew 9:1-8

I was out at the ocean and because today's reading begins with Jesus coming ashore from being out in a boat, I hope that beautiful backdrop would be perfect for today's introduction to Matthew 9:1-8.

Beautiful as all this is, there is something more beautiful in God's Word for today.

An ocean—any ocean! The Pacific Ocean rarely has anything “pacific / peaceful” about it. She gets her name from Ferdinand Magellan who called her “Mar Pacífico” which means “peaceful sea.”

He must have caught her on a good day because she can swallow ships in an instant. Wikipedia has a list of hundreds of ships that have sunk or simply disappeared.

Powerful! But the stuff in today's reading is more so. More powerful than the Pacific Ocean.

I really pray you'll read it yourself, Matthew 9:1-8, so I'll just give you a hint. When it happens, when that powerful thing happens, the skeptics look down their noses at Jesus and accuse Him of blasphemy.

Read that, and then read how He doubles down and shows that the power and authority (that's another hint) of God rest in Him.

In other words: He might look unimpressive and even weak but He is God Himself. So read these eight verses yourself and know that the same powerful stuff talked about here applies to you as well!

#35

Saturday, June 28, 2025

Matthew 9:9–17

The medical center where I live in Port Orchard has a sign out front. A big WELCOME.

Now I didn't put the sign there but I think the point is that it doesn't matter what your condition is, it doesn't matter who you are, rich or poor, male or female, what your race is...

I think the point of having this sign in front of this kind of facility is that everyone in need of their services should know that they are to come.

They are welcome.

Imagine the opposite. Imagine a state-of-the-art medical facility with a big sign that said UNWELCOME and you couldn't get the help you need.

As Americans, I suppose we don't have to imagine. We actually used to have signs in restaurants and even at drinking fountains that said "Whites Only" and if your ancestry wasn't from northern Europe well then you couldn't eat there or you couldn't even get a drink of water.

Keep those two ideas in mind; welcome and unwelcome, as you read Matthew 9:9-17. Matthew himself was unwelcome because of the job he had. Lots of other people he knew were unwelcome too.

Would you be welcome or unwelcome? The sin on your record would say UNWELCOME. The devil would point that out to you, reminding you that you don't deserve what God has and he's not lying. You don't.

But Jesus welcomes sinners and outcasts. He receives us. He washes away our past. And He calls us to follow Him.

Matthew 9:9-17. I pray you enjoy today's reading.