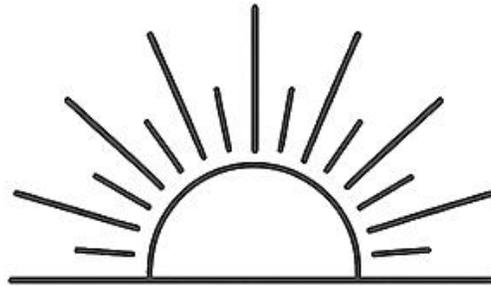


MIDSUMMER
WITH
MATTHEW



SUMMER 2025

WEEK 9

July 20 – July 26

Matthew 16:1 – Matthew 18:6

#57
Sunday, July 20
Matthew 16:1-12

I know I'm about two months early on this, but have you ever heard the old saying that you can tell how cold the winter is going to be by how thick the fur, the coat, is on a Woolly Bear Caterpillar?

For those of you who fish, have you ever heard that if rain is coming in the fish will bite on the surface instead of down deep?

Have you ever looked up at the sun, or the moon, and seen little chunks of rainbow on either side? Those are called "sundogs" or "moondogs" and they means there's moisture in the atmosphere and it is likely to rain or snow.

Maybe you know more of these "Farmer's Almanac" signs. Maybe there's truth to them, maybe not, but in today's reading Jesus refers to a sign that would be absolutely true.

Everybody wants to see a miracle as proof that they really should be paying attention to Jesus. In Matthew 16:1-12 He tells them to keep their eyes out for the sign of Jonah and if that happens, well...

Well, if that happens, if someone is gone, MIA, dead, but then is back fit-as-a-fiddle three days later...

Well, that's worth your attention.

Because IF, as Isaiah 53 says, "the iniquity of us all was laid on Him" and if "we are healed by His stripes..."

Yes, if He died with your sin on His shoulders...

Well, what does it say when He's alive again three days later?

Read today's verses about that sign, Matthew 16:1-12, as if nothing stands between you and the Father in Heaven.

#58

Monday, July 21, 2025

Matthew 16:13-20

Today, the day you're seeing this devotion, is actually my 29th anniversary of being ordained into the holy ministry. July 21, 1996, was the day I became a pastor. Hello, I'm Pastor Jerry Gernander of Hope Lutheran Church in Leander, Texas, and this is the preview for Matthew 16:13-20.

That day I was ordained as a pastor, Pastor Halvorson asked me a question. Just one question. First he described the charge that would be entrusted to me as a pastor in God's Church. Then he asked me: "Do you promise me before God that you will perform all this?"

That was quite a momentous moment for me. I was making this promise "before God" and also in front of the people I would serve as pastor.

In our reading today, Jesus asks the twelve disciples a question, just one question. It's another momentous moment. He asks them, "Who do you say I am?" Peter speaks for all of them and says: "You are the Christ" – the promises Messiah – "the Son of God." He was really saying: "**We believe** that You are the Christ, the Son of God."

This is a confession of faith. The Bible says in Romans 10 that first God's Word produces faith in your heart, and then you confess Him with your mouth. It's a confession of faith. It's saying, "I believe this. We believe this." When you say it, you're always saying it before God and in front of others.

I think it helps to have that question put to you. We say the creed in church. Usually there's not a question in front of it. Next time, imagine that you are being asked a question before you say the creed: "Who do you say He is?" Or: "Do you believe in God?" Or: "Do you believe that Jesus died for you?"

After you confess your faith with others in your church, hear Jesus saying to you: "Blessed are you. This faith was given to you, as a gift from God. You're a child of God. You are in My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

#59

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

Matthew 16:21-28

“Where did I put that? I don't, I have no idea where my phone went. That's, that's weird. I think I lost it. Do you know where my phone is? I just can't. I've lost it. Wait, I've lost my phone. This is awesome. Yes. This is going to be a good day. I lost my phone!”

Yeah, no one says that, that's not how it goes.

That's not how we normally think about things. That would be crazy and very strange for me to say that. But you know, Jesus says some things in what we're reading today that are just as, actually, if not more crazy. We're reading through Matthew 16:21-28.

Jesus, was talking about His need to lay down His life and die. And Peter is like, “No way. This can never happen to You. This, this doesn't make any sense. There's no way in the world this should work this way.” But Jesus says what He says, because Jesus came to defeat the way the world currently works. He came to give us something better. Right now, this world is a sinful, broken place, and right now we're under the influence of Satan. That's why when Jesus, speaks back to Peter, He calls out that actually these... what you're thinking here, Peter, this isn't from God. This is from the enemy. Jesus came to do something that doesn't make sense in this world, the way things normally work because He came to defeat, to conquer sin, to conquer death, to give us something beyond this world.

Then Jesus goes on to say something else that also doesn't make sense. He says, if you want to save your life, you need to lose it. It's like saying, if I want to save my phone, I need to lose my phone. That doesn't make any sense. The only way this makes sense is when you understand Jesus' death and resurrection. When you understand that the life we currently have is not the life we were meant to live. We were not meant to be full of sin. We were not meant to live in a, a broken world. We were not meant to die. This life we have now is a cheap imitation of the life God created us to live.

Jesus died and rose again to give us life back, to restore us, to give us the hope of resurrection, to give us life the way it was meant to be. So yes, we need to lose this life to really gain our real life.

It doesn't make sense. It sounds crazy the way we normally think about things in this world, but Jesus came to give us something better. Something beyond something that is true real life. Alright, see you next time.

#60

Wednesday, July 23, 2025

Matthew 17:1-13

I'm Pastor Pittenger from Bethany Lutheran Church in Port Orchard, WA, and when I'm heading out on a hike is when I feel like myself. While I probably don't have any business being a pastor, when I'm dressed like in my gear is when I really feel like myself. Relaxed, the real me.

In today's reading we get to see Jesus as His real self because today's reading is the Transfiguration. That's the Latin word to describe the events in Matthew 17:1-13 when Jesus' skin, His body, shone brighter than the sun.

And then, in case anyone still isn't sure about the divine nature of Jesus, a voice from Heaven says "This is My beloved Son...listen to Him."

Now, make no mistake about it, Jesus is also truly and fully human. That was easy to see, the Guy who could get tired and get hungry and be sad, the Guy who could bleed and die.

And He is. But even though it rarely looked like it, Jesus is also true God who died and rose for you which means...

Which means your true self—the real you—is a child of God. Read today's section, Matthew 17:1-13, remembering that Jesus did what He did to make you into a child of God.

#61
Thursday, July 24, 2025
Matthew 17:14-21

Pastor Pittenger here from Bethany Lutheran in Port Orchard, WA.

Port Orchard is on a peninsula of land nestled between two mountain ranges. When we look across Puget Sound, toward the Seattle/Tacoma area, the Cascade Range forms a backdrop for those major metropolitan areas, with Mount Rainier stealing the show every day.

When we look west we see the Olympic Mountain Range, small in comparison to the Rockies but pretty inaccessible. There are no roads through the Olympics. You can hike into them by foot or you can drive around them.

In today's reading you'll see Jesus say something about moving mountains, even RE-moving them. That would be a monumental task but it could be done. I could drive over to the Olympics every single day, load my truck full of rocks, and dump them into the water.

In my lifetime it's unlikely you'll notice a difference but if my children did it as well, and my children's children and if my descendants did this faithfully maybe in a thousand year you'd notice a difference, maybe in ten thousand years they'd be gone...

My point is that it is possible.

You know what's not? Rising from the dead, overcoming the wage of sin and escaping the torment of hell. Here is something I can't do, my kids and grandkids and a million years' worth of descendants can't do for me.

But it is possible with God. It is possible with Jesus.

So keep that in mind as you read today's section, Matthew 17:14-21. Remembering that what you could never ever do, Jesus has done for you.

#62
Friday, July 25, 2025
Matthew 17:22-27

We recently heard that glorious account of Jesus' transfiguration. His chosen three disciples witnessed Jesus in His full glory, experiencing a true "mountaintop moment." They clearly wanted to stay there, but Jesus, knowing what was still in store, leads them back down the mountain.

In our reading today, we encounter more of a "valley" experience—something more mundane, not grand and glorious, but small and humble. Here, our Lord Jesus, as He has done on other occasions, makes clear to His disciples His mission: He tells them about His upcoming suffering and death. He prepares them for that.

Think about this drastic change: from that mountaintop to this low valley. Jesus essentially says, *"By the way, I'm going to be suffering and dying, and I'm asking you to follow Me through that as My disciples."*

Being a follower of Jesus also means we might have to be subject to certain things that are not pleasant or make us happy. Sometimes Jesus leads us through some low valleys! To face times when Jesus and his church might have to suffer in this world. This also includes times when we are asked to submit to the governing authorities, which can sometimes be difficult. We see this happening in the second part of our reading today, as Peter faced some questions about whether or not Jesus and His disciples paid the temple tax. We get the feeling that this annoyed Peter—an annoyance that is relatable. Who likes to pay taxes? And so it's easy to complain when we have to pay our taxes or are compelled to follow earthly rulers and authorities. That's not always the easiest thing to do.

Yet, Jesus asks His disciples to continue to rely on God, to rejoice that we are free children of God. We don't have to complain, be bitter, or grumble about these things. And even when we pay our taxes and submit to the governing authorities, we can be assured that God will continue to provide for us—as Jesus miraculously provided the tax for Peter and Himself. And paying such taxes will not take away from our greatest wealth and treasure! As we seek to honor God—as we are led through these various valleys—we are assured that He will continue to provide for us in amazing, incredible ways.

We can rely on Him; we can rest assured that He's going to get us through the valleys of life. He has promised you and me that the day is coming when we will have our own mountaintop experience, seeing Him face to face. There may be some discomfort, even some pain and suffering, here and now—in this world. But as His followers, we are willing to go where He leads us because we know the great future He has in store for us.

#63

Saturday, July 26, 2025

Matthew 18:1-6

Sometimes when you need some perspective, you need a child's perspective. In what we're reading today, Matthew 18: 1-6, people are talking about greatness and where you see greatness and what makes someone great, and who's the greatest, all that stuff caught up with greatness... where does Jesus point them?

Children! He talks about humbling yourself like a child, and in the Bible, the word "humble", it means to be in a low position. What, do the kids so often do? They reach up their hands and they want us to pick them up. They want us to take care of them. They want to know they are loved and that they are cared for.

Be a child and then also treat others like a child. People who need to be picked up, lifted up and just assured that they are loved.

Jesus then goes into something pretty heavy, says that if you lead a little one to sin, it'd be better to have a millstone put around your neck and be thrown into the sea. Google "Millstone" and get a picture of it.

Have that around your neck and be thrown into the depths of the sea. There's a lot of responsibility when you think about these little ones or anyone who's in this low position. It reminds me of the day that I became officially a pastor, the day that I was ordained. When the stole was put on my shoulders, it felt like there was literally like a hundred pounds that was just placed on them because I was now someone publicly proclaiming the word of God. There's a lot of responsibility there.

But you know what? This responsibility isn't just to the people who are ordained pastors. Every person we talk to is someone created by God, loved by God, who Jesus died for, and rose again. We influence everybody we talk to. So there's significance. There's weight all over the place. As we think about that weight and we think about the times that we haven't carried it the right way, it can really be kind of scary. Oh man, that whole millstone picture.

But then when we get afraid like that and have our conscience weigh on us like that, then we just go back to being children. We lift our hands up, we look to our Savior to Jesus, pick us up. "Jesus, we know You died for us and rose again. We need You to love us. We need you to take care of us."

And the good news is He always does. He died. He rose. You're forgiven. You are a baptized child of God. There you see greatness in being a child and seeing the child in everyone else, children, childlike there, you see greatness.