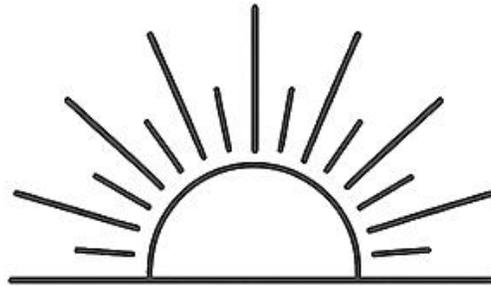


MIDSUMMER
WITH
MATTHEW



SUMMER 2025

WEEK 11

August 3 – August 9

Matthew 20:20 – Matthew 22:22

#71

Sunday, August 3, 2025

Matthew 20:20-28

Hi there. I am Pastor Tony Pittenger, pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Port Orchard, WA. and this is a little introduction for Matthew 20:20-28.

We've divided the Gospel of Matthew into 100 sections, one for each day between the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend all the way through to Monday of Labor Day. This 71st introduction for Matthew 20:20-28 then, is scheduled for Sunday, August 3rd...

And August 3rd is the anniversary of my wife's parents, Curt and Barb were married 51 days ago on August 3rd. Our Lord has Curt home with Himself, while He has Barb here with us.

The Lord blessed Curt and Barb with six children. First there were five daughters and then a son.

They like to joke about being the favorite. Melissa jokes that it's her because she's their first. Aaron jokes that it's him because he's the baby of the family and because he's the only boy. All of them have something they claim makes them the favorite child.

In today's reading you'll see a mother ask God to play favorites. While it shows she loves her kids, it's more than a little presumptuous.

With favorites in mind, read today's verses and see how God's Kingdom isn't about privilege, instead it's about service. And since that's true, God bless you as you serve your neighbor—the other people in God's family, brothers and sisters just like yourself.

#72

Monday, August 4, 2025

Matthew 20:29-34

Today, we're going to read together from Matthew 20:29-34. This is a short, but incredibly powerful, section of Scripture that offers us a glimpse into the heart of our Lord Jesus and His desire to "see the unseen."

Have you ever been in a place where there was a huge crowd, where so much was going on around you? Maybe someone right next to you was having an issue, but because of all the commotion, you didn't even realize. I remember one time at a concert, the crowd was so loud and our attention was so focused on the stage, that I missed a friend I was with, was dehydrated and was passing out! I felt bad that I didn't notice the problem sooner! Sometimes we might be facing a problem and it feels as if no one's paying attention to us because of the "crowd" of life, or because of everything else going on around us. Have you ever felt that way?

In our section for today, we hear about two individuals who were often unseen, marginalized, and living on the edges of society. They were blind beggars. As they learned that Jesus was passing by, they began to shout: "*Lord, have mercy upon us! Jesus, Son of David, help!*"

In spite of their desperate cries, the large, loud crowd would have been drowning those cries for help out, and worse, people in the crowd around them even tried to get them to shut up, to be quiet, and not disturb this important teacher, Jesus. The crowd was working to silence those suffering individuals.

And yet, what does our Lord do? Our Lord Jesus sees those who are often overlooked. He hears those who were seemingly being unheard. So, Jesus stops. He approaches them. He sees them, even though they are blind and cannot see Him. He doesn't tell them to quiet down or to go away. Instead, He asks them what He can do for them, and then, in an amazing display of His power and compassion, He heals them.

The display we find in this section reveals Jesus' heart—His compassion and His care for people who sometimes feel left out, ignored, or overlooked. The same truth applies to you and me today. There are times in our lives when we might feel as if we're being overlooked, or that people aren't paying attention. But Jesus hears us. He cares. He sees the unseen, and that means He also sees *you*. He cares about you, deeply.

After all, Jesus even went to the Cross to die for you. If He did that to pay for your sins, you can trust that He will be with you every step of the way through your life. Even in those moments where people might try to "shush" you, or try to get you to turn away or stop appealing to Jesus, you can confidently cry out even louder, "*Lord, have mercy upon us!*" That's a cry for help that Jesus loves to hear. He loves to see such people appealing to Him. He loves to answer that prayer and cry for help. So, keep doing that!

I hope you enjoy our reading today, Day #72 from Matthew 20:29-34. God Bless!

#73

Tuesday, August 5, 2025

Matthew 21:1-11

Palm Sunday, the lesson we're reading today from Matthew 21, is for me, one of the most fun Sundays of the church year. I just love the palm branches and the songs and the beginning of Holy Week. Holy Week is such a powerful week where there's just so much going on. It's so meaningful.

As we're reading these verses today, it's good for us to see that while it's meaningful for us, partly because of traditions and things that we celebrate and of course, in addition to what's happening that week, it would've had a great deal of meaning for those right there in that moment too, meaning that they would've been tuned into that perhaps we can overlook. An ancient prophecy is fulfilled here. As Jesus rides in on a donkey, He's fulfilling a prophecy from Zechariah. But what we may not see quite as clearly is how the people in that time should have been tuned into the significance of someone riding in on a donkey with people celebrate like this.

This is something that victorious leaders would do. Pretty commonly, they would ride in and people would celebrate them to celebrate their victory. This moment is packed with significance. It's really clear that Jesus is this victorious king, but the question then is, "What kind of victory? What kind of king would he be?"

So many people misunderstood what his victory was all about. There was such a thought that the big issue was Rome. The big issue was out there. Jesus was really coming to deal with the issue that's in here inside of each of us, to lay down his life, to die for our sins, to rise again, to conquer sin and death, to give us life with God, to give us the kingdom of God.

So today, as we think about these meaningful verses, let's think about their true meaning for us too. We can kind of get like the people there where we can get comfortable with what kind of king we want Jesus to be. You know that He's coming to work on the issues that are out there. Or even we can take and think about, okay, yes, he died for our sins and rose again so we can have eternity with God, but are we really letting God's word challenge us in here? What's going on in us that we need to lay before Christ? How is God's word going to challenge us? It's important for us too, to not just be comfortable. People in Jesus' day had their comfort when they looked at the king.

What in God's word is there to make us uncomfortable that we need to lay down so that we can really embrace just how deeply we are forgiven, but also just how new and transformative the way of Christ is as we live looking forward to eternity, but also embracing that he is the king of our hearts. Now what, what is the kingdom of God all about? What does it all mean? Think about that as we read these verses from Matthew 21 today.

#74

Wednesday, August 6, 2025

Matthew 21:12-27

I've grabbed three things that we're lying around in my office, a ball my grandkids play with when they stop in after school, a coffee cup used to store pens and pencils, and a disc-golf disc, a kind of frisbee.

Even though these things are very different, they do have something in common. They're all round, at least when viewed from a certain perspective...

I'm Pastor Pittenger, from Bethany Lutheran in Port Orchard, WA, and try thinking of today's verses, Matthew 21:12-27, like this ball, this cup, and this disc.

There are lots of things in these 16 verses. Commotion in the temple, faithful praises from little children, faith moving things around again (trees instead of mountains this time), and questions about Jesus' authority to do what He's been doing and to preach what He's been preaching.

Read these verse for yourself because God promises that faith comes from His Word and that's now the third time I used the word that ties these verses together, the thing all these different things have in common.

See if you can find it. What do 1) those little children singing praises, 2) a cursed tree or a tree jumping into the sea, and 3) what God's Word does for us all have in common?

And if you still can't figure it out I'll give you one more hint but it's in Latin. It's what the slogans of Lutherans and U.S. Marines have in common. *Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura* and *Semper Fidelis*.

#75

Thursday, August 7, 2025

Matthew 21:28-46

Hello, I'm Pastor Jerry Gernander. I'm the pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Leander, Texas, and this is the preview for Matthew 21:8-46.

Have you ever promised to do something for someone and then not followed through on it and actually done it? You had good intentions, you wanted to help, you wanted to please, but something happened? Something came up, you didn't get there on time, you didn't get your assignment in on time?

It's right to be called out on that. It's right to feel bad about that, and to work on it so you actually keep your word. I think we do over-promise, and the intention is good, but it's important to keep your word.

In our reading today, Jesus tells a story of a man and his two sons. One of them tells his father that he'll do what's asked but then he doesn't. The other says he won't do it, but he actually does it.

Jesus isn't just talking about our day-to-day sins and failures, and yet He is. He uses this example to teach the Pharisees that good intentions, and just doing good outwardly, doesn't justify you before God. We need actual righteousness, perfect obedience, to have a good conscience before God.

I've been the son who was unwilling to do good. I've been the son who made myself look good. You have too. But Jesus is the Son of God who never sinned and always did right. We put our faith in Him.

Jesus tells a second story here about how a beloved son is killed by some ungrateful people. He's giving a preview of His own death these very men are plotting against Him. I always thought of this as a "gotcha" moment. But Jesus is after these Pharisees to save them. When He says He's the stone they're rejecting, and He becomes the Chief Cornerstone, He is offering Himself to be the cornerstone of their life. Make sure He's yours.

As you read Matt. 21:28-46, hear the voice of the beloved Son, your Savior!

#76

Friday, August 8, 2025

Matthew 22:1-14

Hi there. I'm Pastor Pittenger from Bethany Lutheran in Port Orchard, WA and this is an introduction for Matthew 22:1-14.

I grew up in the Church. Mom especially was a devout Christian woman and mother and she made sure that attending the services of God's house was as constant as her home-baked deserts.

In fact, Mom baked so much that I took it for granted. I loved store-bought cookies, made out of who knows what in giant factories. I looked down my nose at her chocolate chip cookies. They weren't bad, in fact they were great! They were such a constant presence in my childhood that I took them for granted.

What about you? Anything you naturally take for granted? Something wonderful that you are just so used to that you've forgotten how wonderful it is?

For those of us raised in the Church, I wonder if the Gospel is like that? That invitation to come to Christ and to find rest and strength in Him, if it isn't so familiar that we might be tempted to look down our noses at it?

Think about that as you read today's section, Matthew 22:1-14, in which Jesus tells a story about people invited to a very special thing but they end up looking down their noses at it. Read about them and pray to God that He keep you from responding like that!

And read about the undeserving, the unworthy, the people that should never be welcomed into God's Kingdom but read how they are! That's me. That's you too. Unworthy invitees to the greatest thing ever! Thank God for His mercy!

#77

Saturday, August 9, 2025

Matthew 22:15-22

T: I'm Tony Pittenger, pastor at Bethany Lutheran in Port Orchard, WA...

N: And I'm his daughter Nika, soon to be a nursing student at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, MN. Hey Dad, how long has it been since you stopped robbing banks?

T: Well, it's been...wait a minute! That's a trick question! I've never robbed a bank.

N: A pretty good trick, huh? Because just trying to answer the question with a number suggests that you used to do it and if you said "No comment," or "I didn't stop," it would suggest that you actually are a bank robber.

T: Cute. But we're supposed to be introducing people to today's reading from Matthew 22:15-22.

N: Well, in these verses Jesus is asked a trick question like the one I tried to trap you in. The Pharisees don't really care about the question, they're just hoping to get Him into trouble no matter what He says.

T: Does it work?

N: Well...since the whole point of these devotions is to encourage the people reading them to read Matthew themselves, how about if we let whoever is reading this do that and so that they can see whether it worked or not?

T: Sounds good. Friends, faith comes by hearing. God's Word works for faith like rain and snow work for plants. Read Matthew 22:15-22 and see your Savior as unbelievers try to trick Him into incriminating Himself. I'm Pastor Pittenger...

N: And I'm Nika Pittenger...

T: And until we meet again, God bless and keep you.