

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 11 May 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 98:1-3

Opening Psalm: 91A The One Who Dwells in God (1-4)

Confession of Sin

O great and everlasting God, Who dwells in unapproachable light, Who searches and knows the thoughts and intentions of the heart; We confess that we have not loved You with all our heart, nor with all our soul, nor with all our mind, nor with all our strength; Nor our neighbors as ourselves. We have loved what we ought not to have loved; We have coveted what is not ours; We have not been content with Your provisions for us. We have complained in our hearts about our family, about our friends, about our health, about our occupations, about Your church, and about our trials. We have sought our security in those things which perish, rather than in You, the Everlasting God. Chasten, cleanse, and forgive us, through Jesus Christ, who is able for all time to save us who approach You through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Matthew 1:18-21

Hymn of Preparation: 537 Jesus, Master, Whose I Am

Old Covenant Reading: Proverbs 16:1-20

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 26:69-75

Sermon Title: *In Denial*

Psalm of Response: 143A Hear Now My prayer, O LORD

Confession of Faith: Ten Commandments

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Closing Psalm: 91A The One Who Dwells in God (5-9)

PM Worship

220 Give Praise to God

265 In Christ Alone

216 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Old Covenant Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 8:1-13

Sermon Title: *Our Merciful God*

Adult Sunday School – *The Westminster Assembly* (Ben Richards)

Suggested Preparations

Monday (5/5) Read and discuss Matthew 26:69–75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then

he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

It is not surprising (at least to many) that the apostle Paul will often offer direct, propositional statements that illustrate or explicate truths that are narrated in the Gospel of Matthew. In beginning his commentary section, I think of two Pauline statements. I recall them because Peter held fast to neither of them that night Jesus was handed over.

The first is “therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses in order that the power of Christ may rest on me” (2 Cor 12:9). We do not know the inner psychology of Peter any more than we know that of Judas. As the events of Jesus’ betrayal – the paradoxical reign of God – have unfolded, however, Peter has claimed to be different from the other apostles. Although they all said the same thing. Peter claimed to be strong; he asserted that he was even willing to die with Jesus rather than deny him. He rejected what Christ predicted about his own fall and therefore had no room in his heart for Christ’s promise of His restoration.

The second Pauline statement is also from the Corinthian correspondence: “therefore let the one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12). In the life of discipleship both then and now, there are always spiritual dangers of which Jesus’ disciples need to be aware. That night in and around Jerusalem the greatest spiritual battle of all time was being fought, as with every battle, there was the danger of collateral damage. Peter and the others have already been routed in the spiritual warfare in Gethsemane. Now the chief apostle will go down to utter defeat, just as Jesus said he would. Failing to take heed, he will not stand. He will fall.

Read or sing Psalm 91A The One Who Dwells in God (1-4)

Tuesday (5/6) Read and discuss Mark 15:1–39

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” And the chief priests accused him of many things. And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”

For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" And they cried out again, "Crucify him." And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (ESV)

William Hendriksen writes:

Bypassers and Sanhedrists were agreed that if Jesus wanted to prove that He was indeed what He claimed to be He should save Himself. The robbers are carried away by this argument. They too in the same manner begin to revile Him. It must be emphasized that according to the plain language of Scripture both robbers were at first heaping abuse on Jesus in this manner. The language of one of these men is reported in Luke 23:39. He said,

“Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us.” The insults were coming from almost every side. Legionaries, bypassers, chief priests, scribes, elders, robbers, and multitudes of other spectators deride Him.

In the midst of it all Jesus remains silent. He offers not one word of rebuke. Peter puts it beautifully when he says, “who, while being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, never threatened, but continued to entrust Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

Is it not possible – probable even – that this claim and majestic behavior of our Lord, coupled with the prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34), was used by God as a means to lead one of these two robbers to repentance?

Note from pastor Booth: Instead of “robber,” it is better to translate the Greek term “insurrectionist.” The term could refer to either robbers or insurrectionists but the latter fits much better with the context and the passage. The Romans were pretty brutal, but crucifixion was a major undertaking and was largely reserved for very serious crimes that in some way threatened Roman rule. This also fits well with the way the men on the cross mocked Jesus. Why would “robbers” say, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us.”? But zealots who were trying to overthrow Roman rule were looking for a Messiah who would do that very thing. For the insurrectionists, if Jesus were their type of Messiah He would be on *their* side!

Read or sing Hymn 537 Jesus, Master, Whose I Am

Wednesday (5/7) Read and discuss Proverbs 16:1–20

The plans of the heart belong to man,
but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,
but the LORD weighs the spirit.
Commit your work to the LORD,
and your plans will be established.
The LORD has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble.
Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD;
be assured, he will not go unpunished.
By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for,
and by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.
When a man’s ways please the LORD,
he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.
Better is a little with righteousness
than great revenues with injustice.
The heart of man plans his way,

but the LORD establishes his steps.
 An oracle is on the lips of a king;
 his mouth does not sin in judgment.
 A just balance and scales are the LORD's;
 all the weights in the bag are his work.
 It is an abomination to kings to do evil,
 for the throne is established by righteousness.
 Righteous lips are the delight of a king,
 and he loves him who speaks what is right.
 A king's wrath is a messenger of death,
 and a wise man will appease it.
 In the light of a king's face there is life,
 and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.
 How much better to get wisdom than gold!
 To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.
 The highway of the upright turns aside from evil;
 whoever guards his way preserves his life.
 Pride goes before destruction,
 and a haughty spirit before a fall.
 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor
 than to divide the spoil with the proud.
 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good,
 and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD. (ESV)

Commenting on verse 7, Andrew Steinmann writes:

This verse ends this string of proverbs that mention Yahweh by building on the previous line about a person with the fear of Yahweh turning from evil. God has reconciled all people to Himself through Jesus Christ, even while we were still His enemies. Thus Christ could be the person whose ways are pleasing to God and who causes the enemies to be at peace with the Father; believers have peace with God through Christ (Rom 5:1). Unbelievers remain "enemies" of God and ultimately will be defeated and made a "footstool" for God the Son. Yet the believer may also be the referent of this proverb, since the person guided by faith walks in ways that are pleasing to God. His actions not only commend him to God, but even his enemies may be disarmed by his integrity and live peacefully with him.

Read or sing Psalm 143A Hear Now My prayer, O LORD

Thursday (5/8) Read and discuss Jeremiah 31:31–34

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I

will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (ESV)

Terence Fretheim writes:

This is the only Old Testament passage where "new" modifies "covenant," though other modifiers are used that imply newness (cf. "everlasting" in 32:40; 50:5). What is "new" about this covenant is a disputed issue. The only other substantive use of the word "new" in Jeremiah is in v. 22. This new covenant is explicitly said *not* to be like the one that God made with a redeemed-from-Egypt Israel at Mount Sinai. This reference to the exodus should be connected to the call for a change of confession in 16:14-16, also introduced by "the days are surely to coming." The new covenant will be linked neither to Mt. Sinai nor to the exodus! The return from exile is newly constative event for the people of Israel and the new covenant is an accompaniment integral to that event. Given the pattern in the book of Exodus, it is appropriate that a new covenant with Israel follow upon this newly constitutive salvific event. This new covenant will be made by God "after those days," that is after Israel's return from exile.

What this constitutive event positively entails for Israel has been spelled out in 24:6-7; God will build them and plant them and "give them a heart to know that I am the LORD?"; probably reflecting on Deut 20:1-4. This new heart will replace the "evil will/heart" so characteristic of Israel's life before exile. This will be a new "exodus" in terms of the more basic themes, but so different in other ways. The old covenant formula of relationship still applies, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people;" a theme struck in the immediately prior sections, but Israel will now be constituted as he people of God in a new way. God will give them a new heart so that they will know the LORD, indeed *all* of the people will know the LORD.

Friday (5/9) Read and discuss Hebrews 8

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

For he finds fault with them when he says:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah,
not like the covenant that I made with their fathers
on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.
For they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord.
For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.”

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (ESV)

Tom Wright comments:

This passage ... draws together for the last time the contrast between Jesus as the true high priest and all the priests who have gone before Him. It places this contrast inside two larger contrasts: the contrast between the earthly and temporary tabernacle or Temple and the true, heavenly one; and the contrast between the old covenant, the bond established on Mount Sinai between God and Israel, and the new covenant, promised long ago and now brought into being by Jesus. Verse 6, mentioning this latter point, introduces the new section of the letter which begins with verse 7.

The thrust of this conclusion, then, is that the readers must learn to distinguish between the copy and the reality – like small children discovering that there was such a thing as real live football, for which their table-top game was just a small substitute – and that they must learn to celebrate and enjoy the real thing, and not cling on to the copy. This must have presented a particular challenge to those Jewish Christians who all their lives had looked to the Jerusalem Temple as the focus of devotion, the place of pilgrimage, the very house of God, and to the priests who served in the Temple as God’s representatives for all time. The challenge must have appeared as much political as theological; for much of the first century the

Jews who lived in and around Jerusalem perceived themselves as being under threat, not least from Rome. Eventually the threat would burst out into an open war which would end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple itself in AD 70. In such circumstances, anyone suggesting that the Temple was only a copy of the reality, and that anyone who came to God through Jesus was entering the true Temple which had all along existed in heaven and would one day be revealed as the reality, would be seen as horribly disloyal. And when countries and cultures are under threat, disloyalty is sometimes punished with violence.

As we shall see in chapter 10, that was indeed what had been happening. Part of the reason for writing the letter may well have been that the Jewish Christians who received it were under exactly that kind of pressure and threat, and needed to know, and to know very clearly, that the Jesus who they were following was indeed the true high priest, and had indeed entered the true Temple on their behalf. The old Temple was good; the new, real one was better. The old priests were good; the new Priest was better. The old covenant was good; the new one was better, established on better promises. As we look back to those early days, and put ourselves in the shoes, and the hearts, of our forebears in the Christian faith, we do well to ask ourselves whether our own devotion to Jesus, our own celebration of all that He is and has done, is as powerful and as central to our lives as the writer wanted Him to be for his readers. If He was 'better' even than the Temple and its priesthood, how much more is He 'better' than the many things which so easily distract us from single-minded devotion to Him.

Read or sing Psalm 91A The One Who Dwells in God (5-9)

Saturday (5/10) Read and discuss Matthew 26:69–75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

What shall the hearers/readers of Matthew make of Peter's tears? One must be careful because we cannot fill in the gap too explicitly. Here, however, are the two things that Matthew's readers/hearers know for certain: First, Jesus said that all of His disciples would be caused to stumble because of Him. Second, Peter tried to distinguish himself from the others as steadfast

and failed. They are just like Peter is, and he is just like they are, and he has denied his Lord just as his Lord said that he would.

Leaving Judas aside for the moment, what is the spiritual condition of these eleven? Matthew does not explicitly describe the restoration of the Eleven after Jesus is raised from the dead, although 28:16-20 assumes it. Luke 24 makes it clear that none of the disciples thought Jesus would be raised from the dead: they thought He was dead and gone. John 20 conveys the same message; no one had believed Jesus' promise that He would take up life again. Jesus died, and in their despair, the disciples thought it was over.

There is no reason to think that Matthew's message differs at all from Luke's or John's. Indeed, Jesus' promise to go ahead of the disciples to Galilee can and should be read as a promise that, risen from the dead, the Son of God will appear to the apostate band and restore them to faith and to following Him. That means that Peter's tears here are not to be understood as the tears of genuine repentance or something like that. Peter has fulfilled the prediction of Jesus; he has stumbled so as to fall. ...

To anticipate 28:16-20, then, this means that when the Eleven encounter Jesus in Galilee, they do so as those who have nothing to offer Him – no strength of their own, no track record of courage or faithfulness, no visionary wisdom to guide them. No wonder some explicitly doubted how in the world they were going to be able to carry out the Lord's mission! They are like infants, little children, in their weakness. The most that we can say about Peter's bitter tears here in 26:75 is that they show the profound experience of his poverty of spirit.

Into that poverty will come the Son of God to restore and renew. But it will not happen just yet. First, the reign of God must go where none of His disciples thought it should go: to a paradoxical enthronement scene where the King will die. And then, against all of their unbelieving expectations, God will raise him on the third day.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.