

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 1 (Matthew 1:1-Matthew 3:12)

Matthew 1:1-17

Is this any way to start a Gospel, with a drawn-out genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism (and Islam and Christianity)? As you read this passage, circle the names you recognize and consider 3 questions: 1.) What is it that you know about the names you recognize? 2.) What does it mean that the list of names you did not circle is likely to be as large, or larger, than the names you did recognize? (Note: there are names in this genealogy that are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, so don't feel badly if you don't recognize all of the names.) 3.) Who is in your 'spiritual' genealogy?

Matthew 1:18-25

The connecting point between the reading from yesterday and today is Jesus' human father, Joseph. Most of what we know of Joseph, Jesus' 'human father', comes from the Gospel of Matthew. As you read this passage, come up with a list of 3 to 5 adjectives you would use that describe Joseph. Consider, could these same adjectives be used to describe Jesus? What might this tell you about Joseph's influence on his son? Did your father have a good influence on you?

Matthew 2:1-12

While a typical nativity set will include 3 wise men, we don't actually know how many there were. Because the word 'magi' (2.1) is the plural of 'magus', we believe there was more than one, but how many more we do not know. This reading hints at some of the barriers these magi had to overcome in order to worship Jesus, but we certainly don't know all the details about how long, arduous, and dangerous their journey may have been. Imagine what might be included if we read a travel diary written by any of the wise men and consider what barriers impede your ability to worship Jesus?

Matthew 2:13-15

Once again Joseph is the central character in a reading where he displays both trust and courage to save his infant son from real danger. Like our previous story of the magi, these details about the Holy Family escaping to Egypt as political refugees is told in only in Matthew; not in the other 3 gospels. If you felt your family was in danger, what do you think you might do to protect them? What wouldn't you do? Today is a good day to pray in gratitude for faithful fathers who take action to protect their children... Who knows, they may be protecting the child who is to be the Author of Salvation?

Matthew 2:16-23

The tragic story related in this passage is known as "The Massacre of the Innocents." Notice the difference between Joseph and Herod. Joseph, who is among 'the least' in terms of social standing, goes to great lengths to protect his infant son (step-son?) while Herod, who is among 'the greatest' in terms of social status, goes to great lengths -- slaughtering the powerless -- to protect his own interests. This reveals the depraved lengths that people sometimes go to protect their own power and prestige. Read Philippians 2:5-8 and consider how Jesus' costly self-giving love reflects that of his earthly father, Joseph.

Matthew 3:1-6

While the first 2 chapters of Matthew provide information about Jesus that is not relayed in the other 3 gospels, Matthew 3 introduces us to someone who does appear in all of the gospels, John the Baptist. (cf. Mark 1:1-8, Luke 3:1-17, John 1:19-28). It is John the Baptist who formally announces the coming of the kingdom of heaven for the first time. Following yesterday's sickening story of cruelty and suffering, who would not yearn for a different sort of Kingdom and a different sort of Ruler? How do you yearn for the world to be different than it is?

Matthew 3:7-12

After introducing us to John the Baptist, Matthew provides a more complete taste of his preaching focused on a message of repentance. Had you been alive then, how do you think you would have responded to John's message? Note that the word 'repentance' is often misunderstood. As Frederick Buechner writes, "To repent is to come to your senses. It is not so much something you do as something that happens. True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying, 'I'm sorry,' than to the future and saying, 'Wow!'" (Have you had any 'wow' moments reading scripture this week?)

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 2 (Matthew 3:13 – 5:16)

Matthew 3:13-17

When we last read about him, Jesus was an infant spirited across the border into Egypt by his father, Joseph. Joseph took this action based on a dream. Jesus, now an adult, returns to ‘the scene,’ seeking baptism by John. As Sueng Ai Yang remarks, “The fact that Jesus received John’s baptism of repentance has been a puzzle [] to Christians throughout history... How can Jesus receive baptism from his inferior... (cf. Matt. 3:11)? Moreover, if Jesus is not only human but also divine, why does he need baptism?” Whatever the explanation, the key is surely related to God’s affirmation that Jesus is His beloved Son in whom his heavenly Father is well pleased.

Matthew 4:1-11

In our reading today, right after his baptism, Jesus faces the temptation to deny his identity. Note that the temptations come as a result of religious activity – being led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a time of fasting. Notice also that the first two temptations begin with the devil expressing doubt about Jesus’ identity: “If you are the Son of God...” The final temptation is a bit different, an invitation to Jesus to misuse his identity. Justo Gonzalez observes how the power of our worst temptations is “that if we yield to them, we forget and deny our own identity as children of God.” Pray today for strength to remember your God-given identity.

Matthew 4:12-17

Sometimes we forget that before and during his ministry, Jesus actually lived somewhere. As Matthew tells us, following the arrest of John, Jesus’ physical address was his home in Capernaum. According to what we’ve read so far: Jesus first lived in Bethlehem, then lived for a time as an immigrant in the land of Egypt, and later returned to reside in Nazareth. Jesus then begins his public ministry from his home base in Capernaum. Echoing John’s announcement of the coming kingdom (cf. Matt. 3:2), Jesus’ message announces that the kingdom has ‘come near.’ What do you think Jesus meant?

Matthew 4:18-22

These 5 verses tell us about the first four disciples. Have you ever considered the possibility that there were other people we’ve never heard of who said ‘no’ when Jesus issued a similar invitation? Consider the implications of these fishermen stepping away from their livelihoods’ and their families as they responded to Jesus’ invitation. What (safety) nets might you have to drop in order to follow Jesus more closely? Which of Jesus’ invitations do you struggle with most?

Matthew 4:23-25

With the preliminary work – baptism by John, trial in the wilderness, calling the first disciples – behind him, Jesus ‘goes public.’ Certainly, the events described in these 3 verses took weeks, perhaps even months. Given that Jesus began his ministry ‘announcing the kingdom,’ it is important to see that what follows is his ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing. When you think of Jesus, do you think of him most as being a teacher, a preacher, or a healer? Why do you tend to think of Jesus in the way you do?

Matthew 5:1-12

From the beginning, Matthew has been treasured as “the Gospel of the Sermon on the Mount.” This famous sermon begins in 5:1 and extends through 7:28. Our reading today is known as “The Beatitudes”. They received that name because these 9 verses, one after the other, all begin with a word we translate as ‘blessed’ (Latin, *beati*; Greek, *makarioi*). This word indicates a sense of favor God has towards certain types of people. When you read this passage, are these the types of people you believe are blessed/favorable? Why or why not?

Matthew 5:13-16

Both salt and light, says Jesus, have a specific purpose. And, unless they fulfill that purpose, salt and light are useless. In the same way, those who follow Jesus must fulfill their purpose so that others may “see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Can you think of people who shine their light in a way that gives God glory? Write down the names of these people in the margin of your Bible and take a moment to give thanks to God for their light.

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 3 (Matthew 5:17 – 6:15)

Matthew 5:17-20

In this passage, says Barbara Blaisdale, “we hear Jesus’ teachings regarding the eternal law that he comes into our lives to fulfill – to make complete or to fill full of meaning...” We who rely on the unconditional grace of God may be tempted to think that “our” salvation by grace is somehow superior to salvation by the law. While grace does mean that Jesus fulfills the law in a way we cannot, this passage invites us to remember how the Kingdom of God which Jesus announces is in harmony with what has been revealed in the law.

Matthew 5:21-26

Jesus gives a first example of a law that he has come to fulfill, focusing on the commandments about killing/murder as set forth in Ex. 20:13 and Deut. 5:17. While congregations sometimes have deal with actual murder, it is far more frequently that congregations face the devastating consequences of murderous behavior and attitudes that result in alienated relationships within the community. In this passage Jesus goes beyond the original law (full-filling the law) saying that unrepentant anger at a brother or sister, or insults hurled at them, is tantamount to murder. (cf. 1 John 3:15: “All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.”)

Matthew 5:27-32

If we were to insist on the literal application of this passage, there would surely be a great number of disfigured and maimed folks sitting in our church pews (and preaching from our pulpits!) Perhaps the place to begin is with an honest acknowledgement that no one has managed a life free from failure in this regard. And yet King David is mentioned in the initial genealogy of Matthew; the same King David who coveted, and then committed adultery, with the wife of Uriah. #thingsthatmakeyougohmm?

Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus admonishes against swearing oaths, encouraging people to be true to their word by simply saying either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. As one theologian notes, “Yes means yes, not ‘It depends.’ No mean no, not ‘We will see.’” Do you sense that people find you trustworthy? Do you seek to be impeccable with your words? Where can you root out guile in dealing with other people? How can you grow in dependability?

Matthew 5:38-48

Preachers want to point out that they did not make up this teaching; it is Jesus who said it! As Steven Eason writes, “This is crazy talk. We want to be Christians at covered-dish dinners. We love being Christians at infant baptisms and weddings. We really enjoy being Christians at Christmas... but what in the world is Jesus talking about here? This is not Christianity, is it? It is way too extreme. Did we sign up for this at our baptisms?” Do you think Jesus is asking the impossible? Why or why not?

Matthew 6:1-6

Why do we give? What is our motivation? Is it to signal our virtue? In this teaching, Jesus reminds us that there can be a dark side to our giving and even our praying, depending on our motivations. Some people who give to their churches expect something in return and threaten to withhold giving if their ‘conditions’ are not met. Money, even given to the church, can be given out of pride or guilt, to manipulate or control. If your giving to the church, or to charities, or to individuals expects something in return, then it is not given freely as Jesus teaches us it should be.

Matthew 6:7-15

We usually read the Lord’s Prayer as a list of petitions, e.g. ‘give us’, ‘forgive us’, ‘rescue us’, etc. But there is an interesting twist at the end of Matthew’s narrative that makes this it clear that something is also asked of us, that if we want to live in God’s forgiveness, we must be people who offer forgiveness to those who have ‘trespassed’ against us. This makes it clear that as Christians, we are not to hold grudges and withhold forgiveness... Indeed, Jesus says, “if we do not forgive others, neither will your Father (God) forgive you.” Make a list of people you need to forgive and then pray that God will help you to forgive them. **Note: Some very difficult things should not be forgiven before we are able to work through them with a pastoral counselor or a therapist.**

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 4 (Matthew 6:16 – 7:12)

Matthew 6:16-18

Jesus' teaching in these verses continues the theme he began in 6:1, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them..." Jesus is not criticizing practices of piety, but rather the motivation to draw the attention (and adulation) of others about our piety. Nonetheless, Jesus anticipates his disciples will fast (abstain from eating food). John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, did not think of fasting as an option for disciples and he commended fasting two days a week, on Wednesday and Friday. Consider skipping a meal this week and spending that time in prayer.

Matthew 6:19-21

Consider the primary audience listening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. From the Gospels it seems that those who gathered to hear Jesus were not the well-off; far from it. Still, Jesus advises these people not to store up earthly treasures. Would this have been a temptation and a challenge for them? Why or why not? Remember, Jesus had just taught the crowd around him to pray for enough bread for the day and for freedom from debt, (cf. 6:11-12) so why do you think Jesus is now teaching on this subject to this crowd? Might there have been some in the crowd who did have treasure? How do you feel about this teaching?

Matthew 6:22-23

"[This] is a strange passage, at first glance. Biblical scholars tell us that, in order to make sense of it, we must first know something of the way the ancients understood eyesight. Whereas we see the eye as a window that lets the outer light in, the ancients saw the eye as a lamp that projected [our] inner light outward, illuminating the world." (Wallace W. Bubar) Could this explain the several times Jesus restores people's vision; healings that reinforce that Jesus wants all of us to perceive the world, and people around us, in right and helpful, ways?

Matthew 6:24-34

This passage is a continuation of the admonition that begins 5 verses earlier with, "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth." (Matt. 6:19) As Mark Lomax points out, "It is easy for Christians to speak glibly about God's provision if they enjoy the privileges of well-ordered and wealthy societies, [but] Jesus spoke not to the privileged, but to ordinary people, many of whom were poor, suffering brutal oppression and therefore legitimately concerned about daily bread, water, and clothing." But rich or poor, the question is valid, are you worried and overanxious about tomorrow? What does this anxiety tell you about your confidence in God?

Matthew 7:1-6

In this passage Jesus gives a straightforward command: Do not judge. Why? So that you may avoid being judged. James Bryan Smith points out that we have to primary reasons to judge others: 1) to 'fix' them, or 2) to feel better about ourselves. Smith writes, "Judging others puts us on the moral high ground and diminishes those we are judging. We don't come across as a fellow struggler... Judging implies that we are right and others are wrong. This feels good to us [because] we forget our own failings as we focus on the faults of others." Why do judgement and gossip seem to go hand-in-hand?

Matthew 7:7-11

Leah Schade points out that "Asking, seeking, and knocking are ways of being in relationship with God. Each implies dependence. Each is indicative of the fact that one is relying completely upon God for whatever is being sought. The inquirer does not possess the answer. The seeker does not possess the treasure. The knocker does not also open the door. Appeals are made to God, and God responds in God's time." Are you patient enough to keep asking, seeking, and knocking even as you await God's response... in God's time? What if God's answers are not according to your desires? Is that okay with you? Why or why not?

Matthew 7:12

"The beautiful thing about the Golden Rule is that you do not need to be a devout Christian to understand it. In fact, you do not need to be religious at all. It is one of those rare axioms whose simple truth stands on its own merit." (Richard Harbart). Compared with the Golden Rule, how might Jesus' commandment, "Love one another as I have loved you" set an even a higher standard? (Might Jesus' commandment be considered a Platinum Rule?)

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 5 (Matthew 7:13-8:27)

Matthew 7:13-20

This might be a good time to reflect on your own discipleship and consider, from the perspective of what Jesus has taught in the Sermon on the Mount, where your own life is bearing good fruit? (Instead of using this passage to negatively assess the discipleship of others, it would be more fruitful to take a personal inventory and/or decide, what is it that you consider 'good fruit' from your discipleship. Also, consider asking a friend to tell you where they see evidence that your faith is bearing good fruit? Finally, consider telling someone where you notice 'good fruit' in their life of faith.)

Matthew 7:21-29

This is the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and vv. 21-24 make it clear that Jesus is not offering a set of good ideas for would-be followers to consider; he is saying his teachings are authoritative for anyone who wants to 'enter the kingdom of heaven.' Jesus makes it clear that having a personal relationship with him involves more than just calling him 'Lord.' "It is doing God's will, not simply because you know Jesus' identity, but because knowing and being known by him have transformed your own will, bringing it into accord with God's will." (Timothy B. Cargal)

Matthew 8:1-4

Just as Jesus finishes teaching the Sermon on the Mount, he comes down the mountain and performs three miracles, all of which provide physical healing. Many Bible's preface this passage with the title: "Jesus Cleanses a Leper." Perhaps it would be better to refer to this story as "Jesus Cleanses a Man with Leprosy" to remind us that a disease does not 'define' the total person and to remind us that the man with this disease is someone's child, and perhaps someone's parent, or husband, or brother... In what ways do we use language to diminish the personhood of others?

Matthew 8:5-13

This is the second of three healings that Jesus performs immediately after his Sermon on the Mount. The story is scandalous on many levels as the healing is performed at the request of a Roman Centurion, a person who represents the oppressors who occupy the Promised Land of the Jews and someone who also practices a pagan religion. Not only this, but Jesus actually esteems the faith of this outsider above the faith of those who consider themselves insiders: the Israelites who are ostensibly "heirs to the kingdom."

Matthew 8:14-17

This passage is the third in a set of three physical healing stories that follow the Sermon on the Mount. Why do you think Jesus performs three physical healings right after preaching/teaching the Sermon on the Mount? After healing Peter's mother-in-law, v. 16 reveals that news of Jesus' prowess in healing leads many others to his doorstep as they seek healing from him for both demons and sickness. Consider praying for those you know who are needful of healing today.

Matthew 8:18-22

Two people offer themselves as followers of Jesus. The first is a professional student of scripture (a scribe). The other is said to be a disciple of Jesus. To the first, Jesus says that following him is not easy for he will not even have a place to 'lay his head'. To the second, Jesus says that when it is a matter of following him, even the most urgent commitments become secondary. Where have you faced challenges in being a follower of Jesus?

Matthew 8:23-27

In the passages for today and tomorrow, Matthew tells us about two more miracles of Jesus. Note that the disciples have faith, for they ask Jesus to save them, yet he tells them that they are "of little faith." Justo Gonzalez asks, "How can you explain that even though the disciples ask Jesus to save them, he tells them they have little faith. Consider this possible answer: A faith that is always concerned about itself [self-focused] is weak. Such faith, even though it knows that the Lord can save, does not truly trust that such salvation will come. A deeper and more mature faith leads us to a trust such that one's own salvation is no longer a reason for anxiety or fear."

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew

Reading Guide: Week 6 (Matthew 8:28-10:4)

Matthew 8:28-9:1

Fear of being tortured and then cast into “the abyss” (as Matthew seems to suggest demonic powers will experience at the end times), the demons possessing these two violent men request to be sent into a herd of pigs instead. Pigs were considered unclean, so were most likely property of local Gentiles and a perfect host for the demons. Ironically, their violent natures cause the pigs to drown themselves as the two men are freed and healed. Might this be a promise that no form of evil disorder - political, familial, physical, psychological - can endure in the end? That the Gospel will ultimately subdue all evil? What do you think?

Matthew 9:2-8

(Cf Mark 2:2-12) Matthew omits some details about the healing of the paralytic, perhaps realizing that Mark’s version has already circulated. In Matthew’s version, his sole focus is on Jesus’ authority as Savior from sins in response to the human need for forgiveness from God. One of the most powerful forms of daily prayer is confession. Is this a form of prayer you practice? If so, how has it helped you recently? If not, would you be willing to start?

Matthew 9:9-13

Once again, in this account of Matthew being called to follow Jesus, the theme of God welcoming sinners is highlighted. With whom one chose to eat was a serious matter in Jewish practice. Since the Pharisees directed their question about acceptance to the disciples and not Jesus, it might have reflected the ongoing practice of first century Christians to welcome “sinners” into their midst. When you think of “other” in your neighborhood, what type of person comes to mind? What might Jesus have to say?

Matthew 9:14-17

Here we find out that John the Baptist had disciples separate from, and at times in conflict with, Jesus’ disciples. Matthew seems to make the point that the kingdom Jesus ushers in is indeed something new and requires new thinking and action, but it does not do away with the old. Instead the old is perfected by the new, thus preserving both. Are there traditions or customs you hold dear that seem to be threatened by new thinking? Are there ways to hold new and old together so the essence of both are preserved?

Matthew 9:18-26

The healings of both the girl, who died as Jesus was being fetched, and the women with the hemorrhage that is slowly killing her, are statements in Matthew of Jesus’ power over death. For Matthew, Jesus is one for whom death is already vanquished. Our faith in the power of the resurrected Jesus also gives us new life now and forever. We experience little “deaths” in life. How has your faith in Jesus brought you back from the brink? How does Jesus call you “back” to life even today?

Matthew 9:27-34

Harkening back to Matt. 1:1, the two blind men call Jesus “Son of David” indicating they are somehow aware of his royal bloodline and that he is “Lord.” Even though Jesus restores their sight, they ignore what he tells them in v. 30. This is a comment, by Matthew, on the theological importance of obedience to Jesus’ commands. We all ‘miss the mark’ (which is the Greek translation for the word ‘sin’), and disobey God. What are ways you can begin to aim more precisely at the target of perfection? (cf Matt. 5:48)

Matthew 9:35-10:4

All of the miracle stories we read in Matthew are to be thought of as a bundle and not isolated events. They all point to Jesus as master of demonic powers. This one in particular emphasizes the unbelieving response of Israel’s leaders. Do you believe you have witnessed any present-day miracles of Jesus?

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew

Reading Guide: Week 7 (Matthew 10:5-11:24)

Matthew 10:5-15

This two-fold command is for the traveling missionaries and also for those who receive them. Reflecting Jesus' earthly mission, the disciples are to go only to the Israelites and receive not money, but only food for sustenance. The Great Commission ends this restriction, which the early Christians struggled to accept, sending missionaries also to the Gentiles. As you go through your day, look for ways to be the love of Christ to others. In this way, you are also a modern-day missionary.

Matthew 10:16-23

Christian missionaries in this passage are named sheep in solidarity with the lost sheep of Israel who are called to repent. Matthew reverses the image of the Israelite leaders now as the wolves. He warns the church that mission brings tribulation and that suffering is not incidental. Unique to Matthew is the expression "the Spirit of your Father" pointing to the continuing presence of Jesus so that the missionaries need not depend on their own resources in times of trial. What trials have you endured in your faith?

Matthew 10:24-33

Clearly, Matthew compares the disciple-missionaries' experience to Jesus' experience while on earth, reminding them to not be afraid to bear public witness of faith. He even goes so far as to say that the criterion of their judgement will be their present confession of Jesus - or lack of it. In what places or with whom do you struggle to confess Jesus? Why?

Matthew 10:34-39

The text here reflects a real situation in the early church where followers sometimes had to choose between their family and their faith. Matthew also alludes to the experience that sometimes the Christian community as the family of God creates closer and more meaningful ties than a family of origin. The key is not loving family in general, but MORE THAN God. Does your family of origin share your beliefs, or are they different? Have you experienced a connection with other believers greater than familial ties?

Matthew 10:40-11:1

Verse 42 shifts the audience from just the disciples following Jesus on earth to all future disciples - they will not lose their reward. It's ambiguous exactly to whom the "prophets", "righteous ones" and "little ones" are referring. Most likely, little ones are not children, but ordinary Christians. It's implied that settled disciples who receive and support itinerant disciples share in the same reward. Do you know of any itinerant disciples? Did you know that all United Methodist Elder pastors are itinerant?

Matthew 11:2-19

John had previously recognized Jesus as Messiah (3:14&15), but now seems to doubt. Rather than confessing his identity, Jesus refers to the work of both He and the disciples in His name as a sign of the messianic age being present. How are all of us blessed by not "falling away" from Jesus?

Matthew 11:20-24

These words may be from early Christian prophets reflecting on their present day struggles rather than sayings of Jesus. The problem wasn't believing the miracles happened, but that the miracles didn't change their behaviors. Are there behaviors you feel convicted to change? Who will benefit?

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 8 (Matthew 11:25 - 12:42)

Matthew 11:25-30

In response to the failed missions above (cf. Matthew 11:20-24), Jesus thanks God in prayer that some did come to repentance; those who were “babies”, the unpretentious “little ones” who made no claims, but were open to the gift of revelation from God. It’s not that no one can know the Father *except* the Son, or vice versa, but no one knows the Father *if not* the Son and vice versa. God the Father and God the Son know one another intimately on a divine level and we know them by revelation from the Son. Those who hear the invitation will know they have the response-ability to answer the call, and when they do, will praise God for it as a gift of pure revelation instead of human intelligence or gain.

Matthew 12:1-8

This chapter division is unfortunate as these verses connect with Matthew 11:23-30 as a unit - both dealing with the “yoke” traditionally understood as Torah law and its interpretation. The picture is not of well-fed disciples wanting a snack, but of ones who have left everything and are genuinely poor and hungry. The law provided for such people and points to humane consideration and mercy being paramount to legalism. What church traditions do you tend to legalize rather than practice mercifully or with consideration?

Matthew 12:9-14

As in the above verses, the Jewish leaders seek to catch Jesus in a legal question to accuse him rather than discuss an idea or be taught by Him. Sabbath violation, however, does not carry the death penalty and isn’t used later in his trial (Matthew 26:57-75) Yet it is still enough to incite them to begin plotting how to kill Jesus - the first mention of this end goal. When talking about your faith with others, do you find yourself open to honest and genuine discussion or more often trying to persuade or argue a point?

Matthew 12:15-21

Although there is a plot now to kill Jesus, partly due to his healing on the Sabbath, when Jesus withdraws in response, does he hide and stop his work? On the contrary, he continues to heal “all their sick” instead, still on the Sabbath. His withdrawal in the face of threat is not cowardice or even a strategy, but a divine response to human violence that will ultimately lead to the cross, in which human violence is met with divine self-giving. What do you believe about healing in this day and age? Does Jesus still heal?

Matthew 12:22-32

So much to contemplate in just 10 verses! The original source called “Q”, that both Matthew and Luke incorporate in their Gospels, already set up a dualistic theme of the conflict of kingdoms. Only Matthew assigns one as Satan’s kingdom and the other as the kingdom of God. Our constant choice to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God points us safely away from any kind of sin and toward the kingdom of God as a way of choosing sides. Do you believe there is anything that can separate us from God’s love?

Matthew 12:33-37

Just as important as having Jesus as a personal savior is Matthew’s call to bear good fruit in mission to others as a way to choose which side we are on (see last Friday’s entry). General point being, one’s outward words and deeds represent one’s inner reality. These pronouncements about judgement can only be found in Matthew who considered verbal professions of faith an ultimate concern as he witnessed new Christians around him either keeping quiet about their faith or joining in saying scandalous things about Jesus. Would you say you profess a faith in Jesus as the Christ? If so, where have you had opportunity to share that?

Matthew 12:38-42

The Pharisees demand Jesus perform a miracle of grand proportion, preferably something celestial, as proof of His divinity. Notice they call him “teacher” instead of “Lord” as his disciples do, signaling their preconceived unbelief. Have you ever asked God for a sign of His presence? If so, what was the result?

Announcing the Kingdom: The Gospel According to Matthew
Reading Guide: Week 9 (Matthew 12:43-13:53)

Matthew 12:43-45

In Matthew's day, sickness and demon possession were related. This saying observed that sometimes cures/exorcisms weren't permanent and a relapse could be worse. Of this passage, John Wesley wrote in his *Explanatory Notes*, "When the unclean spirit goeth out - not willingly, but being compelled by one that is stronger - he wanders through barren, desolate places not yet watered with the Gospel: Seeking rest and finding none - how can he, while he carries with him his own hell? Reader, is it thy case?"

Matthew 12:46-50

Though the prior daily readings describe an unbelieving generation, there *are* some who respond with faith. These believers become Jesus' true family. This is Mary's first appearance since Jesus' birth story and the only appearance of His biological brothers and sisters. They stand "outside" as a sign of their religious distance as unbelievers who do not participate in the kingdom of God. What do you think about the present-day practice of calling other believers "sisters/brothers"? Is this comfortable or uncomfortable? Why?

Matthew 13:1-9

We encounter metaphorical sayings Matthew calls "parables" for the first time. Parables were a new form of teaching introduced by Jesus in that day. They were disturbing stories that threatened the hearer's assumptions. "Sowing" was a stock metaphor for teaching, as was "harvest" for the day of judgement. Matthew changes "seed" to "seeds" (cf. Mark 4:1-9) emphasizing the responsibility of individual believers to produce "fruit" (righteous deeds). How would you quantify the "fruit" you help produce?

Matthew 13:10-17

The Greek word "secrets" in verse 11 can also be translated "mysteries". Not that there are secret things being kept from certain people, but that unbelievers remain mystified by the ideas set forth by Jesus. Believing Jesus is who He says He is opens up a whole new understanding of what it means to follow Him. Have you experienced this in other settings when learning something makes other things become clearer?

Matthew 13:18-23

Another translation of "understanding" in verses 19 & 23 is "putting facts together". Putting the facts together about Jesus - what has been seen, read, heard - is the same as receiving and believing. What comes next depends on a person's situation. What situation are you in right now? Are you on a path, on rocky ground, among thorns, or on good soil? How is this currently affecting your faith journey?

Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43

It's helpful to read Mark 4:26-29 also. Matthew changes the parable also found only in Mark and adds an explanation. One view of the parable is that it goes back to Jesus as a declaration against the building of boundaries and efforts to have a "pure" community, which is God's business and will be settled in the last days. What words or phrases jump out at you as you read this? Take time to look into any questions.

Matthew 13:31-35 & 44-53

How do you understand the kingdom of heaven? Is it temporal, or a process that moves through history from creation to end times? Is it a noun of action, like the word *love* in "love of God"? Is it a certain church, community, or institution -- or a manifestation of God anywhere? Which image is your favorite?