

# MATTHEW TOGETHER

## WEEKLY READING QUESTIONS

Our journey begins: June 1-4

*Things to think about in Matthew 1 through 3:10*

At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we find a version of Jesus' family tree, witness his birth and recognition by the Magi, and re-experience the family's desperate flight into Egypt. Then Jesus suddenly becomes an adult and we meet John the Baptist.

- Why do you think that Jesus' link to King David is important to Matthew? Compare Matthew's lineage to Luke's lineage in Luke 3:23-28. Why do you think they included these the way they did? If you are reading a commentary as you read the gospel, what does it have to offer?
- What other important infant (think Old Testament) was saved from death in Egypt? What importance, if any, is there in this parallel?
- John the Baptist performs baptisms as an agent of God. Many people went to John for a renewal of their promise to God to live with changed hearts and lives. He received all people for baptism but challenged those hostile to Jesus' ways in a God-filled life. If you were to renew your baptism today, what new promises might you offer to God?

June 5-11

*Things to think about in Matthew 3:11 through 6:6*

Jesus' baptism by John marks an important beginning—it is the starting moment of Jesus' public ministry.

- How is Jesus' ministry recognized by God? Who can hear the "voice from heaven?" Have you ever heard such a calling? Or maybe you experienced more of a "nudging" of God's Holy Spirit toward a particular vocation or way of life? Sit with that this week and pray with it. If you haven't, maybe pray that you might hear or sense something.
- The image of the dove is used to depict the presence of the Holy Spirit. What other images help you to understand the Spirit of God in and around you?
- Jesus' journey begins in the wilderness. What happens in the wilderness for ancient Hebrew people? For Jesus? Do we face "the wilderness" in our modern lives?
- In chapter 5, Jesus preaches five sermons beginning with the Sermon on the Mount which contains the very familiar Beatitudes. His words are radically different than his listeners may have expected. Why do you think Jesus wants us to know that God's favor is with people who suffer hunger, thirst, injustice?
- Jesus also warns us about judging others and the need to obey God's laws, the command to reconcile with those who have offended or wounded us, warnings against adultery, divorce, retaliation – even loving enemies! Consider which of Jesus' teachings are the most difficult for you to hear or obey?

The Weekly Reading Questions are designed to help you reflect on the Book of Matthew as you read over the course of three months. The reflection questions correspond with the **Matthew Together** reading calendar. You may also find your reading enhanced by the use of a study Bible or Matthew commentary. For more information and additional resources, go to [www.upctempe.org/matthewtogether](http://www.upctempe.org/matthewtogether).



## June 12-18

*Things to think about. Matthew 6:7 through 9:17*

Jesus the teacher offers several important best practices for children of God. He also warns us of important pitfalls to be avoided.

- The example of the Lord's Prayer as the proper way of praying provides all that is necessary in a sincere prayer to God. Consider each line of the prayer; what do you find? Praise? Need? Other?
- Jesus clearly points at many of the challenges we face. We are definitely people with wealth (comparatively) who appreciate our possessions. What of your many things are most important to you and do those things get in the way of serving God?
- Do you worry about your life; what you will eat, drink, wear? How do you feel about Jesus' teaching that you should stop worrying about tomorrow?
- Do you see yourself as one who judges others? Consider carefully ways you might better recognize the "log in your eye."
- How do you understand the passages that talk about the "kingdom of heaven?"
- What do you think Matthew is trying to tell us about Jesus by recording stories about his miraculous powers over disease and nature?
- Are you surprised that Jesus delegates his powers to his disciples? What does that mean for us as disciples today?

## June 19-25

*Things to think about. Matthew 9:18 through 12:14*

In this week's readings, we hear the Bible's most frequent command. Which one is that? "Be good! Behave! Say your prayers!" No. It's the command we find in Matthew 10:26, 28 and 31. "Don't be afraid." Jesus warned his disciples that the authorities will be after them and that discipleship will involve physical and emotional suffering. He reminded them that God was in charge. Truth and justice will prevail; those who have lived with faith and integrity will be vindicated despite what others do or say to the contrary. So faith in God put into action, not fear, is Jesus' message.

- Jesus' call to the twelve disciples was not easy. Do you think they were asked to do too much? What are ways you respond to God's call to

discipleship? Are there times when you do too little or too much?

- News of Jesus' teachings and miraculous work was reaching John the Baptist (in prison) and beyond. Challenges to his wisdom, love, and position as the Son of God could have been expected. Are there ways that you challenge Jesus? Do you embrace his teachings as they are written in the bible? How do you understand the many miracles; are they real?

## June 26-July 2

*Things to think about. Matthew 12:15 through 14:12*

To begin the readings, it's important to note that Jesus reminds his many followers of the words spoken by Isaiah the prophet. Consistently, the book of Matthew draws from the Old Testament not only to communicate effectively to the people of that time and tradition but to help them understand that he is the one that has been foretold. Jesus' teaching continues in parable form using common images drawn from first-century agricultural life – weeds, seeds, yeast, treasure hidden in a field, a seller of fine pearls, fishermen and their nets.

- As a person of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, see if you can understand the messages of these stories. Are the messages important today?
- Select one of the parables and try to rewrite it so it will be meaningful to a friend. What image(s) would you choose to help your friend understand the message of the parable you are trying to convey?
- Is the death and burial of John the Baptist foreshadowing of what is to come?

## July 3-9

*Things to think about. Matthew 14:13 through 16:12*

This week's readings will explore what it means to have faith.

- What exactly is spiritual purity? Does it describe what we do in public (our exterior life) or the devotion of our hearts (what is interior)? Might it involve BOTH?
- How does the Canaanite woman's request for Jesus to heal her daughter strike you?
- Why do you think Matthew recorded a second feeding miracle? Who actually feeds the crowds in the second account? Who fed the crowds in the account in Matthew 14:13-22? What conclusions do you draw from this?



## July 10-16

*Things to think about. Matthew 16:13 through 18:7*

We begin with further evidence of who Jesus is and what his future holds.

- Peter declares his belief that Jesus is the Christ—meaning anointed one. What led Peter to believe this?
- A few passages later, Jesus calls Peter “Satan.” Why did Jesus do that? (hint-Matthew 4:1-11)
- What does Jesus’ transfiguration/transformation tell you about him?
- As Jesus continues his journey toward Jerusalem, his teachings continue and we have lots of questions to consider:
- Why were the disciples unable to heal a boy who was demon-possessed?
- What does Jesus think about paying the temple tax?
- How bad is it to lead someone else to sin?

## July 17-23

*Things to think about. Matthew 18:8 through 19*

Teachings are the focus of this week’s readings.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are particularly challenging as we sort out all of Matthew 18:15-35.

- How far should you go to reconcile with someone?
- Is reconciliation just a personal and private matter?
- How many times must we forgive?
- In Chapter 19, Jesus insist on seeing and blessing the children.
- What are ways that children are examples for us as we seek to be children of God.
- Jesus talks about the laws for divorce; the encumbrances of wealth and possessions.
- Could you give up all that you have to be in right relationship with God or would you walk away saddened, as the man in Matthew 19:22?
- How might you reconcile yourself to this idea that wealth entices you in wrong directions on your faith journey?

## July 24-30

*Things to think about. Matthew 20 through 21*

Matthew 20 opens with a very interesting story about equity and generosity and we will read, for the third time Jesus’ prediction of his suffering, death, and resurrection.

- What is illustrated in the story of the landowner? How does he choose to spend his abundant wealth? How does this story suggest the presence of God’s abundant grace?
- In the following story, the mother of Zebedee’s sons seeks special divine favoritism for her sons much to the dismay of the other disciples. How does Jesus respond to them and how does his response help you to understand your life as a servant of God?
- Our readings take us into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the story that begins to unfold is very familiar to many of us. We know what is coming but, in the meantime, there is much more to learn.
- As Jesus “cleanses” the temple and “curses” the fig tree, do you feel unsettled? What are these violent actions saying?
- As Jesus faces continued challenges to his authority, again he uses parables as windows into understanding how God works in the world. To help in understanding the lessons of these two parables, consider how each challenges the authority of the chief priest and elders. In one, they are compared to so-called sinners (tax collectors and prostitutes) and in the other, they are represented by the tenant farmers. What other symbolism can you find in the parables?

## July 31-August 6 Week 10

*Things to think about. Matthew 22 through 23:33*

Jesus wrangles with the scribes and Pharisees—the religious leaders of his day—as they continue to ask questions in an effort to test him, trap him, and get him in trouble with the authorities. Again, Jesus uses story and references the Old Testament in response. He minces no words in pointing out their duplicity, calling them “hypocrites” and “blind guides.” You may not be able to stop reading at verse 34 but will want to go to the end of Chapter 23.

- Jesus levels a lot of accusations at the leadership. Review all of his powerful condemnations. The symbolism is potent. Clearly, he has drawn the proverbial line in the sand. Is it any wonder that anger was building against him? Is this where he sealed his fate?





## August 7-August 13 Week 11

*Things to think about. Matthew 23:34 through 25:13*

The readings this week open with Jesus' lament over Jerusalem and then, as he exits the temple, he promises its destruction will come. The disciples ask questions about when this will happen and Jesus' answers are full of doom and gloom (but no real timetable). Over the centuries, a lot of Christians have spilled oceans of ink trying to use Jesus' words as a Judgment Day calendar. Don't do it, but keep reading! There is so much to take in.

- The readings for this week end with the command to "keep alert," to be prepared. What does that mean to you? How does that influence the way you choose to live and love today?

## August 14-August 20 Week 12

*Things to think about. Matthew 25:14 through 26:57*

Perhaps the most important verses are Matthew 25:34-46. The future is in God's hands – and God's alone. As children of God, we are called to remain faithful. The basis of judgment is closely tied to love of neighbor and stranger.

- How is compassion for others tied to the love of God? In your life, are there other ways that you express your love for God?
- As Jesus' death comes closer, he reinforced his message to be vigilant and prepared.
- Did Mary of Bethany's demonstrate foolish extravagance in her act of devotion to Jesus?
- Betrayal is presented in several forms as Jesus moves through the last supper and his night of preparation and prayer. How is he betrayed? Do you think you could have fought off your fears or remained awake and vigilant? Why is important that you, the reader, are a witness to the failures of the disciples during Jesus final hours?

## August 21-27

*Things to think about. Matthew 26:57 through 27:56*

This week's readings are both familiar and full of wrenching emotion. Matthew presents us with a cast of characters, all with a part to play in Jesus' death. There are central characters like Caiaphas and Peter; walk-on parts like Pilate's wife and the servants who point at Peter in the courtyard; the sinister figure of Judas, and the angry blaspheming pair crucified along with Jesus.

- As you read, you will almost certainly identify with someone. Who is it?

- Let this story wash over you anew. Be attentive to how forces have come together to orchestrate Jesus' death. Are these dynamics that are still at work today?

## August 28-31

*Things to think about. Matthew 27:57 through 28*

Jesus death is not the end of the story, is it?

- Why does Matthew tell us that the grave was sealed and guarded?
- Fear permeates the account of the women at Jesus' unsealed tomb. How are the women able to overcome their fears, while the guards could not do the same?
- Are you surprised at the plot to suppress the news of Jesus' resurrection? How is hiding the resurrection news relevant for us today?
- With very few words, Jesus says so much to the eleven disciples. What are his declarations and instructions? If you had been there and heard Jesus, would his message about God have made you a follower; would you have been able to respond to his commands to discipleship?
- Today, how are his declarations and instruction important to you? Consider the ways you are able to respond to Jesus' and your baptism?

