

SUNDAY THEOLOGY TALKS

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The Gospel of Matthew: discipleship, healing, and Community

1. *Worship the Lord Your God*: Jesus' stand-off with Power, Greed, and Pride (April 12)
2. *Blessed Are the Poor*: Jesus' Vision of Flourishing (April 19)
3. *Love Your Enemy*: Healing the Heart to Change the World (April 26)
4. ***Upon This Rock: Faith as Resistance to Idolatry (May 3)***
5. *Let Him be Crucified*: The Cross and the Idol of Violence (May 10)
6. *I Am With You Always*: The Eucharistic Presence of the Risen Christ (May 17)

THURSDAYS READING GROUP

“Blessed Awareness: Mindfulness and the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew”

a.

1. Mindfulness and Poverty of Spirit (April 23)
2. Beatitudes and Inner Unity (April 30)
3. Meekness: Strength, Attention, and Non-Reactivity (May 7)
4. Mercy: Compassion as Attentive Presence (May 14)
5. Purity of Heart: Undivided Attention and Clear Seeing (May 21)

Books

Roger Bretherton, Dr Joanna Collicutt, Jennifer Brickman, *Being Mindful, Being Christian: An guide to mindful discipleship* (2016)
Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*.

4. UPON THIS ROCK: FAITH AS RESISTANCE TO IDOLATRY

6. In the middle of the Gospel of Matthew we find **Peter's confession of Caesarea:**

16.13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his **disciples**, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

- 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
- 15 He said to them, "But who do **you** say that I am?"
- 16 Simon Peter replied, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**"
- 17 And Jesus answered him,
 - "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, **but my Father who is in heaven.**
 - 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this **rock** I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
 - 19 I will give you the **keys** of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."
 - 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and **suffer** many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan!** You are a hindrance to me. For you are not **setting your mind on the things of God**, but on the things of man."

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**."

7. Why is this declaration of faith only appearing only at this point in the Gospel?

7.1. Had Jesus' identity not been revealed already by the Father at the moment of the baptism?

3.16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, **a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

7.2. Interestingly, Jesus declares to Peter

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, **but my Father who is in heaven.**

7.3. This echoes another declaration by Jesus

11.25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, **Father**, Lord of heaven and earth, that **you have hidden** these things from the wise and understanding

and **revealed** them to little children; ²⁶yes, **Father**, for such was your gracious will.

- ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and
- **no one knows the Son except the Father,**
- and **no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**
- ²⁸**Come to me**, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- 7.4. The Father revealing the true identity of Jesus at the Baptism was not enough – because we were not able to hear, to receive this revelation.
- 7.5. This is why Jesus adds that “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”
- 7.6. Even when the Father declares something as in the scene of the baptism, it remain *hidden* to the “wise and understanding” and is revealed only to the “little children”.
- 7.7. Hence the questions
 - i. Who are the little children?
 - ii. How do we become little children?
 - iii. Why do we have to become little children?

8. The “little children” appear often in Matthew

- 8.1. **18:1–5** When the disciples ask “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus places a child (*paidion*) in their midst and says that unless they *turn and become like children*, they will not enter the kingdom at all.
- 8.2. **19:13–15** The disciples rebuke those who bring children to Jesus for blessing. Jesus’ intervenes: “*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.*”
- 8.3. **21:15–16** After the cleansing of the Temple, children cry out “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*” The chief priests and scribes are indignant. Jesus responds by quoting Psalm 8:2: “*Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise.*” Children know.

9. The image of children can be understood properly only in the light of the Sermon on the Mountain

- 9.1. Everything that Jesus teaches in that sermon is what turns us into children *of the Father who is in heaven*
 - ^{5.44}But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so **that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.**
- 9.2. We turn into children by being poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart and by seeking the justice of the kingdom (cf. the Beatitudes)
- 9.3. All these attitudes can be taken as a spiritual portrait of who Jesus is, how he acts, how he establishes the kingdom of God
- 9.4. In other words we become children of the Father by being with Jesus, united to him

11.28**Come to me**, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for **I am gentle and lowly in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

10. So the Father had revealed Jesus’ identity from the beginning, but we were not able to hear “the voice from heaven”, we had not turned into children yet – for this something else had to happen – and this explains why it took such a long time for a declaration of faith (by Peter) that echoed the Father’s declaration.

11. Let us see what happens to make this possible in the Gospel.

12. Jesus begins his ministry by this declaration

4.17From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”

12.1. “Repent” is a poor translation of the Greek word *metanoeite* which means

- i. "be transformed in your mind"
- ii. "turn your whole way of seeing"
- iii. "undergo a change of perception"

12.2. Only a complete change of perception can enable us to hear the Father’s revelation.

13. How does this change happen? How are we transformed?

13.1. First by **following** Jesus – this is the first thing Jesus does, at the beginning of his ministry

4.18While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, “**Follow me**, and I will make you fishers of men.”^b 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father and **followed him**.

13.2. But we cannot follow Jesus because we are paralysed, we cannot see him because we are blind, we cannot hear him because we are deaf – hence the need for **healing**

- i. Healing miracles are essential to this ‘change of perception’ and have a symbolic meaning
- ii. If Jesus does not heal our paralysis we cannot follow him, if he does not heal our blindness and deafness, we cannot see him or hear his word.
- iii. This is why only some people follow Jesus, while others are opposed to him – only some understand and hear his words, while others don’t. This is a theme in Jesus’ teaching, for instance in the parables of the sower in chapter 13

13.18“Hear then the parable of the sower: 19When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and **does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and

immediately receives it with joy, ²¹yet he **has no root in himself**, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.^b ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and **it proves unfruitful**. ²³As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

- iv. The same chapter 13 ends with the refusal of Jesus by the people from his native village, Nazareth

^{13.53}And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” ⁵⁷And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” ⁵⁸And **he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief**.

- 14. But even when we reach chapter 16, despite all the following and the healing, his disciples still cannot hear the “voice from heaven”, the revelation of the Father – or are quick to betray its real meaning:

- 14.1. Jesus does not ask this question to anyone, but to his “disciples”, that is those who had followed him

^{16.13}Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his **disciples**, “Who do **people** say that the Son of Man is?”

- 14.2. That is, how those who are not yet disciples, those whose eyes and ears have not yet been opened, hear the Father’s voice from heaven?

¹⁴And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”

- 14.3. Then Jesus adds: what about you, after all the ‘metanoia’, the “change of perception” you have undergone by following me, by being healed by me?

¹⁵He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, **but my Father who is in heaven**.

- 15. Here something crucial happens that helps us to understand the real meaning of ‘metanoia’:

²¹From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and **suffer** many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” ²³But he turned and said to

Peter, “**Get behind me**, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not **setting your mind on the things of God**, but on the things of man.”

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**.”

15.1. The very disciple who seems to have ‘got it’, Peter, becomes overconfident about his ‘knowledge’

15.2. He is ‘child’ one moment, and becomes ‘Satan’ the next

13.18 “Hear then the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, **the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart**.”

15.3. The ‘voice from heaven’ is not heard once and for all, the revelation about who Jesus is never becomes something we own

23 But he turned and said to Peter, “**Get behind me**, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not **setting your mind on the things of God**, but on the things of man.”

15.4. “Get behind me” means “follow me”: only insofar as we keep following Jesus, only united with him, only by constantly listening to him, only by being constantly *healed* by him, we remain able to hear the voice from heaven.

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**.”

16. Peter is tempted by Satan like Jesus was in the desert:

“**If you are the Son of God**, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written,

“‘Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, “**If you are the Son of God**, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’

And “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

16.1. It is as if Satan was suggesting to Peter: if you are the “rock”, if you have the “keys” of the kingdom, if you are the recipient of the revelation from the Father, then own it!

16.2. And Jesus has to remind Peter that he can keep hearing the Father’s voice from heaven only as long as he keeps “coming to Jesus”, following him, learning from him, listening to him

11.27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, **and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him**.

17. One of the key themes of Matthew’s Gospel is Jesus’ ‘authority’ – few quotations:

17.1. 7:28–29 “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had **authority**, and not as their scribes.”

17.2. 9:6 "That you may know that the Son of Man has **authority** on earth to forgive sins."

18. Jesus wants to give this 'authority' to his disciples

10:1 "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them **authority** over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction."

10:7–8 "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."

16:19 "I will give you [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

18:18 "Truly, I say to you [all the disciples], whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

19. However this authority never *belongs* to the disciples – it belongs only to Jesus, and this is declared emphatically at the end of the Gospel

28.16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them,

- "All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given **to me**."
- **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
- And behold, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"

19.1. The authority remains Jesus' – and his only.

19.2. Jesus does not go away – he is with us until the end of times

19.3. Which means that for us, exactly as for the disciples in the Gospel, we keep receiving it only insofar as we remain "little children", we follow him, we are healed by him.

STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

1. PRELUDE: IDENTITY AND PREPARATION (1:1–4:16)

1. Genealogy and birth of Jesus
2. Visit of the Magi, flight to Egypt, and return to Nazareth
3. Ministry of John the Baptist
4. Baptism of Jesus
5. Temptation in the wilderness.

2. PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM (4:17–11:1)

1. Speeches:
 - 1.1. Sermon on the Mount (5–7)
 - 1.2. Speech on the mission and sending of the disciples (ch. 10)
2. Main events:
 - 2.1. Beginning of Jesus' preaching in Galilee
 - 2.2. Call of the first disciples.
 - 2.3. Healing and exorcisms.

3. GROWING OPPOSITION AND MIXED RESPONSE (11:2–16:20)

1. Speech:
 - 1.1. Parables of the Kingdom (ch. 13)
2. Main events:
 - 2.1. Inquiry from John the Baptist.
 - 2.2. Rejection by Galilean cities.
 - 2.3. Escalating conflicts with Pharisees.
 - 2.4. Key miracles: feeding of the five thousand, walking on water.
 - 2.5. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi.

4. JOURNEY TOWARD JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS (16:21–25:46)

1. Speeches:
 - 1.1. Speech on community life (ch. 18)
 - 1.2. Speech on the end of times (23–25)
2. Main events:
 - 2.1. first announcement of the passion
 - 2.2. Transfiguration.
 - 2.3. Journey through Judea
 - 2.4. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem
 - 2.5. Temple cleansing.
 - 2.6. Disputes with religious leaders

5. PASSION AND RESURRECTION (26–28)

1. Main events:
 - 1.1. Last Supper.
 - 1.2. Prayer in Gethsemane
 - 1.3. Arrest and trials.
 - 1.4. Crucifixion and burial.
 - 1.5. Resurrection.
 - 1.6. Manifestation to disciples.
 - 1.7. Great Commission.