

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”

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*.

LET HIM BE CRUCIFIED: THE CROSS AND THE IDOL OF VIOLENCE (MAY 10)

1. On Good Friday, between midday and 3 pm, that is the time that Jesus spent on the cross before dying, we have a special service called *The Three Hours Devotion*. Each year we invite a preacher who has the task of presenting seven sermons on the seven last words of Jesus on the cross.
 - "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34
 - "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43
 - "Woman, behold your son. Behold your mother." John 19:26–27
 - "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46 / Mark 15:34
 - "I thirst." John 19:28
 - "It is finished." John 19:30
 - "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Luke 23:46
- 1.1. No individual Gospel contains all these sentences. They are taken from all the Gospels and this presents a real challenge for the preacher.
- 1.2. The narratives of the passion in the Gospels have similarities, but also significant differences. Each one of them chooses a particular theological angle.
- 1.3. It can be said that they are the point of incandescence of the theology of each particular Gospel.
- 1.4. This is particularly evident with John, but applies also to the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) – and one of the ways of discovering the specific angle of each is tracking their differences and specificities.
- 1.5. See the synopsis of the passion narratives in the appendix.
6. Let us begin with some minor differences/specificities.
1. Only in Matthew's version of the passion is this sentence found
 - 27:52 The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.
- 1.1. No parallel in Mark, Luke, or John
- 1.2. The passage is chronologically awkward:
 - i. the tombs open at Jesus' death, but the saints only come out after his resurrection (v.53).
 - ii. This suggests Matthew may be incorporating an existing tradition or fragment and has not fully smoothed it into his narrative.
 - iii. The other evangelists either did not know this tradition or chose not to include it.
2. Matthew is the most explicitly Jewish of the four evangelists and writes for a community steeped in Jewish apocalyptic expectation.
 - 2.1. The resurrection of the holy ones at the end of time was a standard feature of Jewish eschatology

Daniel 12:2 ¹“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Ezekiel 37 ¹¹Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

- ^{2.2.} By including this episode, Matthew signals that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a cosmic, apocalyptic turning point: the end-time resurrection has begun.
- ^{2.3.} This is Matthew's theological signature, and no other evangelist shares it.

3. The "holy city" and Jerusalem's centrality

- ^{3.1.} Matthew uses the expression "holy city" (27:53, also in 4:5), which reflects a distinctly Jewish reverence for Jerusalem.
- ^{3.2.} The appearance of the raised saints in Jerusalem reinforces Matthew's consistent interest in showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's hopes within Israel's sacred borders.

4. The guard at the tomb

27:62-66 ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ ⁶⁴Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard

28:11-15 ¹¹While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. ¹²And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers ¹³and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ ¹⁴And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” ¹⁵So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

- ^{4.1.} Only Matthew narrates the posting of a guard at the tomb by the chief priests and Pharisees, and then the bribing of the soldiers after the resurrection to spread the story that the disciples stole the body.
- ^{4.2.} This apologetic concern suggests Matthew is responding to a Jewish counter-narrative circulating in his community.

4.3. Matthew is writing for a specific community, addressing its conflicts, its relationship to Judaism, its need for apologetics, and its sense of cosmic fulfilment.

5. But the most interesting traits proper to Matthew is in the following section of the passion narrative

27:39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying,

“You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! **Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!**”

41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him.

42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 **He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’**”

6. This intentionally echoes the temptation of the devil in the desert

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him,

“**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.’”

7 Jesus said to him,

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

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him,

“All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

10 Then Jesus said to him,

“Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (Matt 4:1-11).

7. As we saw, the way the devil tempts Jesus in the desert focuses on

7.1. what it means to be a child of God,

7.2. on what it means to act (“command,” “throw”) in the name of God,

7.3. on what it means to act *as God*.

8. This makes the behavior of Jesus on the cross the supreme demonstration of the real way of acting as the Son/child of God.
 - 8.1. We saw that the description of the way a child of God should act is found in the Sermon on the Mountain

“that you may be *children* of your heavenly Father” (Matt 5:45).
 - 8.2. In the desert, Jesus responds to the devil’s distorted understanding of what it means to be a child of God (“if you are the Son of God”) through answers and actions that show what it really means to be “Son of God.”
 - 8.3. Then, in the beatitudes, he explains it further.
 - 8.4. We saw the explanation of

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3)

 - i. The Son knows he is at the service of a mission, a will, a salvation, and a Kingdom that is not his, but God’s, and for this he knows that the most important way to *act* is to pray, hope, believe, and wait—this is the meaning of being poor in spirit.
 - ii. And indeed, at the end of the story of Jesus’ temptation, we see that the Father takes care of Jesus, sending his angels to feed him (cf. Matt 4:11)
 - iii. just as the Father brings Jesus back from the dead with the Resurrection.
9. This is reiterated in Jesus’ reaction to his disciples when they want to wield the sword to defend him:

“Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that **I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?**” (Matt 26:52-53).
10. And the same temptation comes back to Jesus when he is on the cross in the sentence we saw above

“You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!” Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him and said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the king of Israel! Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. **For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’**” (Matt 27:40-43)

 - 10.1. Always the same provocation:

“**If you are a Son**, if you really have power, do it yourself.”
 - 10.2. Instead, Jesus, by his actions, replies:

“On the contrary, I show that I am a Son by waiting for the Father to act, by continuing to believe and hope in him against all hope.”
 - 10.3. This is how Jesus saves us.

Why Jesus died on the Cross

11. If we want to understand **why** Jesus died on the cross we find two levels of explanation in the Gospel of Matthew.

12. Jesus died because of **a plot** orchestrated by the Jewish leaders who saw in him a blasphemer and a threat, the complicity of one of his disciples, the inertia of the Roman authority, the support of the mobs, and the brutality and indifference to the death of a foreigner of the Roman soldiers

26: 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

26: 14 Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

26: 34 Jesus said to Peter, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

26: 47 While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

26: 65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him.

27: 22 Pilate said to [the Jewish crowd], "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

27: 26 Then [Pilate] released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

27: 27 Then the [Roman] soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

13. But, and here we reach the second level of explanation, Jesus knew about the plot and yet did not flee or oppose any resistance. The prayer on the Gethsemane provides us with a crucial key:

26: 36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and [...] going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying,

- "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

[...] 42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "

- My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

[...] 45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, [...] See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

- 13.1. What was the will of the Father?

13.2. Not that Jesus should be murdered. This was the will of the actors of the plot.

13.3. Rather, it was that Jesus should manifest with his death what he had taught in his preaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mountain - especially in these sentences

5“Blessed are the **meek**, for they shall inherit the earth.

10“Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for **righteousness**’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11**“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12**Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

38“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **39**But I say to you,

- **Do not resist the one who is evil.**

- But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

- **40**And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

- **41**And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

- **42**Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

43“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **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.**

14. This was going to be the way he would reveal what it really means to be the Son of God, that is to be God.

7. And indeed the way he dies is immediately followed by this confession

27.54When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “**Truly this was the Son of God!**”

8. These two sentences act as bookends in the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew

8.1. The devil’s provocation: ““**If you are the Son of God...**”

8.2. And the centurion’s confession: “**Truly this was the Son of God!**”.

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
³³ They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”).	²² They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”).	³³ When they came to the place called the Skull,	¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)
³⁴ There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.	²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.	³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”	
³⁵ When they had crucified him,	²⁴ And they crucified him.	they crucified him there,	¹⁸ There they crucified him,
they divided up his clothes by casting lots.	Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.	And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.	²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.” So this is what the soldiers did.
³⁶ And sitting down, they kept watch over him there.			
		along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.	and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.
		³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.	
		And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.	
		³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”	
	²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.		
³⁷ Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.	²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.	³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.	¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

			²⁰Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” ²²Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”
³⁸ Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.	²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.	<i>along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.</i>	<i>and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.</i>
		³⁹One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”	

<u>39</u>Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads <u>40</u>and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” <u>41</u>In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. <u>42</u>“He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <u>43</u>He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”	<u>29</u>Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, <u>30</u>come down from the cross and save yourself!” <u>31</u>In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! <u>32</u>Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”		
<u>44</u>In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.	Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.		

			²³When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. ²⁴“Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, <i>“They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”</i> So this is what the soldiers did.
			²⁵Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.
⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.	³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.	⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining.	
		And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.	

⁴⁶About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lemas abachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).	³⁴And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).		
⁴⁷When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”	³⁵When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”		
			²⁸Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”
⁴⁸Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”	³⁶Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.		²⁹A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.
⁵⁰And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.	³⁷With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.	⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.	³⁰When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
⁵¹At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵²and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.	³⁸The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.	<i>And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.</i>	

⁵⁴When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”	³⁹And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”	⁴⁷The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”	
⁵⁵Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons.	⁴⁰Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.	⁴⁹But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.	
		⁴⁸When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.	
		⁴⁹But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.	