



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: Peter

Week 14: Matthew chapters 27 and 28

Talking to the Kids
When we talk about Jesus and his disciples, we hear that there are 12 disciples. But of the 12, Peter, James and John, get a lot of mention. We might remember Thomas because he doubted Jesus was risen. But Peter gets special treatment.

But we also have to remember that through the years the Church has put special emphasis on the male disciples and often relegated the women disciples to the side, often not even calling them disciples.

But women like Mary (Jesus' mother), Mary and Martha (the sisters of Lazarus), Salome, and Joanna, are also key figures in the gospel and deserve the title of "disciple". They sit at Jesus' feet and learn. They travel with Jesus. They provide for his ministry with their offerings.

So, yes, we sometimes find special treatment for the male disciples, like Peter, but we cannot forget the women disciples. And we should celebrate their stories, too.

In the final two chapters of Matthew's Gospel, we have the disciple Judas ending his own life. The women disciples, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and John, and other women who are not identified, are at the cross. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple previously unmentioned in the whole gospel, shows up to bury Jesus' body. And on the day of resurrection, the two Mary's go and see the tomb is empty, and then the group of disciples, mentioned as a whole group and not named individually, are at the final scene.

In other words the 12 disciples are all missing as Jesus hangs on the cross and is raised from the dead. Yet throughout the Gospel, these 12 are featured. And while all 12 are named, most are silent participants. But Peter, even more so than James and John, gets special mention by Matthew.

Peter is the disciple who finds the coin in the mouth of a fish so they can pay the tax. Peter asks Jesus how many times a person should forgive another. When Peter walks on the water during the storm, Matthew gives Peter a little more credit than Mark and makes Peter look good for actually getting in a couple steps before stumbling. And of course, it is Peter who confesses that Jesus is Messiah, a pivotal moment that leads Jesus to declare that this is the Rock on which the church will be built.

And this last story leads the early church to develop the notion of the Pope, the bishop of Rome, as being in a line of "apostolic succession" from Peter. Think of it in genealogical terms - each pope is descended from Peter like one grand family tree. Only instead of this family tree being built on family bloodlines, this one is based on a spiritual confession that Jesus is Messiah, first spoken by Peter.

Now over the centuries, the church has not always agreed on what Jesus was saying here. Which is partly why there are so many different denominations. Even the early church fought over which bishop had authority over other bishops. Did Jesus really mean that everything rests on Peter? Did Jesus mean the words that Peter expressed was the important "rock" on which the church was built?

The other Gospels are silent on this point. The other New Testament authors don't really say anything. Even the book of Acts, which gets labeled with the genre of history, doesn't speak of Peter going to Rome. It is only in tradition and sources outside of the Bible that say anything about Peter in Rome. These other sources come from early church leaders like Irenaeus and Tertullian, who both write that Paul and Peter were martyred in Rome. St. Clement writes about Peter's death in a letter to the Corinthians. And there is some ancient graffiti (words written on the walls) under St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican that say "Peter is here". And after examination in the 1960's bones were found that appear to have been a male from the 1st century, whose age fit roughly the age we guess Peter to have been. Does that make it Peter? Not with certainty. But with coincidence it allows the Vatican to continue presuming that Peter was most likely there. So, why do you think Peter gets such special attention?

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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