



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: The Church

Talking to the Kids

Our community is called the Church. Church is a word that refers to both our individual congregation - as in First Lutheran Church. It refers to our denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. And it refers to the whole movement of all the people who follow Jesus, no matter what their denomination or congregation is.

So, yes, we are Church with all those who worship with us on Sunday mornings. We are also Church with our Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Mormon, Orthodox, and more siblings who also follow Jesus.

Being a part of the Church doesn't mean we have to agree on everything. In fact, there is a lot we do not agree on. But we agree on the principle that we follow Jesus, and we have a lot to teach to and learn from one another.

This is the joy of being a part of the Church.

Week 9: Matthew chapters 17 and 18

- Matthew is the only Gospel writer to refer to the Church. He introduces the Church when Jesus tells Simon, You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. Matthew returns to the language of the Church here in Chapter 18 as Jesus instructs the disciples on how forgiveness works.
- By doing this, Matthew is suggesting that the Church community was instituted by Jesus during his lifetime and ministry with the disciples. And that Jesus started the Church with rules and definitions and roles and all the things that make up an organization.
- Matthew is doing this intentionally. The Gospel of Jesus is not just about the life of Jesus, it is about the way the community reflects the life of Jesus as they do what Jesus said. So, this story in Matthew 18 about the church and how to forgive one another in the church was probably not something Jesus actually said. But based on things Jesus would have said, like the next story where Jesus answers the question about how often one should forgive, Matthew shapes this story to reflect those teachings put into action.
- Matthew is dealing with a community that is struggling to figure out what it looks like to be a community. They are still writing the rules, so to speak, of how community works. They are fighting over who has the status, and what to do when one another get mad and do something that goes against the community rules.
- In many ways as Matthew's community is figuring all these things out, everything feels so new. Those who follow Jesus are no longer in synagogue communities, they don't know if they are to follow the same rules they used to follow when they were in synagogue communities. Some of these followers may not even know all the old Jewish laws.
- Matthew wants his community to feel like they are a part of a movement that truly connects with Jesus. Jesus set these rules in place, we follow these rules about how to live with one another because Jesus said so. Think about that old expression you hear some parents say to their children "If you are going to live in my house, you are going to live by MY rules!" Even as those children grow into maturity and become legal adults, that line sometimes still echoes. And children and parents have to navigate new ways of living together as the children age. That is sort of what is happening. These disciples are trying to figure out how to live in community, and Matthew is saying, this is Jesus' house, we will live in it according to his rules.

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

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