



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Deep Dive: The Temple

Talking to the Kids

Have your kids draw a picture of the church. Try to be as detailed as possible. Can you draw where the altar is? Where the pulpit is? Where the pews are? Can you draw where the offices are and where the preschool is? How about the parking lot and the playground?

Take time to talk about each space on the drawing. Where are all the spaces at church you have been. What are some spaces at church you haven't been - like Pastor's Office or the balcony or the Bell tower (Yes, it is possible to climb up to the bell tower.)

In Jesus' time the Temple was divided into spaces where priests could go, where men could go, where women and children could go, and where all people who were not Jewish could go.

Do we have places only certain people can go? Why is it good that every one can always be together in church?

Week 11: Matthew chapters 21 and 22

- There are two concepts that go with the word "Temple" when we are talking about the temple in Jerusalem. There is the Temple Complex, which is a series of buildings and courts that make up a huge space, think about the Vatican City, and its many chapels and dormitories and guard spaces and administrative centers. And then there is the Temple proper, the holy space where only priests enter, think St. Peter's Basilica within the Vatican, only more exclusive as who gets to be let in.
- By the time Matthew is writing his Gospel, the Roman siege of Jerusalem (ends about the year 70) resulted in the destruction of the Temple proper and the whole Temple complex. And by the time Matthew is writing, it is pretty well understood the Temple is not getting rebuilt any time soon, if ever. Jewish people are in diaspora, that is a time of being scattered around the Roman Empire, and a time of being scattered from the traditions and sacred sacrificial practices that marked their identities for so many centuries.
- The Temple complex would have been centered on a holy of holies space, where a high priest enters once a year on the Day of Atonement. There would have been the Temple spaces the priests would have entered, there was the sacrificial altar, burning 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, there would have been separate courts for Jewish men, Jewish women, and Gentiles. The trading of animals and coins that Jesus disrupts takes place in the Court of the Gentiles.
- It was sacred custom for travelers to Jerusalem to buy their animals for sacrifice once they arrived at the temple complex. This saved having an animal injured on the journey, thereby making it unacceptable for sacrifice, as well as saving on traveling costs for the animal. It was also necessary custom to not use currency with foreign idols on it, so trading coins for money acceptable within the Temple was a necessary step.
- The Temple also had its own police to protect the sacred traditions taking place, and during major festivals, Roman guards also would have been utilized to protect order.
- This means Jesus flipping tables and going all Indiana Jones with a whip probably did not happen, at least not as dramatically as Matthew makes it sound. But Matthew is telling us something important about Jesus, and also helping his community deal with the loss of the temple -- since the Temple is gone, this action would explain why God was okay with it being destroyed - it was no longer a house of prayer, and our focus on where God is in the world should center on Jesus, not a physical building.
- If Jesus did cause any scene on the day he entered Jerusalem, it was probably more of a prophetic gesture that made his presence known but also was not so disruptive as to get himself arrested immediately by would have been a very impressive show of force by Temple police and Roman guards all concerned with keeping the festival peaceful and uninterrupted.

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

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