



# First Lutheran Church

## Gospel of Matthew

### Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



## Deep Dive: The Abiding Presence of God

### Talking to the Kids

Jesus comes to us with many titles: Lord, Messiah, Savior, Christ, just to name a few.

These titles tell us that Jesus was and is a special way that we get to know who God is and what God is really like.

When we read the stories about Jesus, we see Jesus make friends with people who are often without friends; we see Jesus feed people who are hungry; we see Jesus teach about forgiving when one another have done things wrong. Most importantly, Jesus teaches us to love as God loves.

When we do the same things that Jesus did, we get our own special title: Disciple of Jesus. This title helps others to know who God is and what God is really like. In that way, we are just like Jesus, helping others to get to know God.

### Week 3: Matthew chapters 5 and 6

- Matthew has multiple themes that are found throughout the whole entire Gospel. One of those themes is the abiding presence of God. Matthew takes this theme from Mark's Gospel, and then gives it his own theological spin.
- So, for instance, Mark uses the expression "Kingdom of God", and Matthew uses the expression "Kingdom of Heaven." Sometimes different interpretations may use the word "Reign" in place of "Kingdom." These expressions are essentially interchangeable for us. For the Gospel writers these expressions help us to see how God is not just somewhere else, but is fully present here with us.
- Matthew, as well as Mark before him, definitely understands God's presence to be here on earth. God is present in the Temple and in the community of God's people. Matthew also more explicitly connects the Kingdom of Heaven, the presence of God, with Jesus. In the birth narrative, Matthew calls Jesus "Emmanuel, God with us".
- Throughout the Gospel, multiple people come up and worship Jesus, be it after being fed, taught, or healed. None of these people are rebuked, even though Jesus will say we are to worship no one but God alone.
- This abiding presence of God is also then extended to the disciples of Jesus, the Church. In fact scholars debate if Matthew is suggesting there are two or three ways God's abiding presence has always been here on earth. There is the era of the Temple, which begins with the tabernacle after the exodus from Egypt, and continues until the Second Temple is destroyed in 70 CE. This era is not debated. The second and third eras may be distinctly separate or considered one intertwined era. The second era is the era of Jesus - from his birth to his ascension; and the third era is the era of the church, which for Matthew begins with the command "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" and ends with the promise, "And remember I am with you, always, unto the end of the age."
- While the debate over how we understand God's abiding presence may be unresolvable, it is clear that Matthew wants us to read the Gospel as telling us not just how Jesus was the special-in-person presence of God abiding (living with/dwelling with) us; but Matthew also wants us to read the Gospel as telling us how the Church is the continuing abiding (living with/dwelling with) us presence of God today. So when we see Jesus feed, heal, or teach, we are to understand that as the Church continues to feed, heal, and teach the same, we are God's abiding presence for the world today.

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

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