



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Devotion Time: Week 11: Matthew chapters 21 and 22
Prayer Time

Almighty God, you call us to a simple life of loving you and loving neighbor. Yet we complicate this by justifying which neighbor is worthy of love; and by limiting who we think can love you the right way. Center us again in the two commands Jesus hangs all the prophets and law on. Guide our life back to the simple ways you want us to just love you and all neighbors. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Love is a word that we all know, but we all have difficulty defining it. We try to break it down with how we love a relative, how we love a special someone, how we love a child, how we love a certain kind of food or a certain television show. but all these kinds of love, which all mean something different, get wrapped up in this one word: Love.

Jesus uses this word "Love" to summarize all the commandments that are in the scriptures. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is just like it, Love your neighbor as yourself. If we want to understand any of the laws, if we want to understand all that the prophets are trying to tell us, Jesus says, this is what it boils down to. And it sounds so simple.

But then we complicate it. We come up with all sorts of dogmas and doctrines that we need in order to love God. And we judge people for not following the dogmas or doctrines as we want them to, and we tell them their love of God is not valid. We tell them loving God must look like how we want God loved.

And we come up with all sorts of reasons for what defines a neighbor we can love and what defines a neighbor we dare not love. The neighbor who is quiet, goes to church like us, acts according to our standards for what life is like -- we love that neighbor and we are there to help that neighbor. But the neighbor who comes from another country, who plays music too loud, who speaks differently than us, who goes to another type of religious services or doesn't go at all, or that neighbor who loves someone we don't think they should love -- all of a sudden we have a list of people we don't have to love.

But -- Jesus doesn't qualify these commandments. He just states them simply. Love God, Love Neighbor. This should give us pause to ask ourselves how do we simplify ourselves back to these simple ways of following every commandment ... how do we remove the things that complicate our following this word Love -- and how do we simplify ourselves to Love God, to let others Love God, and to love not just some neighbors, but to love all neighbors.

We Found Love

in 2011, Rihanna sang a beautiful and simple love song with a refrain that repeated the words:
"We found love in a hopeless place."

The song is about a lover who discovered a lover in a space that was completely unexpected. And this love became transformative in ways that were powerful.

Now sure, the song, which is a fun pop song, is about romantic love. But I sometimes like listening to lyrics and imagining the layers of faith here. And I sometimes think about this as a song God sings to us. Imagine God saying to you, "We found love in a hopeless place."

Imagine God saying something like, "Hey, I know all the messiness that you exist in, and I love you, and you love me"

How does God's transformative love change us -- as we relate to God and neighbor?

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

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