



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Devotion Time: Week 12: Matthew chapters 23 and 24
Prayer Time

Lord Jesus, we do not know the hour of your return, but only that you promise to return. Prepare our hearts with the faith we need to trust your promise, and to live fully in the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

In Matthew 24:32-35, Jesus uses a fig tree as an illustration of when people know that summer is coming. So let's ponder this fig tree. In ancient Israel, most trees keep their leaves all year long. But the fig tree actually loses its leaves for the winter. But unlike other trees that do that that then bud in early spring, the fig tree doesn't bud until the very end of spring. So, when the fig tree buds its leaves, it is truly a sign that spring is ended and summer is truly here.

Most of the signs that Mark gives about the end times would more correlate to the telling of spring, not the telling of summer. So with those signs, we know there is still a long way to go to reach summer, or in this metaphor, the final coming of Jesus. So some combination of all the things that we are hearing about tells us that Jesus' return is near. But near is still not here and now. Near is still approaching. Matthew is not giving us a calculator to know the precise time and day. Matthew is just giving us some guidance to know when the end is near, approaching.

Now there are a lot of mixed messages about the coming of the end times in our current day. Most of this comes from media attention to movements that have decided they know when the exact moment of Jesus' return will occur. There was one such public movement that happened in the last few months that was another in a sequence of claims by faith leaders. There were a lot of claims around the year 2000. There have been smaller claims that have come and gone. One guy in California kept predicting, and changing his prediction, again and again, until he finally became a recluse and a few years later peacefully died. But all that after he swindled many out of their life savings.

Claims of knowing when Jesus is returning are common, but they are all based on someone trying to read the budding of the fig tree leaves. But they also miss the point. Our faith life is not one big jump to the conclusion, and skip all this life stuff. Our faith life is very much living in the present moment. Yes, we are to be aware of Jesus and his approaching return. But we are to live the ways of God's Kingdom now. Any claim that we can skip serving neighbor, living generously, being in community, and just skip to the final moment is not a faithlife Matthew intends for us, nor what Jesus is doing in speaking about the end times. So live now, be present with Jesus now. Tomorrow and the approaching return of Jesus will take care of itself all on its own.

Knocking on Heaven's Door

In the movie Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (1973) there is a scene where lawman Slim Pickens dies, and the song playing is a song written by and performed by Bob Dylan. Later covered by others, including Guns N Roses, Knocking on Heaven's Door is a song that acknowledges the coming of death and the approaching of heaven.

Slim turns his badge in, resigns, and is peacefully resigned to the inevitability of what comes next as he knocks on heaven's door, an expression-metaphor for preparing ourselves to meet Jesus.

Martin Luther is reported to have answered the question, "What would you do if you knew the world was going to end tomorrow" with the answer "I'd plant a tree."

How are you prepared for this moment?

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

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