

Sunday, April Second

Today is Palm Sunday, and thus, the beginning of Holy Week! Today, we will start on a high point, and next Sunday we will end on a high point, but in between, we will also witness the pain, suffering, and passion of Jesus. May your time this week in the final chapters of Matthew be filled with fresh perspective and peace as you reflect upon some of the most important moments in history!

Read: Matthew 21:1-46

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- Who did the crowd identify Jesus as? (see verses 9 and 11)
- Who did Jesus drive out of the temple? Who did He draw into the temple? (see verses 12-14)

Many people traveling to Jerusalem had to travel long distances to get there. This meant that when they came to the temple to offer sacrifices, they had to often buy from the merchants because it wasn't practical to bring doves and cattle on their long journey to the holy city. The merchants knew this, which is why they would price-gouge the people and profit off their desperation. When Jesus arrived on the scene, though, He could not stand to see His Father's house turned into a "den of robbers" (v. 13). In kicking these deceiving salespeople out of the temple, Jesus made it clear that the temple was not to be used for personal gain.

- What did Jesus do to the fig tree with no fruit? (see verses 18-19)
- How do the parables of the two sons and of the tenants expose the chief priests and elders as all talk and no action? (see verses 28-46)

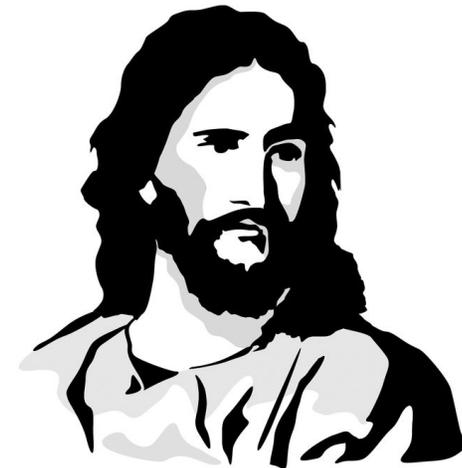
Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

The heart of Palm Sunday is that we give thanks and sing praise to Jesus, our triumphant King, who advocated for us on the cross. Take some time today to sing a hymn or Christian song that focuses on praising our great and gracious King.

Read through the Bible



Matthew Week Five



Monday, March Twenty-Seventh

In June of 2009, the U.S. military sent out hundreds of troops into Afghanistan to find one of their missing soldiers - Bowe Bergdahl. The search was largely based on the military principle that no soldier is left behind. In today's passage, Jesus shares why He is unwilling to leave any of His "lost sheep" behind.

Read: Matthew 18:10-20

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- In Jesus' parable, how did the man react to the one lost sheep? (see verses 12-13)

If you had 100 sheep, and one wandered away, what would you do? Would you stay with the 99 and consider the one a loss, or would you leave the 99 to find the one? In this parable of the lost sheep, Jesus shows us that He cares about us as individuals. There is never a moment when He considers someone "not worth it;" He will continue to seek that person no matter how far she or he may wander away from Him.

- What steps should a person take when someone sins against her or him? (see verses 15-17)

This model can be difficult to follow because it's not natural for most of us to first go and talk to the person who has sinned against us. We'd much rather process with or vent to other people about that person than go and speak to her or him face to face. But notice that Jesus isn't talking about all people; He's talking about fellow believers – brothers and sisters in Christ (v. 15). In this sense, Jesus calls us to follow this model as a way of maintaining unity and like-mindedness amongst members of a congregation.

- How did Jesus stress the importance of community and like-mindedness? (see verses 19-20)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

When fellow believers sin against you, how might you "show them their fault" in both an honest and gracious way?

Saturday, April First

This past year, Siesta Key was named the second-best beach in America. TripAdvisor, the company giving out these coveted awards, arrived at their conclusion by analyzing the quantity and quality of traveler reviews and ratings over a 12-month period. In the end, Siesta Key stood out as one of the best, as it has for many years now (St. Pete Beach was not too far behind!). However, not everybody would agree that Siesta Key is the best. For example, if you ask a bunch of locals to describe the best area beach, they might say Pass-a-Grille or Fort DeSoto instead. Ultimately, it comes down to how you define what makes a certain beach "great." In today's passage, Jesus describes what it means to be "great" in the kingdom of God.

Read: Matthew 20:20-34

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What did the mother of James and John ask? (see verse 21)
- How did Jesus define what it means to be "great"? (see verses 25-28)
- How did the two blind men demonstrate urgency in their request? (see verses 30-34)

Notice what the two blind men called Jesus: "Son of David" (vv. 30-31). It is perhaps no coincidence that right as He was headed to Jerusalem to fulfill His purpose and mission, Jesus was called "Son of David" as a way of reminding the large crowd (v. 29) that He was indeed the individual from the line of David who had come to fulfill God's prophecies and promises to His people. The crowds would witness this reality firsthand in the coming days...

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Jesus tells us that in order to be "great" in His kingdom, we must be ready to become a servant and slave of others (see verses 26-27). How does this notion support or challenge the way(s) you approach serving others in the community?

Friday, March Thirty-First

Suppose you went to Chick-fil-A with a coupon for a free box of nuggets, and when you received it, there were four nuggets inside. Now suppose that the person next to you had the same coupon, but when they opened their box, they had twelve nuggets. That's not fair, right? In today's passage, Jesus talks about fairness.

Read: Matthew 20:1-19

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How much did the landowner offer to pay the early hires? (see verses 1-2)
- How much were the late hires paid? (see verse 9)
- What did the early hires expect to be paid based on what the late hires were paid? (see verses 10-12)

Imagine the frustration of the early hires. Not only were the late hires paid first, but they were paid the same as the early hires! They didn't have to endure the heat and the working conditions of the early hires, so why should they be paid the same? We can certainly sympathize with the early hires because from a standpoint of "fairness," this doesn't seem right!

- How did the landowner justify his actions to the early hires? (see verses 13-16)

Peter's words in 19:27 – "What then will there be for us?" – prompted Jesus to tell this parable. As their Master, Jesus likely anticipated that His disciples (i.e. His early hires) not only thought they would be first in His kingdom but would also get more for following Him. But Jesus reminds them that His grace is not dependent on what they think they deserve; it is simply dependent on what and how He chooses to give. In this way, Jesus offers the same eternal life to all people, even the person who comes to a saving faith in the final moments of her or his life.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

How does this parable help you better understand God's grace?

Tuesday, March Twenty-Eighth

At Our Savior Lutheran School, students are encouraged to communicate with one another in the midst of a difficult conflict. In particular, the person who wronged the other is encouraged to say, "I'm sorry," while the other is encouraged to say, "I forgive you." This exchange helps them learn how to address conflict and also how to resolve it. In today's passage, Jesus shows His disciples the value of apologizing and forgiving one another.

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How many times did Peter suggest we should forgive our fellow believers? What about Jesus? (see verses 21-22)

Back then, Rabbis taught that you should forgive someone three times. Perhaps Peter thought he was being generous by offering to forgive seven times, but Jesus exceeded all expectations when He said that we should forgive seventy times seven times. By saying this, Jesus is not suggesting we continue to keep count, but rather that we continue to forgive.

- What did the master do for the servant? (see verses 26-27)
- How did the servant respond to his fellow servant? (see verses 29-30)
- According to the master, why should the servant have had mercy on his fellow servant? (see verses 32-33)
- How will God treat those who do not forgive their fellow believers? (see verses 34-35)

This is the heart of the parable – If God forgives you, shouldn't you forgive your brothers and sisters, especially if they are begging you to do so? The stern warning in verses 34-35 should give us pause when we find ourselves unwilling to forgive our fellow Christians.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Think of somebody who has recently wronged you. If you haven't forgiven her or him yet, what steps might you need to take?

Wednesday, March Twenty-Ninth

“I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife (or husband), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy law, and this is my solemn vow.” In today's passage, Jesus discusses why marriage should be regarded as a lasting commitment between a husband and a wife.

Read: Matthew 19:1-15

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- How did Jesus answer the Pharisees' question on divorce? (see verses 4-6)

Jesus preached on this very topic in the Sermon on the Mount (see 5:31-32), but in this exchange with the Pharisees, He provides an explanation of what happens in marriage. Specifically, two distinct people – a man and a woman – become “one flesh” when they are married before God (v. 5). Because it is God who has joined them together (v. 6), this sacred bond should not be broken easily. Instead, as He also said in His Sermon on the Mount, only “marital unfaithfulness” should provide grounds for divorce.

- Why did Moses permit a man to divorce his wife? (see verses 7-8)
- What did the disciples conclude? (see verses 10-12)

The disciples' reaction reminds us that marriage is not something to be entered into lightly. It requires sacrifice, forgiveness, and perseverance (to name a few). In response to the disciples' conclusion, Jesus affirmed that celibacy is a legitimate option for some (e.g. eunuchs), but not for all. The term ‘eunuch’ generally referred to individuals who abstained from marriage and sex.

- What does Jesus do for the children? (see verses 13-15)

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Take some time to pray for the marriages of the people in your life.

Thursday, March Thirtieth

Becoming an Eagle Scout is not an easy task! At its core, the process requires hard work, dedication, and discipline. This means earning a series of merit badges and learning important survival skills. The aspiring candidate must also perform service projects for the community and become an outstanding contributor to society. Finally, he should be recommended by his leaders and by his peers as someone fit to earn the distinction of Eagle Scout. In today's passage, Jesus details all that is required to earn the distinction of eternal life.

Read: Matthew 19:16-30

Reflect: Use the passage to work through these questions

- What question did the man have? (see verse 16)
- What did Jesus say the man should do? (see verses 17-21)
- How did the man react to Jesus' directive to sell all he had? (see verses 22)

When asked to give up all he had, the man realized that he did indeed have an idol in his life – his love of money.

- How did the disciples react to Jesus' teaching on money and earthly treasures? (see verse 25) How did Jesus respond? (see verse 26)

The disciples' reaction – “Who then can be saved?” – demonstrates their realization that nobody can receive eternal life on their own merit. In other words, it's impossible for people to follow all of the commandments and give up everything they have to follow Jesus. But, as Jesus points out, “with man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible” (v. 26). In this way, we are saved by God's grace and not by our own works. Even the rich man in this passage can be saved by the perfect work of Jesus.

Respond: Apply what you've learned in prayer and action

Take time in prayer today to thank God for making eternal life possible with Him through the perfect work of His Son, Jesus.