

A Year with Matthew

for a Matthew 25 church



Revised Common Lectionary Year A
Nov. 27, 2022 – Nov. 26, 2023



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbyterian Mission



Artwork: “Jesus Multiplies the Loaves and Fish” (Matthew 14:13–21), JESUS MAFA, 1973.

JESUS MAFA is a response to the New Testament readings from the lectionary by a Christian community in Cameroon, Africa. Each of the readings were selected and adapted to dramatic interpretation by the community members. Photographs of their interpretations were made, and these were then transcribed into paintings.

Source: *Art in the Christian Tradition*, Vanderbilt Divinity Library (library.vanderbilt.edu/divinity), Nashville, Tennessee. Original Source: Librairie de l’Emmanuel (librairie-emmanuel.fr), Paray-le-Monial, France.

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Drawing on the Gospel readings from the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) Year A, this resource helps preachers, educators and worship planners attend to themes of congregational vitality, systemic poverty and structural racism throughout the Christian year (or liturgical calendar). It takes advantage of the convergence of the focus on Matthew in RCL Year A (2022–2023) and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Matthew 25 invitation, with its three-part emphasis on systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality, as well as intersecting work on peacemaking, gender justice and care of creation.

The primary components of this resource are:

- a brief introduction to the Gospel of Matthew and how it functions in the lectionary;
- theological, pastoral and liturgical guidance for the seasons of the Christian year, with a focus on the Matthew 25 themes of poverty, racism and vitality (and connections with peacemaking, gender justice, and care of Creation, where applicable);
- sermon prompts and music suggestions that highlight Christ’s call to righteousness, justice and reconciliation in the Gospel of Matthew.

Additional features, found in Part I of this resource (see pcusa.org/matthew25), include:

- Seven Ways to Read the Gospel of Matthew [reading plans]
- Emmanuel: God with Us [public reading of the Gospel]
- The Sermon on the Mount [Scripture reading and hymn festival]
- The Ten Miracles [Scripture reading and hymn festival]
- Reading Matthew in Daily Prayer [daily lectionary]
- Index to the Gospel of Matthew [appendix]

The objective is to form faithful and active disciples and communities of people who are engaged with, energized by and committed to these strategic priorities for the PC(USA).

Notes

- The Scripture readings below are the appointed texts in the Revised Common Lectionary; brief summaries come from Call to Worship (pcusa.org/calltoworship).
- alt: Italicized passages offer alternative (non-RCL) Gospel readings from Matthew.
- Verses in brackets are added to expand the readings from Matthew’s Gospel.]
- Congregations wishing to read the whole Gospel of Matthew during Year A should use the italicized passages and the verses in brackets; they should also find occasions to read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:29) and Ten Miracles (Matthew 8:1–9:34).

How to use “A Year with Matthew for a Matthew 25 church”

This resource was designed to offer a variety of ways to engage the Gospel of Matthew and the PC(USA)’s Matthew 25 vision over the course of a year. It is not assumed that congregations or individuals will make use of all the options provided in the document. You are encouraged to select the approaches that seem most appropriate and helpful, and to adapt as needed to suit your context. For instance, congregations might choose to host a reading of the Sermon on the Mount, but not the whole Gospel of Matthew. Preachers might decide to use some of the sermon series provided, but not others. Individuals might elect to use the 26-week reading plan for half the year and other options for the remainder.

The Gospel of Matthew

Thought to have been committed to writing in Antioch or southern Galilee after the year 70 CE, the Gospel of Matthew was intended for a primarily Jewish audience. Jesus is depicted as the “new Moses,” who has come to lead his people to redemption. The structure of the Gospel mirrors the five books of the Torah (see outline below), with each section consisting of stories from Jesus’ ministry followed by accounts of Jesus’ teaching. Distinctive features of the Gospel of Matthew include the account of the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2), the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), and the Great Commission (Matthew 28).

An Outline of the Gospel of Matthew[‡]

Prologue: Genealogy and Infancy Narrative — Matthew 1:1–2:23

Book One: Opening Proclamation of the Kingdom — Matthew 3:1–7:29

Narrative: Matthew 3:1–4:25 beginning of ministry

Discourse: Matthew 5:1–7:29 Sermon on the Mount

Book Two: Ministry in Galilee — Matthew 8:1–11:1

Narrative: Matthew 8:1–9:34 10 miracles

Discourse: Matthew 9:35–11:1 instructions to the Twelve for mission

Book Three: Controversy and Parables — Matthew 11:2–13:53

Narrative: Matthew 11:2–12:50 incredulity and hostility

Discourse: Matthew 13:1–53 a collection of parables

Book Four: Formation of the Disciples — Matthew 13:54–19:2

Narrative: Matthew 13:54–17:27 stories before the journey to Jerusalem

Discourse: Matthew 18:1–19:2 instructions for the assemblies

Book Five: Up to Jerusalem — Matthew 19:3–26:1

Narrative: Matthew 19:3–23:39 stories on the journey and at Jerusalem

Discourse: Matthew 24:1–25:46 instructions concerning the last things

The Passion — Matthew 26:1–27:66

The Resurrection — Matthew 28:1–20

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) presents the Gospel of Matthew not strictly in its biblical sequence, but in a way that helps us keep time with Christ’s church around the world through the Christian year. The distinctive shape of the liturgical calendar — with the first half including numerous festivals and seasons and the second half consisting of “ordinary time” — lends itself to a two-part approach to this year with Matthew:

- (1) In the first half of the year, from Advent through Pentecost, this resource addresses the basics of Christian faith and discipleship in a more general way, yet always with an eye toward the themes of Matthew 25.
- (2) In the second half of the year, from Trinity Sunday (Great Commission) to the final three Sundays of Year A (all from Matthew 25), ending with Christ the King (final judgment), this resource focuses more specifically on Matthew 25 priorities — systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality — as these themes are reflected throughout Matthew’s Gospel. (Fittingly, in the second half of the year the RCL draws exclusively from Matthew, not relying on the other Gospels.)

[‡]Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Four Gospels on Sunday: The New Testament and the Reform of Christian Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 98.

Season of Advent

“Advent” means coming or arrival. This word has a double significance, as in Advent we celebrate Christ’s coming into the world and look with longing for his coming again. The season of Advent begins with an emphasis on final things (eschatology). We watch and pray with expectant hope for the establishment of God’s justice and the return of the Prince of Peace. As the weeks of Advent progress, the focus shifts to thanks and praise for the birth of the one who has already come — Jesus Christ our Savior.

The duration of Advent was, in some times and places, as long as six or seven weeks. The RCL still anticipates the themes of Advent in the final three weeks of the Christian year, including Christ the King/Reign of Christ. This feature of the lectionary allows preaches and worship planners to get a head start on Advent before it is eclipsed by preparations for Christmas.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 163

ADVENT SERIES: The Realm of God

four weeks

There is a kind of refrain in the Gospel of Matthew, ringing like a bell throughout this first book of the New Testament. It is the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (*basileia ton ouranon*), appearing 32 times in the book of Matthew, with the final reference found in the first verse of Matthew 25.

The season of Advent provides the church an opportunity to get to know this coming realm of God — the kingdom of heaven that Jesus came to proclaim, and for which we wait in Advent. What is this kingdom? How will we know it when it comes? How does it differ from earthly powers and principalities?

Specifically, what does this realm of God mean for people who are poor, for societies struggling with racism and for churches longing for renewal? How might we experience or participate in God’s realm — here and now — through our work to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle structural racism and build congregational vitality?

The preaching and music suggestions in this four-week series offer ideas for engaging these themes and exploring the significance of the realm of God in Christian faith and in the vision of a Matthew 25 church.

Sunday, Nov. 27, 2022

First Sunday of Advent

Matthew 24:36–44

The Lord is coming; keep awake; no one knows the day or hour.

SERMON PROMPT:

There is good news and bad news. The bad news: Christ is coming at an unexpected time to judge the world. How will Christ judge us when it comes to poverty, vitality and racism? The good news: Christ the judge is also Christ our Savior. How are we longing for salvation?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Come Now, O Prince of Peace

GTG 103

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

GTG 347

Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning

GTG 350

Sunday, Dec. 4

Second Sunday of Advent

Matthew 3:1–12

John calls for repentance: prepare the way of the Lord.

SERMON PROMPT:

It is our turn to turn. John calls us to repent (turn around) and prepare the way of the Lord. In what ways do we need to repent in relation to poverty, racism and vitality? How might we prepare the way for the coming of God’s new realm of justice, peace and righteousness?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Wild and Lone the Prophet’s Voice

GTG 163

Freedom Is Coming

GTG 359

For the Troubles and the Sufferings

GTG 764

Sunday, Dec. 11**Third Sunday of Advent**

Matthew 11:[1] 2–11
[12–15]

Jesus praises John, the messenger who has prepared the way.

SERMON PROMPT:

Has the time finally come? Jesus describes signs that the kingdom of God has indeed come near: healing, new life and good news for the poor. Have you seen signs of God's realm with respect to racism, vitality and poverty? Are we ready? What are we waiting for?

FEATURED HYMNS:

While We Are Waiting, Come	GTG 92
Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn	GTG 107
Heaven Shall Not Wait	GTG 773

Sunday, Dec. 18**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Matthew 1:18–25

Mary is with child; an angel visits Joseph; Jesus is “God with us.”

SERMON PROMPT:

Jesus is “Emmanuel,” God with us. What difference does Jesus make in building congregational vitality, dismantling structural racism and eradicating systemic poverty? By responding to these concerns, how might the church proclaim to the world that God is with us in Jesus?

[*gender justice*] God's promise is fulfilled through a young woman.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Love Has Come	GTG 110
O Little Town of Bethlehem	GTG 120
He Came Down	GTG 137

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Lighting the Advent Candles, Litany for Advent (O Antiphons), Thanksgiving for Baptism, Confession and Pardon (3), Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings (3), Ascription of Praise, Prayers of Intercession (4), Invitation to the Offering (3), Invitation to the Lord's Table, Great Thanksgiving (2), Prayer After Communion (3), Prayer of Thanksgiving, and Blessing and Charge (3), as well as Las Posadas and Lessons and Carols; see pp. 163–186.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Candle Litanies, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 14–27.

Season of Christmas

“Christmas” (from Christ-mass) is the church’s celebration of the incarnation and nativity of Jesus Christ. At the Nativity of the Lord and throughout the season of Christmas we give thanks that, in the fullness of time, God’s Word became flesh to live among us, full of grace and truth. We proclaim this good news of great joy for all people: that God has sent us a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. We bear witness to the light of Christ that has come into the world, the light that darkness cannot overcome.

As with Easter, Christmas refers not only to a single day, but to a whole season of celebration in the Christian year. The season of Christmas spans the twelve days between the Nativity of the Lord (December 25) and the Epiphany of the Lord (January 6). Traditionally, the first service of Christmas takes place on the eve of the Nativity of the Lord. Depending on the year, one or two Sundays fall within the season of Christmas; on these Sundays we continue to rejoice in the wondrous gift of Emmanuel — God with us in Jesus Christ.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 187

Note that several of the RCL readings in Christmas are from the Gospels of Luke and John. For congregations wishing to focus on the Gospel of Matthew, alternate readings are provided, with the exception of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas Day).

CHRISTMAS FOCUS: God with Us

three weeks (12 days)

Matthew’s Gospel begins with the announcement that the child born to Mary will be “Emmanuel,” God with us (Matthew 1:23). And it ends with Jesus’ promise that “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Between these bookends, Matthew shares the faith-shaping, world-changing story of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection.

The season of Christmas is a time to dwell in the wonder and mystery of Christ’s incarnation — the gift of God’s Word made flesh among us, full of grace and truth. Concerns about systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality may seem distant from the minds of many worshippers, and discordant with the festive nature of the season. However, for many children of God these are inescapable realities and ever-present struggles.

The preaching and music suggestions in this resource pick up where we left off on the fourth week of Advent: celebrating the gift of God with us in Jesus, “Emmanuel.” In comparison with the ideas provided for Advent, this span of weeks deals less directly with matters of poverty, racism and vitality; however, it seeks to establish theological foundations that are essential to a year with Matthew and critical to the church’s mission of righteousness, justice and peace.

Saturday, Dec. 24

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)

Jesus is born in Bethlehem; angels tell shepherds the good news.

alt: Matthew 1:1–17

The genealogy of Jesus from Abraham through David to Joseph

SERMON PROMPT:

Matthew’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ family tree, the account of 42 generations from Abraham to David to Babylon to the Messiah. The God of our ancestors — indeed, of all history — has come to dwell with us. This is truly “good news of great joy for all” (Luke 2:10).

[*peacemaking*] The coming of the Messiah heralds peace on earth.

FEATURED HYMNS:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Once in Royal David’s City

GTG 88
GTG 119, 127
GTG 140

Sunday, Dec. 25	Nativity of the Lord
Luke 2:(1–7) 8–20	To you is born this day a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord.
John 1:1–14	The Word of God became flesh and lived among us.
SERMON PROMPT:	See Dec. 24, Christmas Eve.
FEATURED HYMNS:	O Come, O Come, Emmanuel GTG 88 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing GTG 119, 127 Once in Royal David's City GTG 140

Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023	First Sunday of Christmas
Matthew 2:13–23	Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt to escape persecution from Herod.
SERMON PROMPT:	Matthew's Gospel is distinctive in its treatment of Mary, Joseph and Jesus as political refugees, situating their story in the context of an act of genocide. This is in stark contrast to the message of Epiphany (Matthew 2:1–12): that Jesus is good news for the people of all nations. [<i>peacemaking</i>] Amid the violence of empire, the Prince of Peace is born.
FEATURED HYMNS:	In Bethlehem a Newborn Boy GTG 153 Jesus Entered Egypt GTG 154 Where Armies Scourge the Countryside GTG 344

Since congregations are unlikely to hold a separate service for Epiphany, which occurs on a Friday in 2023, worship planners may wish to use the reading and suggestions below on January 1.

Friday, Jan. 6	Epiphany of the Lord
Matthew 2:1–12	Following a star, wise men visit Jesus and bring him gifts.
SERMON PROMPT:	John's Gospel <i>tells</i> us that anyone who has faith in Jesus Christ will be claimed as a beloved child of God. Matthew's Gospel <i>shows</i> us this truth — sharing the story of wise travelers from far beyond the land of Judah, who nevertheless come to adore the newborn king. [<i>care of creation</i>] Jesus' birth is good news for the whole earth.
FEATURED HYMNS:	On This Day, Earth Shall Ring GTG 141 'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime GTG 142 What Star Is This GTG 152

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Prayer of Adoration, Litany for Christmas, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Confession and Pardon (3), Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings (3), Ascription of Praise, Prayers of Intercession (3), Invitation to the Offering (3), Invitation to the Lord's Table, Great Thanksgiving (2), Prayer After Communion (3), Prayer of Thanksgiving, Blessing and Charge (3), and Chalking the Doors; see pp. 187–210.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Candle Litanies, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 28–43.

Time after Epiphany

The Sundays after Epiphany are sometimes called Ordinary Time — not because they are routine or mundane, but because their primary rhythm has to do with following the Sundays “in order.” Indeed, each Sunday is a celebration of Christ’s resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week, and it is this holy mystery that animates, renews, and transforms our life of faith. These Sundays are bracketed by festivals that concern the identity of Jesus Christ: Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration of the Lord; according to the Gospels, at each of these events a voice from heaven claims Jesus as God’s beloved Son. The RCL readings for the time after Epiphany highlight the themes of Christian vocation, discipleship, and community. Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 211

WINTER SERIES: Discipleship

seven weeks

First it happens at the Jordan River: Jesus rises from the water of his baptism and suddenly the heavens open, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the voice of God says, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16–17). Then it happens on a high mountain: Jesus appears in radiant glory, speaking with Moses and Elijah, and suddenly a bright cloud overwhelms them, and the same voice is heard, saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:2–5).

Framed by these dramatic events that reveal the identity of Jesus — baptism and transfiguration, the time after Epiphany challenges us to reflect on who we are and how we are called to live as Jesus’ disciples. The Beatitudes are found at the center of this span of weeks and reflect the heart of Christian discipleship; they also have much to say about the themes of poverty, racism and vitality.

The preaching and music suggestions in this seven-week series focus on the life of discipleship in Christian community. They begin with our baptismal identity as people of the triune God, moving steadily toward our missional purpose in Jesus Christ — a life transfigured and a world transformed by the power of the gospel.

Sunday, Jan. 8

Baptism of the Lord

Matthew 3:13–17

Jesus is baptized; the Spirit descends; a voice says: This is my Son.

SERMON PROMPT:

Where does discipleship begin? In each of the Gospels, Jesus’ ministry begins at his baptism, where he is claimed as God’s beloved child and anointed with the gifts of the Spirit. The same is true for us. Baptism is the beginning of a lifelong journey of discipleship in Jesus’ name.

[*care of creation*] Jesus’ identity is revealed in a local river.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Sing of God Made Manifest

GTG 156

Down Galilee’s Slow Roadways

GTG 164

Wonder of Wonders, Here Revealed

GTG 489

Sunday, Jan. 15

Epiphany 2

John 1:29–42

John says Jesus is the Lamb of God; Jesus calls Andrew and Peter.

alt: Matthew 14:1–12

John the Baptist is beheaded by Herod.

SERMON PROMPT:

What is the cost of discipleship? John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus’ coming; he was later beheaded for challenging Herod (Matthew 14). Andrew and Simon (Peter) were the first disciples called by Jesus (John 1); according to early church tradition, they were both crucified.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said

GTG 718

Rejoice in God’s Saints

GTG 732

Precious Lord, Take My Hand

GTG 834

Sunday, Jan. 22**Epiphany 3**

Matthew 4:12–23 [24–25]

Jesus calls four disciples: Follow me, and you will fish for people.

SERMON PROMPT:

How do you fish for people? Sometimes discipleship is like “casting a net into the sea” (Matthew 4:18) — reaching out in new forms of ministry. At other times it may mean “mending our nets” (Matthew 4:21) — tending to the relationships and communities that sustain our service.

FEATURED HYMNS:

You Walk Along Our Shoreline
 Jesus Calls Us
 From the Nets of Our Labor

GTG 170
 GTG 720
 GTG 751

Sunday, Jan. 29**Epiphany 4**

Matthew 5:1–12

Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes.

SERMON PROMPT:

What does it mean to be blessed? The Beatitudes suggest that, like Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12:1–3), we are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. This is a fitting vocation for Christian disciples — baptized into the life of Jesus, in whom God is “well pleased.”

[*peacemaking*] Blessed are the peacemakers; they are called children of God.

FEATURED HYMNS:

When the Lord Redeems the Very Least
 For the Healing of the Nations
 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

GTG 852
 GTG 346
 GTG 753

Sunday, Feb. 5**Epiphany 5**

Matthew 5:13–20

Jesus says: You are salt and light; I have come to fulfill the law.

SERMON PROMPT:

How do you recognize a disciple? Jesus says we are called to be like salt, seasoning the world with goodness, and like light, shining for all to see. This is how we fulfill the law and follow God’s way. This is how others can “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

FEATURED HYMNS:

Take Us As We Are, O God
 Here in This Place
 Taste and See

GTG 312
 GTG 401
 GTG 520

Sunday, Feb. 12**Epiphany 6**

Matthew 5:21–37

Jesus interprets the laws on murder, adultery and making vows.

SERMON PROMPT:

What is the purpose of God’s law? The law can be a mirror: revealing our sin in contrast to God’s holiness. The law can be a fence: restraining us from evil and keeping order in society. For Christian disciples, the law is also a sign: guiding us in a life of faithfulness.

[*gender justice*] God calls for justice and respect in intimate relationships.

FEATURED HYMNS:

I Long for Your Commandments
 Where Charity and Love Prevail
 Before I Take the Body of My Lord

GTG 64
 GTG 316
 GTG 428

Sunday, Feb. 19

Transfiguration of the Lord

Matthew 17:1–9 [10–23]

On a high mountain with Moses and Elijah, Jesus is transfigured.

SERMON PROMPT:

How can we see God's glory? The disciples glimpsed it in the face of Jesus Christ on the mountain of transfiguration. The early church leader Irenaeus said we can see it in "a human being fully alive." To live into our calling as Jesus' disciples is to shine with God's glory.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory

GTG 190

Lord, the Light of Your Love Is Shining

GTG 192

Jesus, Take Us to the Mountain

GTG 193

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The Book of Common Worship includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Litany for Baptism of the Lord, Litany for Transfiguration of the Lord, Thanksgiving for Baptism (2), Confession and Pardon (2), Prayer for Illumination (2), Response to Readings (2), Prayers of Intercession (2), Great Thanksgiving (3), Prayer After Communion (2), Prayer of Thanksgiving (2); see pp. 211–232.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 44–61.

Season of Lent

"Lent" comes from an old English word for springtime, perhaps connected with the lengthening of days in this time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. The season of Lent is a time for growth in faith—through prayer, spiritual discipline, and self-examination in preparation for the commemoration of the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus Christ. In ancient Christian practice, Lent was a time of preparation for the celebration of Baptism at Easter. In many churches, it remains a time to equip and nurture candidates for Baptism or confirmation, and for the whole community of faith to reflect deeply on the theme of baptismal discipleship. Reconciliation is a key theme in the season of Lent — reconciliation with God and with one another through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Lent is a period of forty days — like the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call of repentance to Nineveh, and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. The Sundays in Lent are not counted among the forty days, as every Lord's Day is a celebration of Christ's resurrection. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday and concludes at sunset on Holy Saturday, at the start of the Great Vigil of Easter.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 233

Note that the RCL features a series of readings from John in Lent Year A; these are texts that have been important in Christian catechesis. For congregations wishing to focus on the Gospel of Matthew, alternate readings are provided.

LENTEN SERIES: Called to Die

six weeks (40 days plus Sundays)

As Jesus' journey leads to Jerusalem, he tells his disciples three times about his coming death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21–23; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Not surprisingly, they are greatly disturbed by this news. They have left everything to follow this teacher. They know that their own fate is bound up with that of their Savior and Lord.

If we are to be faithful disciples of the crucified and risen Lord, we too must face this consequence of our faith. Following Jesus means taking up the cross. As Jesus taught, “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). This is the nature of our Lenten journey, the deep and costly calling of the gospel.

The 40 days of Lent are an opportunity to ponder this paradox and wrestle with these questions. What do we need to give up in order to take up the life of discipleship? What do we need to confess and lament in order to move toward reconciliation with God and one another?

The preaching and music suggestions in this six-week series invite us, as communities of faith and individual believers, to consider how we too are “called to die” ... to sin and evil, power and privilege, status and security, false idols and fear. Dying to these things will help us live into the Matthew 25 vision.

Wednesday, Feb. 22

Ash Wednesday

Matthew 6:1–6, [7–17]
16–21 [22–23]

Don't flaunt your fasting and prayer; store up treasure in heaven.

SERMON PROMPT:

Where is your heart? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns us: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). Lent is an invitation to examine our own hearts and return to the heart of our faith — dying to sin and evil and rising to life in Christ.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Son of God, Whose Heart Is Peace
Search Me, O God
Jesus Knows the Inmost Heart

GTG 425
GTG 426
GTG 427

Sunday, Feb. 26

First Sunday in Lent

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus spends 40 days in the wilderness and is tested by the devil.

SERMON PROMPT:

Jesus faces three tests in the wilderness. In this year with Matthew 25, we might ask: How are we tempted to deny God's providence (systemic poverty), to rely on power and privilege (structural racism), or to worship things other than God (congregational vitality)?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days
Seek Ye First
When We Are Tested

GTG 166
GTG 175
GTG 783

Sunday, March 5

Second Sunday in Lent

John 3:1–17

Those who seek God's kingdom must be born of water and Spirit.

alt: Matthew 12:38–50

The sign of Jonah. Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] Jesus challenges us to rethink our ideas about birthright and family allegiances. Whether in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3) or the crowds (Matthew 12), Jesus describes new relationships in God. What does this suggest about dismantling structural racism?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters
Now There Is No Male or Female
O God, We Bear the Imprint

GTG 490
GTG 493
GTG 759

Sunday, March 12	Third Sunday in Lent
John 4:5–42	Jesus offers living water to a Samaritan woman at the well.
alt: Matthew 19: [1–15] 16–30	The rich young man; for God all things are possible.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] Ironically, the rich young ruler asks Jesus, “What do still I lack?” (Matthew 19:20). The problem, of course, is that he has too much. In the realm of God, the first will be last and the last will be first. We must learn to depend on the overflowing grace of God (cf. John 4:14).
FEATURED HYMNS:	Take My Life GTG 697 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me GTG 700 When the Poor Ones GTG 762
Sunday, March 19	Fourth Sunday in Lent
John 9:1–41	Jesus heals a man born blind; the Pharisees question him about sin.
alt: Matthew 20:17–34	The sons of Zebedee; healing two blind men.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>vitality</i>] Who can really claim to see what God is doing? In each of these Gospel stories, those who are dismissed as blind seem to have more insight. What assumptions do we make about people outside the church? How have we failed to see what God is doing with them?
FEATURED HYMNS:	Be Thou My Vision GTG 450 Open My Eyes, That I May See GTG 451 Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord GTG 452
Sunday, March 26	Fifth Sunday in Lent
John 11:1–45	Jesus, the resurrection and the life, raises Lazarus from the dead.
alt: Matthew 26:1–13	A woman anoints Jesus; a dispute about the poor.
SERMON PROMPT:	The anointing at Bethany (Matthew 26) and the raising of Lazarus (John 11) strongly foreshadow the great mystery of faith we are preparing to commemorate at Holy Week. How does the church’s work around poverty, racism and congregational vitality lead us to Christ’s cross? [<i>gender justice</i>] Jesus praises a woman’s witness to the good news.
FEATURED HYMNS:	A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar GTG 201 God Weeps with Us Who Weep and Mourn GTG 787 Why Has God Forsaken Me GTG 809
Sunday, April 2	Palm/Passion Sunday (Sixth Sunday in Lent)
Matthew 21:1–11	Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey; the people shout: Hosanna!
Matthew 26:14—27:66	After the Passover meal, Jesus is betrayed, tried and crucified.
SERMON PROMPT:	On Palm/Passion Sunday the Scriptures speak for themselves (and at some length). The irony of the Lenten season culminates in Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The call to die leads to Gethsemane and Golgotha. A brief homily, if any, will suffice to connect the dots. [<i>peacemaking</i>] Jesus upsets the expectations of a conquering king.

FEATURED HYMNS:	All Glory, Laud, and Honor	GTG 196
	Hosanna, Loud Hosanna	GTG 197
	Filled with Excitement	GTG 199
	O Sacred Head, Now Wounded	GTG 221
	When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	GTG 223, 224
	Were You There	GTG 228

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Litany for Lent (2), Thanksgiving for Baptism, Confession and Pardon (3), Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings (3), Ascription of Praise (3), Prayers of Intercession (4), Invitation to the Offering (3), Invitation to the Lord's Table, Great Thanksgiving (3), Prayer After Communion (3), Prayer of Thanksgiving, and Blessing and Charge (3), as well as full orders of worship for Ash Wednesday and Palm/Passion Sunday; see pp. 233–271.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 62–87.

The Three Days

The liturgy for the Three Days proclaims one dramatic story in three acts. The events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil of Easter are best understood as one service, unfolding over the course of three days. Through this profound and transforming experience at the heart of the Christian year, we are immersed in the holy mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and the great story of God's saving love.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 233

Note that the RCL highlights readings from John's Gospel.

TRIDUUM FOCUS: The Heart of the Gospel

three days

The Three Days — Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil — are an annual opportunity for the church to reflect on the heart of the gospel and experience the mystery of our faith: the dying and rising of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These preaching and music suggestions examine Matthew 25 priorities in light of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They seek to situate the missional emphases of eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality within the great story of salvation history and the holy mystery of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ.

Thursday, April 6	Maundy Thursday
John 13:1–17, 31b–35	Jesus washes the disciples’ feet and gives a new commandment.
SERMON PROMPT:	“Maundy” Thursday takes its name from the Latin word for commandment (<i>mandatum</i>), referring to Jesus’ call to love one another as he has loved us. How are the church’s ministries around poverty, racism and vitality a response to Christ’s call to love and service?
FEATURED HYMNS:	An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare GTG 202 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love GTG 203 Sharing Paschal Bread and Wine GTG 207
Friday, April 7	Good Friday
John 18:1—19:42	Jesus is arrested, put on trial, crucified and buried.
SERMON PROMPT:	Good Friday is called “good” because it proclaims God’s great love for the world, revealed in Jesus Christ. From the cross, Jesus reaches out to embrace the world with this great love. How might the church’s work on vitality, racism and poverty be a sign of such love? [<i>care of creation</i>] Jesus’ outstretched arms embrace the wounded world.
FEATURED HYMNS:	They Crucified My Lord GTG 219 Rejected and Despised GTG 222 There in God’s Garden GTG 226
Saturday, April 8	Great Vigil of Easter
John 20:1–18	At the empty tomb, the risen Lord appears to Mary Magdalene.
SERMON PROMPT:	The Great Vigil of Easter stands at the threshold of Lent and Easter, death and life. We remember God’s saving love through history. We anticipate the dawn of a new creation. Where do you see God at work around racism, poverty and vitality in the great story of salvation? [<i>gender justice</i>] Women are first to witness the good news of resurrection.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Joyful Is the Dark GTG 230 Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers GTG 231 Lift High the Cross GTG 826

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes full orders of worship for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Great Vigil of Easter, as well as additional texts for the Solemn Reproaches of the Cross and Easter Proclamation, and resources for Seven Last Words and Tenebrae; see pp. 272–315.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children’s Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 84–98.

Season of Easter

“Easter” comes from an old English word related to dawn and shining. At Easter we stand in the light of the resurrection to see a new creation, transformed by the grace and glory of God. We celebrate the presence and power of the risen Christ in his church, proclaiming his good news through Word and Sacrament. We rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the “Lord and giver of life.” In the fullest sense, Easter is a new way of life, in which we are “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11); for this reason, it is an especially appropriate time to celebrate the sacrament of Baptism.

As with Christmas, Easter refers not only to a single day, but to a whole season of celebration in the Christian year. The season of Easter spans the fifty days between the Resurrection of the Lord and the Day of Pentecost, and encompasses the Ascension of the Lord. Traditionally, the first service of Easter takes place on the eve of the Resurrection of the Lord with the Great Vigil of Easter. The seven weeks of the Easter season make up a “week of weeks” (seven times seven): A symbol in time of the fullness and abundance of God’s grace. In ancient practice, fasting and kneeling were forbidden during the weeks of Easter. In this most joyful season, we celebrate the great mystery of our faith—that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 316

Note that the RCL readings in Year A take another detour away from Matthew into Luke and John; these are texts that have been important in Christian post-baptismal formation. For congregations wishing to focus on the Gospel of Matthew, alternate readings are provided.

EASTER SERIES: Called to Live

eight weeks (50 days)

“... into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). These are the final words of Matthew 25 — concluding the fifth “book” of Matthew’s Gospel, patterned after the five books of Moses. Just as Deuteronomy ends with Moses’ benediction to the people of Israel, the story of Jesus’ life and ministry ends with Jesus’ blessing for those who recognize him among the “least of these.”

During the 50 days of Easter, the church practices resurrection. We live into God’s promise of new creation and beloved community. We celebrate Christ’s invitation to abundant and everlasting life. We look for the risen Lord in the faces of everyone we meet — particularly among people who are hungry and thirsty, strangers or naked, sick or in prison.

The preaching and music suggestions in this eight-week series are all organized around questions. In the six weeks between the Resurrection of the Lord and the Day of Pentecost, there are pairs of questions related to congregational vitality, systemic poverty and structural racism — provided to inspire deeper reflection and action around Matthew 25 themes in the context of the Easter season.

Sunday, April 9

Resurrection of the Lord

Matthew 28:1–10

Women find Jesus’ tomb empty; he has been raised from the dead.

SERMON PROMPT:

What does it mean to believe in resurrection? For Christians, this is our joyful affirmation that Jesus is risen from the dead. But it is also our call to a new way of life, a new orientation for the people of God. We believe that God is still working to bring new life to the world.

[*gender justice*] Women are first to witness the good news of resurrection.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Jesus Christ Is Risen Today

GTG 232

Christ Is Alive!

GTG 246

Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia

GTG 251

Sunday, April 16	Second Sunday of Easter
John 20:19–31	Jesus shares the Holy Spirit; a week later, he appears to Thomas.
alt: Matthew 15:29–39	Jesus heals crowds and feeds a multitude.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>vitality</i>] What are the marks of a vital congregation? (Part One.) John 20 reveals that vitality involves the work of the Holy Spirit, forgiveness and trust in Christ. Matthew 15 suggests that vitality means a ministry of healing and sharing God’s abundant grace.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Alleluia! Christ Is Arisen GTG 253 These Things Did Thomas Count as Real GTG 256 The Risen Christ GTG 257
Sunday, April 23	Third Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:13–35	On the road to Emmaus, two disciples meet the risen Lord.
alt: Matthew 16:1–12	Disputes with the scribes and Pharisees.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>vitality</i>] What are the marks of a vital congregation? (Part Two.) Luke 24 teaches us that vitality involves recognizing the presence and action of Christ among strangers. Matthew 16 invites us to consider the “sign of Jonah” — a call to repentance, death and resurrection. [<i>care of creation</i>] Signs of the times are revealed in creation’s groaning.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Day of Arising GTG 252 Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises GTG 538 You Are Holy, You Are Whole GTG 596
Sunday, April 30	Fourth Sunday of Easter
John 10:1–10	Jesus says: I am the gate for the sheep; enter by me and be saved.
alt: Matthew 18:1–14	Welcoming little ones; the shepherd and the sheep
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] What does abundant life look like? (Part One.) John 10 says that it means trusting the shepherd’s voice, rather than thieves and bandits who kill and destroy. Matthew 18 connects heavenly life with welcoming all, eliminating stumbling blocks and seeking out the lost.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us GTG 187 Shepherd Me, O God GTG 473 My Shepherd Will Supply My Need GTG 803
Sunday, May 7	Fifth Sunday of Easter
John 14:1–14	Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; he prepares a place for us.
alt: Matthew 12:1–21	Disputes about the sabbath: picking grain and healing a man’s hand.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] What does abundant life look like? (Part Two.) John 14 promises that there are many dwelling places in the house of God, where Jesus makes room. Matthew 12 shows how Jesus came to provide for human flourishing — feeding, healing and serving others.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather GTG 311 This Is My Father’s World GTG 370 Lord, Prepare Me GTG 701

Sunday, May 14**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

John 14:15–21

Jesus says: the Father will send the Spirit, who will abide in you.

alt: Matthew 21:12–22

Jesus cleanses the temple and curses a fig tree.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] Where do we see love in action? (Part One.) John 14 underscores Jesus' new commandment to love one another in the name and image of the triune God. Matthew 21 demonstrates that love in action means rooting out corruption and bearing good fruit.

FEATURED HYMNS:

We Are One in the Spirit

GTG 300

Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

GTG 729

Somos el Cuerpo de Cristo

GTG 768

Thursday, May 18**Ascension of the Lord**

Luke 24:44–53

Jesus interprets the Scriptures; then he is carried up into heaven.

alt: Matthew 24:1–35

Signs of Christ's coming and the end of the age.

SERMON PROMPT:

Where is Jesus now? The story of Christ's ascension is sometimes misunderstood as his absence; the point is that Christ is sovereign, interceding for us. Especially in Easter, we celebrate the power and presence of the risen Christ with the church at work in the world.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun

GTG 265

He Is King of Kings

GTG 273

You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd

GTG 274

Sunday, May 21**Seventh Sunday of Easter**

John 17:1–11

Jesus seeks the glory of God and prays for his disciples.

alt: Matthew 22:23–33

A question about marriage and resurrection.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] Where do we see love in action? (Part Two.) John 17 describes how Jesus has given the mission of God's reconciling love to the church. Matthew 22 indicates that, "in the resurrection," former relationships will be transformed by the power of the living God.

[*gender justice*] In the realm of God, our relationships are transformed.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Glory to God

GTG 585

The Church's One Foundation

GTG 321

In My Life

GTG 468

Sunday, May 28**Day of Pentecost (Eighth Sunday of Easter)**

John 20:19–23

The risen Lord appears to the disciples and gives them the Spirit.

or John 7:37–39

Jesus promises the Spirit: living water from the believer's heart.

alt: Matthew 12:22–37

Jesus casts out a demon; he does this by the power of the Spirit

SERMON PROMPT:

Got Spirit? The church's witness and work toward eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality utterly depends on the work of the Holy Spirit. But here is the good news of the gospel: It is the Spirit who has us.

[*care of creation*] The gift of the Spirit brings renewal to the earth.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Come, O Holy Spirit, Come

GTG 283

Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading

GTG 287

As the Wind Song

GTG 292

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

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The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Prayer of Adoration (2), Litany for Easter (2), Litany for Ascension of the Lord, Litany for Pentecost (2) Thanksgiving for Baptism (2), Confession and Pardon (5), Prayer for Illumination (3), Response to Readings (5), Ascription of Praise (3), Prayers of Intercession (5), Invitation to the Offering (3), Invitation to the Lord's Table, Great Thanksgiving (4), Prayer After Communion (5), Prayer of Thanksgiving (3), and Blessing and Charge (3); see pp. 316–351.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 88–119.

Time after Pentecost

The Sundays after Pentecost are sometimes called Ordinary Time—not because they are routine or mundane, but because their primary rhythm has to do with following the Sundays “in order.” Indeed, each Sunday is a celebration of Christ’s resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week, and it is this holy mystery that animates, renews, and transforms our life of faith. These Sundays are bracketed by festivals that concern key theological affirmations of the church: Trinity Sunday and Christ the King / Reign of Christ; the former celebrates the mystery of God’s triune being, while the latter extols the sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ. The RCL readings for the time after Pentecost cover large sections of the biblical story—including the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry of teaching, healing, feeding, and welcoming.

Excerpted from the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018), p. 352

In RCL Year A, the time after Pentecost (the second half of the Christian year) begins with the Great Commission and then backs up to move semicontinuously through the narrative of Matthew, ending with Matthew 25 on Reign of Christ/Christ the King. This second half of the year will focus most intently on the themes and objectives of the Matthew 25 vision.

SUMMER SERIES: The Great Commission

five weeks

The time after Pentecost begins with the final words of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20). In this brief scene, Matthew gestures to what Luke spells out in the “sequel,” the book of Acts. We begin to glimpse the events that were to unfold through the work of the Spirit in the lives of the apostles as they sought to bear witness to the resurrection: making disciples, baptizing and teaching them to follow Christ always.

It is fitting that this happens on Trinity Sunday. The doctrine of the Trinity is integral to God's “co-mission” — God's collaborative purpose, God's connectional work in the world. The themes of relationship and sending are built into who God is. As God sent Jesus to reveal this great love for the world, now Jesus sends us out, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to do the same.

Trinity Sunday this year provides an opportunity to highlight another three-fold, cooperative mission — the three priorities of the PC(USA)'s Matthew 25 vision. After two introductory weeks, focused on the Great Commission and Jesus' call to discipleship, the preaching and music suggestions in this five-week series focus on eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality — all in the name of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the world God loves. This is a critical part of how the PC(USA) is forming disciples and following Christ's commandments in our present age.

Sunday, June 4	Trinity Sunday
Matthew 28:16–20	Jesus' Great Commission: Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach.
SERMON PROMPT:	How can the church's mission of baptism and teaching help to make disciples who will address poverty, racism and congregational vitality? What does the doctrine of the Trinity have to do with these priorities for the PC(USA)? Where must we “go” to do this work?
FEATURED HYMNS:	Go to the World! GTG 295 Go in Grace and Make Disciples GTG 296 Listen, God Is Calling GTG 456
Sunday, June 11	Proper 5
Matthew 9:9–13 [14–17], 18–26 [27–34]	Jesus calls sinners; he heals a woman and raises a dead girl to life.
SERMON PROMPT:	The reading for today begins with Jesus' call to Matthew, a tax collector, and then concludes with demonstrations of Jesus' healing, life-giving power. How does the call to discipleship surprise our expectations and lead us into scandalous company? How does it bring new life and healing to the world? [<i>gender justice</i>] A woman is bold in seeking healing; Jesus praises her faith.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Woman in the Night GTG 161 Will You Come and Follow Me GTG 726 Somebody's Knocking at Your Door GTG 728
Sunday, June 18	Proper 6
Matthew 9:35–10:8 (9–23)	The harvest is plentiful; Jesus instructs and sends the twelve apostles.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] The fundamental problem of poverty is not one of scarcity, but of the willingness to share God's gifts. Moved with compassion for people in need, Jesus sends the apostles out to share in God's mission. He emphasizes abundance: “the harvest is plentiful.”
FEATURED HYMNS:	God of the Fertile Fields GTG 714 Come, Labor On GTG 719 The Lord Now Sends Us Forth GTG 747

Sunday, June 25**Proper 7**

Matthew 10:24–39

Jesus says: Do not fear for your life; take up your cross and follow.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] The struggle against racism is fraught with danger. History tells us of prophets and martyrs who accepted this cost of discipleship and took up their cross to follow Christ. For people of privilege, this may mean disrupting family systems and building new communities.

[*peacemaking*] Ironically, the work of making peace draws us into conflict.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Lift Every Voice and Sing

GTG 339

Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said

GTG 718

Rejoice in God's Saints

GTG 732

Sunday, July 2**Proper 8**

Matthew 10:40–42

Jesus sends disciples: whoever welcomes you welcomes me.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] Real welcome involves real work. Authentic and effective evangelism requires something deeper and more difficult than accepting those who happen to enter our doors. It means going out to the margins and recognizing Christ in the faces of our neighbors.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Let Us Build a House

GTG 301

Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

GTG 343

God Welcomes All

GTG 399

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Litany for Trinity Sunday, Confession and Pardon, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Prayers of Intercession, Great Thanksgiving (2), Prayer After Communion, and Prayer of Thanksgiving; see pp. 352–364.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 120–139.

SUMMER SERIES: The Challenge of the Gospel

nine weeks

As the Sundays after Pentecost continue, the Revised Common Lectionary passes through the center of the Gospel of Matthew (“books” three and four in the outline above). This section of Matthew’s Gospel finds the disciples in frequent situations of conflict and controversy, debate and danger, as Jesus’ words and actions put him at odds with religious leaders, political authorities, societal norms and cultural expectations.

The church’s work to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle structural racism and build congregational vitality draws the people of God into similar dilemmas. Jesus’ call to faith and faithfulness is often counter-cultural, socially unacceptable, politically unpopular and even scandalous to certain religious sensibilities. Yet those who undertake this work also come to know the gifts and blessings of following Jesus, the hope and joy of life in the Spirit, and the grace and peace that come from God alone.

The passages from Matthew that frame this sermon series exemplify this tension. In the beginning (July 5), Jesus promises, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). At the end (Aug. 30), Jesus warns, “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross” (Matthew 16:24). The yoke is the cross — but it is easy and light because Christ is the one who shoulders its true weight.

The preaching and music suggestions in this nine-week summer series explore the challenging nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ, specifically with respect to these three priorities for the PC(USA): systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality. Topics rotate (not always in the same order) according to the themes and images of the biblical passages. By the end of the summer, congregations will have had the opportunity to engage each of these topics three times, and from a variety of approaches.

Sunday, July 9

Proper 9

Matthew 11:16–19,
[20–24] 25–30

Jesus says: Come to me; my yoke is easy, my burden is light.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] Jesus’ call to discipleship involves constancy and change. In the changing contexts of each generation, vital congregations are challenged to discern how best to respond to Christ’s call. Yet Christ’s faithfulness is constant: inviting us to come, learn, serve, and rest.

FEATURED HYMNS:

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say GTG 182
Come to Me, O Weary Traveler GTG 183
Come, Bring Your Burdens to God GTG 851

Sunday, July 16

Proper 10

Matthew 13:1–9,
[10–17] 18–23

Jesus tells and explains the parable of the sower and the seeds.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*poverty*] The parable of the sower and the seeds illustrates God’s extravagant generosity, scattering out grace and truth in abundance. But this parable also challenges us to be good soil, so that God’s will for the world—and care for the poor—may flourish among us.

[*care of creation*] Keeping God’s word means good stewardship of the earth.

FEATURED HYMNS:

A Sower Came from Ancient Hills GTG 171
The Rice of Life GTG 524
Seed, Scattered and Sown GTG 531

Sunday, July 23**Proper 11**

Matthew 13:24–30,
[34–35] 36–43

Another parable of the kingdom; weeds grow among the wheat.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] This parable may be applied to the hidden dimensions of racism—secret prejudice, implicit bias, and unconscious patterns of privilege. One challenge of dismantling structural racism is learning to recognize these “weeds,” yet continuing to love and serve all.

FEATURED HYMNS:

One Bread, One Body GTG 530
O God, We Bear the Imprint GTG 759
Somos el cuerpo de Cristo GTG 768

Sunday, July 30**Proper 12**

Matthew 13:31–33,
44–52 [53–58]

God’s kingdom is like a tiny seed, yeast, a treasure, a pearl, a net.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] Small moments and subtle actions sometimes make a big difference in the struggle to challenge structural racism and white supremacy. Can you think of people who have been a mustard seed, a measure of leaven, a hidden treasure, or a pearl of great price?

FEATURED HYMNS:

If You Only Had Faith GTG 176
I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me GTG 700
What Is the World Like GTG 771

Sunday, Aug. 6**Proper 13**

Matthew 14:13–21

With five loaves and two fish, Jesus feeds a great multitude.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*poverty*] In “God’s economy,” abundance comes from sharing. The story of Jesus feeding the multitude is a perfect illustration. How might this insight inform our ministry with people who are poor? How might it challenge our anxieties and encourage our generosity?

[*care of creation*] Abundance doesn’t require the exploitation of resources.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Loaves Were Broken, Words Were Spoken GTG 498
All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly GTG 509
When the Poor Ones GTG 762

Sunday, Aug. 13**Proper 14**

Matthew 14:22–33
[34–36]

Jesus walks on the water to meet his disciples, and calms a storm.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] In Christian imagination, the symbol of a boat has been an important metaphor for the church. How is your congregation like a boat? What storms have you weathered? What tempests are you experiencing now? How is Jesus challenging you to step out in faith?

[*care of creation*] Jesus demonstrates his communion with creation.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Calm to the Waves GTG 184
Lonely the Boat GTG 185
It Is Well with My Soul GTG 840

Sunday, Aug. 20**Proper 15**

Matthew 15: [1–9]
(10–20) 21–28

Debate about what defiles; a Canaanite woman shows great faith.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] A courageous and persistent Canaanite woman speaks out with great faith to challenge the ethnic divisions and purity restrictions of Jesus' time. Where do we find similar situations in our society? How does our faith call us to confront these problems?

[*gender justice*] A woman is bold in seeking help; Jesus praises her faith.

FEATURED HYMNS:

In Christ There Is No East or West	GTG 317, 318
For All the Faithful Women	GTG 324
For the Troubles and the Sufferings	GTG 764

Sunday, Aug. 27**Proper 16**

Matthew 16:13–20

Who is Jesus? Peter answers: You are the Messiah, the Son of God.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] Jesus gives Simon a new name and identity: Peter, the rock on whom the church is built. Similarly, the challenge of building congregational vitality depends on our confession of who Jesus is. What difference does it make that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God?

FEATURED HYMNS:

The Church's One Foundation	GTG 321
We Are One in Christ Jesus	GTG 322
O Christ, the Great Foundation	GTG 361

Sunday, Sept. 3**Proper 17**

Matthew 16:21–28

Jesus says: If any wish to follow me, they must take up their cross.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*poverty*] Jesus again presents the paradox of "God's economy" (see Aug. 6). Those who seek to save their own lives will lose them. Those who want to acquire the world will lose what truly matters. How does this challenge conventional wisdom about wealth and poverty?

[*peacemaking*] Jesus calls for non-violent resistance to oppressive powers.

FEATURED HYMNS:

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross	GTG 223, 224
Lift High the Cross	GTG 826
Precious Lord, Take My Hand	GTG 834

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences and Prayers of the Day; see pp. 365–373.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children's Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 120–126, 140–159.

FALL SERIES: Glimpses of God’s Realm

nine weeks

The autumn months are “back to school” time in many congregations and communities. This rhythm in common life happens to correspond with a focus on Jesus as teacher in the Revised Common Lectionary. Most of the Gospel readings in this span of weeks feature Jesus teaching through parables: imaginative and surprising stories that offer a vision of God’s kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace. The few passages that do not contain parables per se still highlight Jesus’ ministry of teaching — to the disciples, crowds and religious leaders.

These parables and other lessons of Jesus have much to teach us about the PC(USA)’s mission to eradicate systemic poverty, dismantle structural racism and build congregational vitality. They provide valuable insights into the coming realm of God — where the hungry and thirsty are satisfied, where strangers are wrapped in welcome, and where the body of Christ is strengthened and set free to serve God with joy.

The preaching and music suggestions in this nine-week fall series seek to offer glimpses of this glorious new creation, promised by Jesus Christ and proclaimed in the Gospel of Matthew. Specifically, this series examines the issues of systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality through Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God. As in the summer series, topics vary according to the themes and images of the biblical passages. By the Sunday after All Saints’ Day, congregations will have had the opportunity to engage each of these priorities three times, and in different ways.

Sunday, Sept. 10

Proper 18

Matthew 18:15–20

Jesus says: seek reconciliation; when you gather I am with you.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] In the realm of God, all will be reconciled. The work of dismantling structural racism begins with confessing sin, lamenting evil, and seeking justice; only then can right relationships be restored. This will require the participation of the whole people of God.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Come, Now, O Prince of Peace
Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether

GTG 103
GTG 203
GTG 529

Sunday, Sept. 17

Proper 19

Matthew 18:21–35

A lesson in forgiveness from a parable about debts and debtors.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] In the realm of God, debts are forgiven. In this parable, Jesus uses astronomical numbers—seventy-seven, ten thousand—to underscore the imperative of forgiving others as God forgives us. Why is forgiveness so important for building congregational vitality?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Jesus Knows the Inmost Heart
God, How Can We Forgive
Help Us Accept Each Other

GTG 427
GTG 445
GTG 754

Sunday, Sept. 24

Proper 20

Matthew 20:1–16

The parable of laborers in the vineyard; the last will be first.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*poverty*] In the realm of God, the last will be first. God’s grace is extended to all. This is the scandal of the gospel—that by the grace of God, we *don’t* just get what we deserve. How might this view of God’s grace influence our work to eradicate systemic poverty?

FEATURED HYMNS:

All Who Love and Serve Your City
O for a World
The Bread and the Wine Are Here

GTG 351
GTG 372
GTG 512

Sunday, Oct. 1	Proper 21
Matthew 21:23–32	Leaders question Jesus’ authority; he answers them with a parable.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>vitality</i>] In the realm of God, Jesus is Lord. Jesus asks us only “one question” (Matthew 21:24): Will you follow me? We respond by doing God’s will. A vital congregation must answer to Jesus’ authority and seek to follow him faithfully, trusting in his transforming power.
FEATURED HYMNS:	At the Name of Jesus GTG 264 Will You Come and Follow Me GTG 726 From the Nets of Our Labor GTG 751
Sunday, Oct. 8	Proper 22
Matthew 21:33–46	A parable about a vineyard, wicked tenants, and the owner’s son.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>racism</i>] In the realm of God, the crucified one is the cornerstone. Structural racism is built on hatred and fear. But the beloved community is built on God’s beloved Son—the very one who was betrayed, denied, rejected, despised, and put to death on a cross.
FEATURED HYMNS:	Rejected and Despised GTG 222 This Is the Day GTG 391 Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation GTG 394
Sunday, Oct. 15	Proper 23
Matthew 22:1–14	The kingdom is like a banquet; many are called, few are chosen.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] In the realm of God, a table is set. Many are called to the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (see Revelation 19:9). God’s gracious invitation upsets our expectations, overturning the tables of power and privilege and disrupting the systems that perpetuate poverty.
FEATURED HYMNS:	The Trumpet Sounds, the Angels Sing GTG 505 Look Who Gathers at Christ’s Table! GTG 506 I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table GTG 770
Sunday, Oct. 22	Proper 24
Matthew [17:24–27] 22:15–22	The Pharisees test Jesus with a question about paying taxes.
SERMON PROMPT:	[<i>poverty</i>] In the realm of God, we honor God’s image. The coin used to pay the tax was marked with the likeness of the emperor; each human being is made in the image of God. Jesus’ words in this parable present us with a critical decision: What or whom do we value most? [<i>peacemaking</i>] The violence of empire denies the image of God in all people.
FEATURED HYMNS:	We Give Thee but Thine Own GTG 708 We Lift Our Voices GTG 710 When We Are Living GTG 822

Sunday, Oct. 29**Proper 25**

Matthew 22:34–46

Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*racism*] In the realm of God, we live by love. Jesus teaches that all of Scripture can be summarized in two commandments: loving God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and loving neighbors (Leviticus 19:18). How does this “rule of love” support and stand behind the work of dismantling racism?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Love the Lord Your God

GTG 62

The Lord Is God

GTG 63

Praise, I Will Praise You, Lord

GTG 628

Since congregations are unlikely to hold a separate service for All Saints’ Day, which occurs on a Wednesday in 2023, this resource transfers those suggestions to the following Sunday.

Wednesday, Nov. 1**All Saints’ Day**

Matthew 5:1–12

The Beatitudes: Blessed are you; your reward is great in heaven.

SERMON PROMPT:

See Nov. 1, All Saints’ Day

FEATURED HYMNS:

Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm

GTG 731

When Twilight Comes

GTG 195

Will You Let Me Be Your Servant

GTG 727

Sunday, Nov. 5**Proper 26**Matthew 23:1–12
[13–37]

The greatest will become servants; the humble will be exalted.

or Matthew 5:1–12

The Beatitudes: Blessed are you; your reward is great in heaven.

SERMON PROMPT:

[*vitality*] In the realm of God, the humble are exalted. The “five books” of Matthew’s Gospel begin (Matthew 5:1–12) and end (Matthew 25:31–46) with an emphasis on humble service in Jesus’ name. Why is this kind of leadership so important for building congregational vitality?

[*peacemaking*] Blessed are the peacemakers; they are called children of God.

FEATURED HYMNS:

Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm

GTG 731

When Twilight Comes

GTG 195

Will You Let Me Be Your Servant

GTG 727

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Litany for All Saints’ Day, Confession and Pardon, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Prayers of Intercession, Great Thanksgiving (2), Prayer After Communion, and Prayer of Thanksgiving; see pp. 374–391.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children’s Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 120–126, 160–188.

CONCLUDING SERIES: *Becoming a Matthew 25 Church* *three weeks*

Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary culminates in a three-week sojourn in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Our pilgrimage through “A Year with Matthew” has led us at last to this place. Jesus is waiting for us here. Are we prepared to recognize him?

Matthew 25 consists of two parables and a vision of the last judgment. Together, these three passages conclude the fifth “book” of Matthew’s Gospel, in which Jesus instructs his followers on “last things” — how to live in light of God’s ultimate purpose for the church and for the whole creation. As it is depicted in Matthew 25, this new way of life involves vigilant prayer, good stewardship and compassion for our neighbors.

In contrast to previous weeks that focused on particular facets of the church’s work on systemic poverty, structural racism or congregational vitality, the preaching and music suggestions in this three-week concluding series relate to the Matthew 25 vision as a whole. They seek to cast a vision for what it means to be a Matthew 25 church in the world today.

For congregations that have spent all or part of this year immersed in the Matthew 25 vision, these final three Sundays of the Christian year present an ideal opportunity to declare and celebrate their commitment to this three-part mission focus for the PC(USA). (Materials for doing so are available in the Resources section at pcusa.org/matthew25; look for “Worship in a Matthew 25 Church.”) For faith communities just beginning to discern their response to the PC(USA)’s Matthew 25 invitation, this brief sermon series provides an excellent occasion to test the waters — and perhaps to begin their own journey of reformation and renewal.

Sunday, Nov. 12

Proper 27

Matthew 25:1–13

The parable of ten bridesmaids; keep awake, the Lord is coming.

SERMON PROMPT:

This parable focuses on time. In your congregation, how will you use the resource of time as you watch for the coming of God’s realm — advancing the Matthew 25 vision of eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality?

FEATURED HYMNS:

“Sleepers, Wake!” A Voice Astounds Us GTG 349
Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning GTG 350
Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers GTG 362

Sunday, Nov. 19

Proper 28

Matthew 25:14–30

The parable of talents; good and trustworthy servants are rewarded.

SERMON PROMPT:

This parable focuses on treasure. In your congregation, how can you be good stewards of the gifts of God as you await Christ’s return— sharing in the Matthew 25 vision of eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism, and building congregational vitality?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ GTG 526
Give Thanks, O Christian People GTG 644
God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending GTG 716

Sunday, Nov. 26**Reign of Christ / Christ the King**

Matthew 25:31–46

The king will judge: just as you did it to the least, you did it to me.

SERMON PROMPT:

This vision focuses on service. In your congregation, how might you love and serve Christ as you love and serve your neighbors in need — living into the Matthew 25 vision of eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism and building congregational vitality?

FEATURED HYMNS:

Come Now, You Blessed, Eat at My Table	GTG 186
Heaven Shall Not Wait	GTG 773
When the Lord Redeems the Very Least	GTG 852

All hymns, psalms and spiritual songs are from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

For more ideas, see the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018) and *Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts* (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

The *Book of Common Worship* includes Opening Sentences, Prayers of the Day, Litany for the Reign of Christ, Confession and Pardon, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Prayers of Intercession, Great Thanksgiving (2), Prayer After Communion, and Prayer of Thanksgiving; see pp. 392–400.

Call to Worship 56.1 (Year A, 2022–2023) includes suggestions for Opening Sentences, Confession and Pardon, Thanksgiving for Baptism, Prayer for Illumination, Response to Readings, Ascription of Praise, Affirmation of Faith, Invitation to Offering, Prayer After Communion, Blessing and Charge, Seasonal Hymns, Anthems for Children’s Choirs, Anthems for Youth Choirs, Piano Music, Vocal Solos, Hymns for the Day, Psalm and Canticle Settings, Organ Music, Anthems for Adult Choirs, Handbell Music, and Visual Art; see pp. 120–126, 190–200.

Seven Ways to Read the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — were written by early Christians because they wanted future generations to know Jesus and trust in him as Savior and Lord. The Matthew 25 movement of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) offers us an occasion to encounter Jesus again through the story of Matthew’s Gospel: to reaffirm our faith in his saving grace; remember his way of righteousness, justice and peace; and recommit ourselves to his mission in the world.

Here are seven ways to read the Gospel of Matthew in the coming year.

Options 1–2 offer suggestions for encountering the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, from start to finish.

(1) *Personal reading, in a single sitting.* Read the Gospel of Matthew as you would a short novel. This is an excellent opportunity for growth in faith and discipleship: immersing yourself in the whole narrative arc of Jesus’ birth, life, death and resurrection. It would be a good activity for a silent retreat. Pray for God’s insight before reading and allow some time afterward for reflection. The reading itself will take approximately 1½ to two hours.

(2) *Public reading, at a congregational event.* This resource provides a way to experience the Gospel of Matthew with other members of your congregation (see Emmanuel: God with Us). This approach puts the story of Jesus in a communal context, building relationships around the themes of Scripture. It would be a good activity for a church retreat or weekend event. Pray for illumination before reading and allow some time afterward for discussion. Reading Matthew aloud will take approximately 2½ to three hours.

Options 3–6 may be used in coordination with the resources for daily prayer found in the Book of Common Worship — Daily Prayer edition (WJK, 2018) or the PC(USA) Daily Prayer app (pcusa.org/dailyprayer):

(3) *In a week, at daily prayer.* Read the Gospel of Matthew in one week at morning and evening prayer, using the following pattern. This plan takes advantage of the way Matthew is organized into five “books,” mirroring the Torah, and places the resurrection on the first day of the week:

Sunday AM	Matthew 28:1–20	Sunday PM	Matthew 1:1–2:23
Monday AM	Matthew 3:1–4:25	Monday PM	Matthew 5:1–7:29
Tuesday AM	Matthew 8:1–9:34	Tuesday PM	Matthew 9:35–11:1
Wednesday AM	Matthew 11:2–12:50	Wednesday PM	Matthew 13:1–53
Thursday AM	Matthew 13:54–17:27	Thursday PM	Matthew 18:1–19:2
Friday AM	Matthew 19:3–23:39	Friday PM	Matthew 24:1–25:46
Saturday AM	Matthew 26:1–75	Saturday PM	Matthew 27:1–66

(4) *In a month, at daily prayer.* Since the book of Matthew happens to consist of 28 chapters, another way to explore the Gospel is to read one chapter per day throughout the month (read Matthew 1 on the first day of the month, Matthew 2 on the second day, and so on). On the 29th–31st (where applicable), you may read other passages of Scripture. You may choose to do this for one month only or repeat the reading of Matthew several times in a year.

(5) *Twice in a year, at daily prayer.* This resource provides a daily plan for covering the whole Gospel of Matthew twice in one year (see Reading Matthew in Daily Prayer). It divides the book of Matthew into short, logical units, paying attention to the narrative divisions and larger structure of Matthew's Gospel; however, it is not coordinated with the seasons and festivals of the Christian year. Since this lectionary only provides readings six days a week (Monday through Saturday), users are encouraged to take time on Sundays to reflect on one or more of the regular Lord's Day readings.

(6) *In a year, in daily meditation.* There are 1,071 verses in the Gospel of Matthew. That number divided by 3 is 357. This means if you read three verses a day, beginning January 1, you will finish reading Matthew just before Christmas. This approach doesn't pay attention to the structure of the book of Matthew, of course, or take into account the rhythms of the Christian year. But it provides a way to savor and contemplate the Gospel story in very small units that you can carry in your heart through the day. One variation on this approach would be to write out the three verses each day in a notebook. By the end of the year, you will have copied the whole Gospel in your own hand. You might then use the notebook for daily reading in future years or give it to a friend or family member.

Option 7 may be used in coordination with resources for the Christian year in the Book of Common Worship (WJK, 2018) or Call to Worship: Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts (pcusa.org/calltoworship):

(7) *In a year, at public worship.* The suggestions for preaching and worship in this document also offer a way for users to read the whole Gospel of Matthew in one year, following the Revised Common Lectionary (as modified and amplified in this resource). Those wishing to take this approach should be sure to use the alternate readings (italicized) for each Sunday and festival, as well as the additional verses provided in brackets. Further, in order to complete the reading of Matthew's Gospel, congregations should find occasions to read the Sermon on the Mount and Ten Miracles (for one way to do this, see the hymn festivals provided below).

Emmanuel: God with Us

A Public Reading of the Gospel of Matthew

Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary (which begins Nov 27, 2022) features readings from the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew offers a dramatic and compelling portrait of Jesus the Messiah — the one we have come to know as Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). It takes 2½ to three hours to read the entirety of Matthew’s Gospel out loud. Why not host a public reading of Matthew in your congregation?

The potential opportunities and benefits are many:

- hearing the Gospel out loud allows us to rediscover the good news of Jesus as the biblical writer intended — as the story of our salvation, unfolding in an intentional and dramatic way, received in community;
- hearing the entire story in context gives us a chance to experience the “big picture” of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, not as isolated scenes and individual stories, but as a unified account of God’s saving work;
- hearing the whole Gospel story in *community* presents an opportunity for discernment and dialogue about its implications, and creates a situation in which we become accountable to one another for how we will respond;
- hearing the Gospel as a congregation provides an occasion for us to evaluate the faithfulness of our mission and ministry in light of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ;
- hearing all of the Gospel in one sitting helps to fill in the gaps between the lectionary readings, and compensates for places where the lectionary readings are out of sequence with the chronology of Matthew’s Gospel;
- hearing a year’s worth of Gospel readings together can be a way for preachers, church musicians and other worship planners to think systematically and strategically about the year ahead;
- most importantly, hearing the Gospel can be — by the power of the Holy Spirit — a life-changing, faith-shaping, disciple-making encounter with the living Word of God.

When you have determined a time and place for the reading of Matthew’s Gospel, spread the good news! You can use or adapt the paragraph below to create an announcement for your church newsletter or website. You might find ways to publicize this event to the larger community as well, as an opportunity for outreach and evangelism. Or you might consider hosting a reading in partnership with another congregation in your community (Presbyterian or otherwise) as a collaborative project and witness to Christian unity.

Have you heard the good news? Join us for public reading of the Gospel of Matthew [insert date, time, and location]. Matthew offers a dramatic and compelling portrait of Jesus the Messiah — the one we have come to know as Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). It takes less than three hours to read the whole Gospel of Mathew out loud. By the gift of the Holy Spirit, this can be a life-changing, faith-shaping, disciple-making encounter with the living Word of God.

Emmanuel: God with Us

A Public Reading of the Gospel of Matthew

OPENING SENTENCES

Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means, “God is with us.”

Matthew 1:23

HYMN

Blessed Jesus, at Your Word

GTG 395

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Eternal, living God,
by the power of your Holy Spirit
prepare the way in our hearts
for the coming of your Word;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

After a time of silent preparation, the reading begins.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The Prologue Matthew 1:1–2:23

A brief song or refrain, such as “Come, Come Emmanuel” (GTG 91), “While We Are Waiting, Come” (GTG 92), “Prepare the Way of the Lord” (GTG 95), “Glory to God” (583–585), or “Alleluia” (GTG 586–591), may be sung after each of the five “books” of Matthew.

	<u>NARRATIVE</u>	<u>DISCOURSE</u>
Book One	Matthew 3:1–4:25	5:1–7:29
Book Two	Matthew 8:1–9:34	9:35–11:1
Book Three	Matthew 11:2–12:50	13:1–53
Book Four	Matthew 13:54–17:27	18:1–19:2
Book Five	Matthew 19:3–23:39	24:1–25:46
The Passion	Matthew 26:1–27:66	

After a time of silent reflection, the reading continues.

The Resurrection Matthew 28:1–20

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, we give you thanks for the good news we have received
in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior.
By the power of your Holy Spirit, keep us faithful in our calling
to take up our cross and follow him for the sake of the gospel. **Amen.**

HYMN

Go to the World!

GTG 295

DISMISSAL

Jesus said: Remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Matthew 28:20

Guidelines for Reading

This suggestion for dividing up the readings is based on the literary structure of Matthew's Gospel. Each unit has a certain shape and integrity in the way the biblical story is presented.

You'll need an appropriate number of good readers: between five and 12, doubling up parts as necessary. Use a group of readers that is representative of your congregation — younger, older; diversity of gender; people of different cultures, backgrounds and professions. Encourage deacons and elders in the congregation to read; don't rely too much on pastors. If possible, find an opportunity for readers to rehearse their parts *out loud*, in the presence of others who can offer constructive feedback.

Begin with a prayer for illumination, and end with a concluding collect that ties together the themes of the Gospel. Examples are provided. You may have the first and last readers lead these prayers or ask someone else to lead them.

Read the Gospel from the church's Bible (the big book on the lectern or pulpit). It may be tempting to print out individual "scripts," with enlarged type or markings for readers; however, this can convey the impression that the Word of God is temporary and disposable. Reading from the church's book shows that this Word is a treasure we share. Using the same translation of Scripture throughout will also help to reveal recurring images and themes.

Don't rush through the readings. Read slowly, clearly and above all with the conviction that this is *good news* — a life-changing, faith-shaping, disciple-making message from God. Allow brief times of silence between readers (letting one reader be seated before the next stands to read), and provide longer silences for reflection as indicated.

A few hymn suggestions are provided. Singing together during the reading is important for a number of reasons: Congregational song offers a way to respond to God with praise and gratitude for the grace of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Gospel; carefully selected hymns help to reinforce the themes and images of Scripture, deepening our understanding; music provides time and space for personal prayer and reflection on the Gospel story; and singing engages the whole body — heart, mind, soul and strength — in the event of the Word proclaimed.

At the conclusion of the reading, there are a number of possibilities. You might schedule this event in such a way that the reading of Matthew's Gospel takes place on a Saturday morning, followed by a meal, and then a time for discussion and discernment — ideally in small groups first, then reporting back to the whole. This would be a good format for a congregational retreat. If the reading takes place in the afternoon or evening, you might provide light refreshments and then continue with a shorter time for discussion. In any case, it's important to find an opportunity for conversation about the Gospel as soon as possible after the reading. It is better not to break up the event for discussion during the reading, because this may interrupt the flow of the story and disrupt the experience of the Gospel as a whole.

It may be tempting for people to read along in their own Bibles. However, it is preferable that participants not be distracted by the written word during the reading, but that they attend to the Word proclaimed through the voice of the one who is speaking this good news. This is how we came to know the Word of God in Jesus Christ: as the Word made flesh.

The Sermon on the Mount

Scripture Reading and Hymn Festival

The following reading plan allows congregations to experience Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew (5:1–7:29) in a single presentation. The 10 biblical passages might be divided among five readers. A related hymn selection is provided for each passage. A brief time of silence for reflection may follow each reading or hymn. It is recommended that time for discussion be provided after this event, perhaps over a meal. Questions for reflection or discussion are found on the final page of this document and may be reproduced as a handout.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from your mouth.
Make us hungry for this heavenly food,
that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Matthew 5

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

HYMN

Bless the Lord

GTG 544

SECOND READING

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.
¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

HYMN

Here in This Place (Gather Us In)

GTG 401

THIRD READING

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.
²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.
³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

HYMN

Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive

GTG 444

FOURTH READING

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰ and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹ and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴² Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.
⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

HYMN

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace (Prayer of St. Francis)

GTG 753

FIFTH READING

Matthew 6

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

HYMN

As a Chalice Cast of Gold

GTG 429

SIXTH READING

⁷ “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

HYMN

Our Father, Which Art in Heaven

GTG 464

SEVENTH READING

¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

HYMN

Lord of All Good

GTG 711

EIGHTH READING

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

HYMN

Why Should I Feel Discouraged? (His Eye Is on the Sparrow)

GTG 661

NINTH READING

Matthew 7

Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. ² For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

⁶ “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹² “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

HYMN

Seek Ye First

GTG 175

TENTH READING

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell — and great was its fall!”

HYMN

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less

GTG 353

CONCLUSION

²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy God, you confound the world’s wisdom
by giving your kingdom to the lowly and poor in heart.
Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice
and perseverance in striving for peace,
that by our words and deeds
the world may see the promise of your kingdom
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

After reading Matthew 5:1–7:29 ...

- (1) What are your general impressions on hearing the whole Sermon on the Mount? What surprised, challenged or puzzled you? How do you think Jesus' original audience responded? How do these words address the church and world today? How does the Sermon on the Mount relate to the overall message of the gospel, or to the life of Christian discipleship?

As a part of the Matthew 25 invitation, the Presbyterian Mission Agency is engaging in focused work around systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality. The following questions relate to these mission priorities.

- (2) Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth" (5:13) and "You are the light of the world" (5:14). How is your congregation "salt" and "light" in your neighborhood, city or community? What else might you do to "let your light shine before others" (5:16)? What else can we learn about promoting congregational vitality from the Sermon on the Mount?
- (3) Jesus said: "Be reconciled to your brother or sister" (5:24) and "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5:44). How does Jesus' call to be reconciled and love one another challenge us to address the problems of racism and white privilege? What else can we learn about dismantling structural racism from the Sermon on the Mount?
- (4) Jesus said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth" (6:19) and "You cannot serve God and wealth" (6:24). How does this teaching inform the church's work for economic justice and ministry with people who are poor? What else can we learn about addressing systemic poverty from the Sermon on the Mount?

Visit pcusa.org/matthew25 for more information about the Presbyterian Mission Agency's work on systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality.

The Ten Miracles

Scripture Reading and Hymn Festival

The following reading plan allows congregations to experience the accounts of Jesus' 10 miracles from the Gospel of Matthew (8:1–9:34) in a single presentation. The 10 biblical passages might be divided among five readers. Related hymn selections are provided for each passage; planners should choose just one hymn for each spot. A brief time of silence for reflection may follow each reading or hymn. It is recommended that time for discussion be provided after this event, perhaps over a meal. Questions for reflection or discussion are found on the final page of this document and may be reproduced as a handout.

OPENING PRAYER

Guide us, O God,
by your Word and Spirit,
that in your light we may see light,
in your truth find freedom,
and in your will discover your peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST READING Jesus Cleanses a Leper

Matthew 8

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; ² and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean." ³ He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ Then Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

HYMN	Ten Lepers Facing Constant Scorn	GTG 179
	Just as I Am, Without One Plea	GTG 442
	Will You Come and Follow Me	GTG 726

SECOND READING Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

HYMN	In Christ There Is No East or West	GTG 317, 318
	O Christ, the Healer	GTG 793
	O Savior, in This Quiet Place	GTG 794

THIRD READING Jesus Heals Many at Peter's House

¹⁴ When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; ¹⁵ he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. ¹⁶ That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and cured all who were sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

¹⁸ Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. ¹⁹ A scribe then approached and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ²¹ Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ²² But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

HYMN	Healer of Our Every Ill	GTG 795
	We Come to You for Healing, Lord	GTG 796
	We Cannot Measure How You Heal	GTG 797

FOURTH READING Jesus Stills the Storm

²³ And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵ And they went and woke him up, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" ²⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. ²⁷ They were amazed, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"

HYMN	Eternal Father, Strong to Save	GTG 8
	Calm to the Waves	GTG 184
	Lonely the Boat	GTG 185

FIFTH READING Jesus Heals the Gadarene Demoniacs

²⁸ When he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ Suddenly they shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" ³⁰ Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. ³¹ The demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." ³² And he said to them, "Go!" So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. ³³ The swineherds ran off, and on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. ³⁴ Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood.

Matthew 9

And after getting into a boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town.

HYMN	Silence! Frenzied, Unclean Spirit	GTG 180, 181
	Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna!	GTG 248
	A Mighty Fortress Is Our God	GTG 275

SIXTH READING

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

² And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” ³ Then some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” ⁴ But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵ For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’ ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — he then said to the paralytic — “Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.” ⁷ And he stood up and went to his home. ⁸ When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

⁹ As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

HYMN

Arise, Your Light Is Come!
I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light
Jesus Calls Us

GTG 744
GTG 377
GTG 720

SEVENTH READING

The Question about Fasting

This reading is not an account of a miracle; it speaks to the identity of Jesus as Messiah.

¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

¹⁴ Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷ Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

HYMN

Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers
Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy
Bread of the World in Mercy Broken

GTG 362
GTG 415
GTG 499

EIGHTH READING

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

This reading includes the accounts of two miracles of Jesus.

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹ And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. ²³ When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ And the report of this spread throughout that district.

HYMN

Woman in the Night
The Woman Hiding in the Crowd
God Weeps with Us Who Weep and Mourn

GTG 161
GTG 178
GTG 787

NINTH READING Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

²⁷ As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” ²⁸ When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to him, “Yes, Lord.” ²⁹ Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you.” ³⁰ And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, “See that no one knows of this.” ³¹ But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district.

HYMN	Be Thou My Vision	GTG 450
	Open My Eyes, That I May See	GTG 451
	Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord	GTG 452

TENTH READING Jesus Heals One Who Was Mute

³² After they had gone away, a demoniac who was mute was brought to him. ³³ And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.” ³⁴ But the Pharisees said, “By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN	O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing	GTG 610
	Open Your Mouth and Praise the Lord!	GTG 640
	Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak	GTG 722

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God of the nations,
you have revealed your will to all people
and promised us your saving help.
May we hear and do what you command,
that the power of evil may be overcome
by the gift of your healing grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
now and forever. **Amen.**

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

After reading Matthew 8:1–9:34 ...

- (1) What do these miracle stories reveal about Jesus? Who is he? What does he do? How does he relate to others — including the disciples, religious authorities, the crowds, and people who would have been outsiders and outcasts (including a man with leprosy, the centurion, people possessed by demons, tax collectors, sinners). What do these stories teach us about following Jesus today? Who are the outsiders and outcasts in our communities? How might we be called to love and serve them in Jesus' name?

As a part of the Matthew 25 invitation, the Presbyterian Mission Agency is engaging in focused work around systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality. The following questions relate to these mission priorities.

- (2) Reread the story of the centurion in Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–13). Notice especially what Jesus says about outsiders — coming from east and west and taking a place at the table in the kingdom of heaven. What might this suggest about the church's work to dismantle structural racism?
- (3) Reread the stories of Jesus talking to the scribes and disciples and calming the storm (Matthew 8:18–27). How is it challenging to follow Jesus? When do we experience fear and lack of faith? What might these stories suggest about the church's work to build congregational vitality?
- (4) Think back on all the characters in this series of stories (Matthew 8:1–9:34). Which ones would have likely experienced poverty, and why? What difference does Jesus make in their lives, and how? What might this suggest about the church's work to eradicate systemic poverty?

Visit pcusa.org/matthew25 for more information about the Presbyterian Mission Agency's work on systemic poverty, structural racism and congregational vitality.

Reading Matthew in Daily Prayer

This 26-week plan for reading the Gospel of Matthew in daily prayer allows users to read the entire Gospel twice in the course of one year. Use the readings designated below on Monday through Saturday; on Sundays, use one or more of the lectionary readings for Lord's Day worship in your congregation.

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
MON 1:1–17	MON 3:1–12	MON 5:1–12	MON 5:33–37
TUE 1:18–25	TUE 3:13–17	TUE 5:13–16	TUE 5:38–42
WED 2:1–12	WED 4:1–11	WED 5:17–20	WED 5:43–48
THU 2:13–15	THU 4:12–17	THU 5:21–26	THU 6:1–4
FRI 2:16–18	FRI 4:18–22	FRI 5:27–30	FRI 6:5–6
SAT 2:19–23	SAT 4:23–25	SAT 5:31–32	SAT 6:7–15
WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8
MON 6:16–18	MON 7:13–14	MON 8:5–13	MON 9:9–13
TUE 6:19–21	TUE 7:15–20	TUE 8:14–17	TUE 9:14–17
WED 6:22–24	WED 7:21–23	WED 8:18–22	WED 9:18–26
THU 6:25–34	THU 7:24–27	THU 8:23–27	THU 9:27–31
FRI 7:1–6	FRI 7:28–29	FRI 8:28–34	FRI 9:32–34
SAT 7:7–12	SAT 8:1–4	SAT 9:1–8	SAT 9:35–38
WEEK 9	WEEK 10	WEEK 11	WEEK 12
MON 10:1–4	MON 10:40–42	MON 11:20–24	MON 12:33–37
TUE 10:5–15	TUE 11:1	TUE 11:25–30	TUE 12:38–42
WED 10:16–25	WED 11:2–6	WED 12:1–8	WED 12:43–45
THU 10:26–31	THU 11:7–10	THU 12:9–14	THU 12:46–50
FRI 10:32–33	FRI 11:11–15	FRI 12:15–30	FRI 13:1–9
SAT 10:34–39	SAT 11:16–19	SAT 12:31–32	SAT 13:10–17

WEEK 13	WEEK 14	WEEK 15	WEEK 16
MON 13:18–23	MON 13:51–53	MON 15:1–20	MON 16:13–20
TUE 13:24–30	TUE 13:54–58	TUE 15:21–28	TUE 16:21–23
WED 13:31–35	WED 14:1–12	WED 15:29–31	WED 16:24–28
THU 13:36–43	THU 14:13–21	THU 15:32–39	THU 17:1–13
FRI 13:44–46	FRI 14:22–33	FRI 16:1–4	FRI 17:14–21
SAT 13:47–50	SAT 14:34–36	SAT 16:5–12	SAT 17:22–23

WEEK 17	WEEK 18	WEEK 19	WEEK 20
MON 17:24–27	MON 19:3–12	MON 20:20–28	MON 21:28–32
TUE 18:1–5	TUE 19:13–15	TUE 20:29–34	TUE 21:33–46
WED 18:6–9	WED 19:16–22	WED 21:1–11	WED 22:1–14
THU 18:10–14	THU 19:23–30	THU 21:12–17	THU 22:15–22
FRI 18:15–20	FRI 20:1–16	FRI 21:18–22	FRI 22:23–33
SAT 18:21–19:2	SAT 20:17–19	SAT 21:23–27	SAT 22:34–40

WEEK 21	WEEK 22	WEEK 23	WEEK 24
MON 22:41–46	MON 24:15–28	MON 25:14–30	MON 26:26–30
TUE 23:1–12	TUE 24:29–31	TUE 25:31–46	TUE 26:31–35
WED 23:13–36	WED 24:32–35	WED 26:1–5	WED 26:36–46
THU 23:37–39	THU 24:36–44	THU 26:6–13	THU 26:47–56
FRI 24:1–2	FRI 24:45–51	FRI 26:14–16	FRI 26:57–68
SAT 24:3–14	SAT 25:1–13	SAT 26:17–25	SAT 26:69–75

WEEK 25	WEEK 26
MON 27:1–2	MON 27:45–56
TUE 27:3–10	TUE 27:57–61
WED 27:4–14	WED 27:62–66
THU 27:15–26	THU 28:1–10
FRI 27:27–31	FRI 28:11–15
SAT 27:32–44	SAT 28:16–20

Index to the Gospel of Matthew

The following chart indicates where the Gospel of Matthew is used in the Revised Common Lectionary, and how the alternate readings (in italics and brackets) provided in this resource fill in the gaps, allowing worshipers to experience the entire book of Matthew over the course of the Christian year. Those wishing to read the whole Gospel should also find an occasion to read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:29) and the Ten Miracles (Matthew 8:1–9:34); see the hymn festivals provided in this document for one option.

Matthew 1:1–17	<i>alt for Christmas Eve</i>		12/24/22
Matthew 1:18–25	RCL Advent 4		12/18/22
Matthew 2:1–12	RCL Epiphany of the Lord		1/1/23 or 1/6/23
Matthew 2:13–23	RCL Christmas 1		1/1/23
Matthew 3:1–12	RCL Advent 2		12/4/22
Matthew 3:13–17	RCL Baptism of the Lord		1/8/23
Matthew 4:1–11	RCL Lent 1		2/26/23
Matthew 4:12–23	RCL Epiphany 3		1/22/23
Matthew 4:24–25	[added to RCL Epiphany 3]		1/22/23
Matthew 5:1–12	RCL Epiphany 4	Sermon on the Mount	1/29/23
	RCL All Saints' Day		11/1/23 or 11/5/23
Matthew 5:13–20	RCL Epiphany 5	Sermon on the Mount	2/5/23
Matthew 5:21–37	RCL Epiphany 6	Sermon on the Mount	2/12/23
Matthew 5:38–48	(RCL Epiphany 7*)	Sermon on the Mount	
Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21	RCL Ash Wednesday	Sermon on the Mount	2/22/23
Matthew 6:7–17	[added to RCL Ash Wednesday]	Sermon on the Mount	2/22/23
Matthew 6:22–23	[added to RCL Ash Wednesday]	Sermon on the Mount	2/22/23
Matthew 6:24–34	(RCL Epiphany 8*)	Sermon on the Mount	
Matthew 6:25–33	RCL Thanksgiving (Year B)	Sermon on the Mount	11/23/23
Matthew 7:1–20		Sermon on the Mount	
Matthew 7:21–29	(RCL Epiphany 9*)	Sermon on the Mount	
Matthew 8:1–13		Ten Miracles	
Matthew 8:14–27		Ten Miracles	
Matthew 8:28–9:8		Ten Miracles	
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26	RCL Proper 5	Ten Miracles	6/11/23
Matthew 9:14–17, 27–34	[added to RCL Proper 5]	Ten Miracles	6/11/23
Matthew 9:35–10:8 (9–23)	RCL Proper 6		6/18/23
Matthew 10:24–39	RCL Proper 7		6/25/23
Matthew 10:40–42	RCL Proper 8		7/2/23
Matthew 11:1, 12–15	[added to RCL Advent 3]		12/11/22
Matthew 11:2–11	RCL Advent 3		12/11/22
Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30	RCL Proper 9		7/9/23
Matthew 11:20–24	[added to RCL Proper 9]		7/9/23
Matthew 12:1–21	<i>alt for Easter 5</i>		5/7/23
Matthew 12:22–37	<i>alt for Day of Pentecost</i>		5/28/23
Matthew 12:38–50	<i>alt for Lent 2</i>		3/5/23
Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23	RCL Proper 10		7/16/23

Matthew 13:10–17	[added to RCL Proper 10]	7/16/23
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43	RCL Proper 11	7/23/23
Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52	RCL Proper 12	7/30/23
Matthew 13:34–35	[added to RCL Proper 11]	7/23/23
Matthew 14:1–12	<i>alt for Epiphany 2</i>	1/15/23
Matthew 14:13–21	RCL Proper 13	8/6/23
Matthew 14:22–33	RCL Proper 14	8/13/23
Matthew 14:34–36	[added to RCL Proper 14]	8/13/23
Matthew 15:1–9	[added to RCL Proper 15]	8/20/23
Matthew 15: (10–20), 21–28	RCL Proper 15	8/20/23
Matthew 15:29–39	<i>alt for Easter 2</i>	4/16/23
Matthew 16:1–12	<i>alt for Easter 3</i>	4/23/23
Matthew 16:13–20	RCL Proper 16	8/27/23
Matthew 16:21–28	RCL Proper 17	9/3/23
Matthew 17:1–9	RCL Transfiguration of the Lord	2/19/23
Matthew 17:10–23	[added to RCL Transfiguration of the Lord]	2/19/23
Matthew 17:24–27	[added to RCL Proper 24]	10/22/23
Matthew 18:1–14	<i>alt for Easter 4</i>	4/30/23
Matthew 18:15–20	RCL Proper 18	9/10/23
Matthew 18:21–35	RCL Proper 19	9/17/23
Matthew 19:1–15	[add to alt for Lent 3]	3/12/23
Matthew 19:16–30	<i>alt for Lent 3</i>	3/12/23
Matthew 20:1–16	RCL Proper 20	9/24/23
Matthew 20:17–34	<i>alt for Lent 4</i>	3/19/23
Matthew 21:1–11	RCL Palm/Passion Sunday	4/2/23
Matthew 21:12–22	<i>alt for Easter 6</i>	5/14/23
Matthew 21:23–32	RCL Proper 21	10/1/23
Matthew 21:33–46	RCL Proper 22	10/8/23
Matthew 22:1–14	RCL Proper 23	10/15/23
Matthew 22:15–22	RCL Proper 24	10/22/23
Matthew 22:23–33	<i>alt for Easter 7</i>	5/21/23
Matthew 22:34–46	RCL Proper 25	10/29/23
Matthew 23:1–12	RCL Proper 26	11/5/23
Matthew 23:13–37	[added to RCL Proper 26]	11/5/23
Matthew 24:1–35	<i>alt for Ascension of the Lord</i>	5/18/23
Matthew 24:36–44	RCL Advent 1	11/27/22
Matthew 25:1–13	RCL Proper 27	11/12/23
Matthew 25:14–30	RCL Proper 28	11/19/23
Matthew 25:31–46	RCL Reign of Christ	11/26/23
Matthew 26:1–13	<i>alt for Lent 5</i>	3/26/23
Matthew 26:14–27:66	RCL Palm/Passion Sunday	4/2/23
Matthew 27:11–54	RCL Palm/Passion Sunday	4/2/23
Matthew 27:57–66	RCL Holy Saturday	4/8/23
Matthew 28:1–10	RCL Resurrection of the Lord	4/9/23
Matthew 28:11–15	<i>best omitted due to anti-Semitic implications</i>	
Matthew 28:16–20	RCL Trinity Sunday	6/4/23

* *Epiphany 7, 8 and 9 are not used in 2022–23 because of the date of Easter.*



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