

BIGGER

— THAN US —

Sermon Series Guide
May 31 – July 5, 2026



BIGGER THAN US

The little girl one Sunday as her family drove home from church, she turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the preacher's message this morning that I don't understand." The mother said, "Oh? What is it?" The little girl replied, "Well, she said that **God is bigger** than we are. She said God is so big that God could hold the world in God's hand. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey." "But Mommy, she also said that God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If **God is bigger** than us and God lives in us, wouldn't God show through?"

EXACTLY!

~ Rev Dr Randall M Deal Sr

We are now in the season of Pentecost. Last year on Pentecost Sunday, if you worshipped outdoors, you will never forget how the wind blew. The wind blows at First Lutheran Church unlike anywhere else. The Spirit is alive! Summer in Minnesota by the lakes means glorious sunshine, incredible sunrises and sunsets, longed-for or long-dreaded family gatherings, lake house time, delightful vacations, or only imagined trips because there is not enough money or time this year to make them happen. Summer might mean surprising visitors showing up in worship, or the absence of dear members. Wherever this season takes us, our job is to wrestle with these ordinary Bible verses and to welcome whoever comes, letting God show through – for this big God lives in us.

The Sermon Series: Bigger Than Us delves into God's identity during everyday life. You see, the season of Pentecost that we are entering is also called "Ordinary Time." Diana Butler Bass writes, "When we see in everyday life things that are pretty, ordinary, banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvelous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonorable, unusual, great, unbelievable, or ridiculous, that we are likely to remember for a long time... Ordinary things easily slip from the memory while the striking and novel stay longer in the mind. Too bad we forget the ordinary."

She continues, "Ordinary Time begins with two journeys, and it reminds us, despite all the supernatural hoopla in the weeks previous (Miracles, Healings, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Pentecost Day) – that a spiritual journey isn't something odd or particularly heroic. Spiritual journeys might have surprising turns or courageous moments, but they mostly involve familiar things and commonplace activities."

We are not fully able to describe God. We begin with the Holy Trinity – remembering that God is bigger than us! God is fully divine, fully human, and fully spirit – that means fully mysterious and so much more than we can wrap our brains around. In this ordinary time, we are reminded through the everyday stories of the Bible of God's bigger mercy, mission, compassion, freedom, and expectation. May this series bless your summer in big and small ways.

Sunday Series: Bigger Than Us



May 31, 2026 – Holy Trinity

Theme: God's Bigger Self

- **Scripture Readings:** 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20
- **Key Ideas:** Though the word trinity is not found in the scriptures, today's second reading includes the apostolic greeting that begins the liturgy: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In the gospel, Jesus sends his disciples forth to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More than a doctrine, the Trinity expresses the heart of our faith: we have experienced the God of creation made known in Jesus Christ and with us always through the Holy Spirit. We celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity in word and sacrament, as we profess the creed, and as we are sent into the world to bear witness to our faith.
- **Daily Discipleship:** Holy Trinity <https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

June 7, 2026 – 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God's Bigger Mercy

- **Scripture Reading:** Romans 4:13-17, Matthew 9:18-26
- **Key Ideas:** The promise of Abraham comes by faith that rests upon grace, not law. In the healing of the leader's daughter and the hemorrhaging woman, we see that God's mercy is big enough to cover them, yes, but the bigger, more challenging concept is God's love being big enough for those who did this to them and the systems of oppression that continue to this day.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

June 14, 2026 – 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God's Bigger Mission

- **Scripture Reading:** Romans 5:1-8 Matthew 9:35 - 10:14
- **Key Ideas:** Jesus sends out the disciples as laborers into the harvest. In baptism, we too are anointed for ministry, sharing God's compassion with our needy world. From the Lord's table we go forth to proclaim the good news, to heal the sick, and to share our bread with the hungry. God sends us out to be the church in real life to fulfill God's wider, bolder, bigger mission.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 3rd Sunday after Pentecost
<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

June 21, 2026 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God's Bigger Compassion

- **Scripture Reading:** Psalm 69:13-18, Genesis 21:8-20
- **Key Ideas:** We are likely familiar with the story of Abraham and Sarah, but the character Hagar's story is rarely told in religious spaces. She found herself in a no-win situation in which she saw her best option as running away, which was dangerous and life-threatening. The first angel/heavenly messenger to appear in scripture is the one who meets Hagar in the wilderness, in her turmoil, and calls her by name, communicating compassion and a knowingness of her situation. In the depths of despair that we can find ourselves in this broken world, God's compassion meets us where we are at, not fixing our problems, but holding us in them. The Psalm text offers a format for lament - we call out to God when in distress, and the in-depth study guide offers insight from the week's gospel lesson from Matthew.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 4th Sunday after Pentecost
<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

June 28, 2026 – 5th Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God's Bigger Freedom

- **Scripture Reading:** Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42
- **Key Ideas:** The welcome of baptism is for all God's children. This baptismal gift sets us free from the power of sin and death. In today's gospel, Christ promises that the disciple who gives a cup of cold water to the little ones serves Christ himself. From worship, we are sent on our baptismal mission: to serve the little ones of this world and to be a sign of God's merciful welcome.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 5th Sunday after Pentecost
<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

July 5, 2026 – 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: God's Bigger Expectation

- **Scripture Reading:** Romans 7:15-25a, Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
- **Key Ideas:** The mystery of God's ways is sometimes hidden from the wise and intelligent. Jesus associates with those often excluded from the religious community. Like Paul, we struggle with our own selfish desires and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. We gather to be refreshed by Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary." Gathered around word, water, and meal, we find rest for our souls. Knowing the son through the father/father through son; come rest if you are weary/carrying heavy burdens; yoke is easy and burden light. God's bigger expectation is not that we carry our own burdens and always choose what is right and best for us, but rather to allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit. Our expectation is to be humble and accept the unburdening of our souls.
- **Daily Discipleship:** 6th Sunday after Pentecost
<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

➔ **The Daily Discipleship resources are free Bible Study resources from the ELCA website. You can print them from home. However, if printing is a problem, we would be delighted to print a copy for you or your Bible Study group.**

<https://resources.elca.org/bible-studies/year-a-time-after-pentecost-2/>

Daily Discipleship

Holy Trinity Sunday (A) – May 31, 2026

Matthew 28:16-20

Tips of Discipleship: *Go, Baptize, and Teach*

Focus Question: *What opportunities did you have this week to teach someone about Jesus?*

word of life

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus was crucified and was raised from the dead. He had appeared to Mary and instructed her to tell the disciples to wait in Galilee for him. (See Matthew 28:10) The eleven disciples follow those directions and wait on a mountain in the Galilee region. Yet, when the disciples finally see Jesus, some of them worship him while others doubt.

1. *Why might some of the disciples doubt the reality of Jesus when they finally see him after the resurrection?*
2. *If you would have been with them, what might have been your response?*

Jesus speaks to all his disciples – those who believe and those who doubt. He begins with a statement of his authority, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18 NRSV) Jesus is not speaking as a ghost, disconnected from God. But rather, Jesus speaks with the authority of God.

3. *Why is it important for Jesus to begin his post-resurrection speech with establishing his authority?*
4. *How does Jesus exercise his authority?*
5. *How does Jesus try to share his authority with his disciples?*

Jesus has the ability to choose to do anything after his resurrection, but he chooses to be with his disciples. He chooses to invest in them and commission them for mission work. Jesus commands his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19 NRSV) This is often referred to as the “Great Commission” and can be found in mission statements of many congregations.

6. *What does it mean to “make disciples”?*
7. *How does the commissioning of the disciples relate to the authority of Jesus?*

Although there is no record of Jesus baptizing anyone, Jesus clearly wants his disciples to baptize. He doesn’t clarify if baptism is to be done by sprinkling, dipping, or dunking. Nor does he clarify the age of the one being baptized. He simply instructs to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet in the book of Acts, some people are baptized in the name of Jesus. (Example: Acts 10:48)

8. *Is there a difference between baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit compared to the name of Jesus? How so?*

The human desire to name God has been an ongoing desire. For example, Moses asks for God’s name before Moses departs to request the release of the slaves from the Pharaoh in Egypt. Names can assist people to grasp aspects of the identity and functions of God.

9. *What is your favorite name for God?*
10. *What does “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” reveal about the nature of God?*

word among us

While I was writing this *Daily Discipleship*, I heard a knock at the front door. Two nicely-dressed women and a little boy in a stroller were waiting for me to open the door. They introduced themselves and one woman asked if she could read a verse of scripture on hope to me. I consented. She opened her Bible to Revelation 21 and read about a new heaven and earth. She concluded, “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” (Revelations 21:4 NRSV)

I suspect I had a smile on my face as I leaned against the door, listened to her read from the Bible, and looked across the lawn at the beauty of God’s creation. It was hard to imagine the beautiful creation passing away as God brings something new – a new heaven and earth. Yet, God knows what is needed to bring something new.

When the reader finished, she asked me if I had heard this passage before. I replied, “Yes.” She asked if it gave me hope. I replied, “Yes.” Those answers seemed to suffice and she asked no more questions. She simply gave me something to read and departed. That was all.

I was ready to tell the visitors about using that passage at funerals to comfort grieving loved ones. But, I did not need to do that. Maybe she could see hope in me. Maybe she could see God in me. Maybe she just needed to hear those words for *herself* today. All in all, it was a pleasant interruption of hope.

1. *Share a time when your day was interrupted by a word of hope.*
2. *Share a time when people invested their time and energy to teach you about Jesus.*
3. *Who in your life might need a word of hope? How might you be an ambassador of hope to that person?*

Jesus told his disciples to “Go!” That is not a very complicated instruction. We *go* all the time. In actuality, we *go* most of the time. But Jesus wants his disciples to *go* with a purpose – not any purpose, but with the mission of Jesus.

4. *What does Jesus want you to go and do?*
5. *How are you to partner with Jesus in mission during the coming week?*

Jesus adds two other commands to “go” – baptize and teach. Pastors are ones who most often place the water on the newly baptized, but the entire body of Christ can be active in encouraging people to consider getting baptized or to live out their baptism. Likewise, all of us have opportunities to teach others about Jesus Christ, especially when we realize teaching does not always occur in formal settings such as a classroom. The Spirit can give us the words to use in teachable moments which occur throughout the week.

6. *What is a teachable moment?*
7. *How might you learn to look for those teachable moments to share about Jesus?*

Prayer

Gracious God, you have commissioned your disciples to go, baptize, and teach. Help me to see opportunities to be your missionary in the course of my week. Amen

Dig Deeper

Psalm 8

last word

Be on the alert for teachable moments about Jesus.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Holy Trinity Sunday (A) Page 2 of 2

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, June 7, 2026 (A) – Matthew 9:18-26

Tips of Discipleship: *Be Merciful*

Focus Question: *How might you extend mercy to someone in the next week?*

word of life

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” Matthew 9:12 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Chapter nine of Matthew begins with Jesus forgiving the paralytic his sins *before* he has made confession. Forgiveness also occurs *before* Jesus heals the man physically. All of this leaves the crowds in awe and amazed at the authority of Jesus. (See Matthew 9:2-8)

But there is more to the new ways of Jesus. He has a pattern of eating and interacting with sinners. This is clearly seen when Jesus calls a tax collector named Matthew as one of his disciples. Tax collectors were known for adding extra to the tax and keeping it for themselves. Nevertheless, the request by Jesus is simple, “Follow me.” (Matthew 9:9 NRSV) Their response is immediate. All of this baffles the Pharisees.

1. *What does it mean to you that Jesus interacts with sinners?*
2. *What does it mean to you that Jesus would call a “sinner” to be his disciple?*
3. *How might Jesus be a positive influence on those around him?*

Jesus understands himself to be on a mission for those who are sick – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He is available for those who have a need of a savior. Jesus says, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” (Matthew 9:12 NRSV)

4. *Describe someone who thinks he or she does not need a physician to tend to his or her spiritual needs.*
5. *How might the Pharisees be in need of a physician?*
6. *What does it mean for Jesus to desire mercy?*

Later a leader of the synagogue comes and kneels before Jesus. He begs Jesus to make his dead daughter live again. He desires a miracle for nothing else will help his daughter. Jesus gets up and follows this religious leader. No questions are asked. Jesus responds as if the request is typical and within the range of Jesus.

7. *How would you have reacted if you heard this request from this grieving father?*
8. *What strikes you about the response of Jesus?*

While they were traveling, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years touches the robe of Jesus so she might be healed. Jesus responds by turning to the healed woman and speaking with mercy, “Take heart, daughter, your faith has been made well.” (Matthew 9:22 NRSV) The woman is healed immediately.

Jesus returns to the other daughter in the story. She is already surrounded by mourners and their music. Jesus asks the crowd to leave. They mock his hope for life. But new life is given – by the grace of God. Jesus is not bound by human limitations.

9. *What do you hope you remember from these passages?*

word among us

Several members of the congregation witnessed their pastor walk into a bar at noon. They were appalled. They asked themselves, “What would others in the community think if they saw their pastor enter into a bar in the middle of the day?” They immediately pulled out their cell phones and began calling the church council and other leaders.

1. *What do you think of the reaction of the members?*
2. *What might have been another way to handle this situation?*

It turned out the pastor was meeting with a woman who was deeply troubled and contemplating suicide. She agreed to meet the pastor in that particular bar at noon. Her whole story was complicated, but the woman ended up getting some extensive counseling as she found her way to health.

3. *Does it make sense to you as a Christian to only interact with Christians in Christian settings? How so?*
4. *How might you be a positive influence on others who might not have faith?*
5. *What is the balance between living with Christians and intentionally interacting with non-believers?*

Jesus had the sole option to interact with sinners. He met no perfect people. Some of them admitted their sin and others did not. The righteous of his day were appalled at the company of Jesus. How dare Jesus interact with sinners? Yet, Jesus came to save sinners and give hope to the lost. He intentionally reached out to those who had needs.

6. *Who would Jesus eat with today?*
7. *Where would we find Jesus in our culture?*
8. *Who are the lost of our times?*
9. *What does this say about where the church should invest its energy?*

Again and again, Jesus extended life to people. He invited Matthew to be a disciple – despite Matthew being an ostracized tax collector. This call to Matthew was life-changing and life-giving. He also gave life back to the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. As long as the woman was bleeding, she was considered unclean and could not have normal interactions with others. After Jesus healed her, she could claim her life again.

It was a startling and bold request from the father for Jesus to bring his daughter back to life, but one rooted in faith. Jesus responded immediately.

10. *What request might you ask of Jesus?*
11. *How might you be more bold and confident in your faith?*
12. *How might you be an instrument of mercy to those around you?*

Prayer

Gracious God, help me to be merciful to those around me. Open my eyes, hearts, and hands to those in need. Amen

Dig Deeper

Psalm 50:7-15



Prayerfully ponder how God has shown you mercy
and how you might show mercy to others.

Daily Discipleship

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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, June 14, 2026 (A) – Matthew 9:35 - 10:14

Tips of Discipleship: *Be On a Mission*

Focus Question: *How do you partner with Jesus in his mission?*

word of life

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:37 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 9:35-10:8

After Jesus is baptized, he spends time being tested and prepared in the wilderness. Once his ministry is launched, he proceeds to call his disciples and trains them about his mission. Jesus expands his mission outreach efforts by commissioning and sending his disciples.

1. *What is important for Jesus to teach his disciples in their first year together?*

In the Gospel of Matthew, by the end of chapter nine, Jesus is heavily engaged in teaching, proclaiming the good news, and curing illnesses. He has compassion for those he meets on his travels “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36 NRSV)

2. *What does it feel like to be harassed and helpless?*
3. *What does it mean to be a sheep without a shepherd?*

Jesus sees great need and hunger in people as he travels throughout the cities, villages, and countryside. He compares it to a harvest time when the crop is ready and laborers are needed. If there are not enough laborers to maximize the moment, then the full benefit of the time is lost.

Jesus believes prayer is the first step. To pray is to acknowledge a need for assistance, particularly in dealing with people who have needs. The laborers of Christ still need a shepherd. Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37 NRSV) It is not just laborers who are needed, but those open to labor for Christ.

4. *How might prayer assist in getting laborers?*
5. *Why might the Lord be concerned about the harvest?*

God has blessed Jesus with laborers – his disciples. Thus, Jesus gathers his own disciples whom he has called, and gives them authority to heal. It is interesting to note the disciples listed in Matthew 10:2-4 are in pairs. Perhaps these are the missionary teams sent by Jesus.

6. *What would it feel like to be a student of Jesus and commissioned to heal and cast out unclean spirits?*
7. *Is this our calling today? How so?*
8. *Describe how you imagine the life of the disciples during their first year with Jesus.*

Jesus gives clear instructions to his disciples to not interact with the Gentiles. The time is not right to harvest that crop. Jesus places a priority on the Jews and requests his disciples to begin their work with them in very specific ways. He mandates, “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.” (Matthew 10:7-8 NRSV) Plus, do it without pay.

9. *What is the most surprising aspect of the commissioning of the disciples?*

word among us

Homer's home congregation was struggling. No doubt about it. There was controversy over the color of the new women's bathroom, the hymns sung at worship, and even about where to allow the children to drink their punch after worship. All aspects of church life seemed like such hard work. It appeared to Homer like his beloved congregation had lost its focus and mission.

1. *What advice would you give Homer?*
2. *If a congregation loses its focus on mission, what can be done?*
3. *Describe a congregation centered on the mission of Jesus Christ.*

Homer's grandson lived out of state. He had fond memories of summers spent with his grandfather, so he pursued his first job after college graduation in Homer's hometown. Proudly, Homer took his grandson to church, but he became embarrassed by all the bickering heard before and after worship. Over lunch, Homer shared his profound sadness about his congregation which had lost its way despite the profound needs of his community. He had a sense of urgency as he expressed concern over his church's apathy. It was his grandson who suggested beginning with prayer. They committed to pray daily for a change of direction for Homer's church.

4. *How might prayer impact the situation?*
5. *How do you explain a congregation which loses its way?*
6. *How might some new members help change the direction of a congregation?*

Jesus compared the opportunities of his day to harvest time. He was well aware of the urgency associated with the season of harvest. There was no time or reason to procrastinate. Jesus knew workers were needed to do specific tasks in a timely manner.

7. *How is it "harvest time" for your community?*
8. *How does your congregation understand and implement the mission of Christ?*

In order to expand his mission, Jesus called his disciples and sent them out by twos. They were asked to do tasks beyond their human powers. Specifically, they were asked to cure, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and even cast out demons. They could do none of this without God's Spirit empowering them to do so.

Jesus continues to call disciples to be sent out on his mission – to do those things beyond their human capabilities. There is such need as people search for meaning and healing in their lives. Today – no matter the season of the year – is harvest time.

9. *What does it mean for you to partner with Jesus Christ in mission?*

Prayer

Christ, thank you for calling me to follow you and to serve as your disciple. Help me to grasp your mission and ways to partner with you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 5:1-8

last word

Each day,
prayerfully ponder the opportunities
to partner with Jesus in mission.



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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, June 21, 2016 (A) –Genesis 21:8-20

Tips of Discipleship: *There is always more to the story.*

Focus Question: *How does God invite us to meet people where they at like God does?*

word of life

“God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven.”

Genesis 21: 17 (NIV)

The story of Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah is beloved and well-known, appearing in every children’s Bible and Sunday School curriculum. We marvel at the fulfillment of God’s promise to them for a child, Isaac and at the beauty of the story when God reveals a sky full of stars as numerous as Abraham’s descendants. As children we sing “Father Abraham” with all the silly actions. But, rarely do we as the church acknowledge an uncomfortable and disturbing aspect of their story, and a very important character: Hagar. Her story deserves to be told.

Prepare for our reading first by reviewing what has led up to this point in the story:

Sarai is identified as being childless and past childbearing age (Genesis ch. 11). God promises to make Abram a great nation (Genesis ch. 12), and that his offspring will be plentiful (Genesis ch. 15). However, when that plan did not come to fruition in a timeline acceptable to them, Sarai decided to build her family through forced surrogacy of Hagar, one of their slaves. Years later when Hagar’s son Ishmael was grown, discord led to re-named Sarah to call for their banishment. Re-named Abraham outfitted them with a small amount of water, which was not enough for their survival. If you would like to read the entire Hagar narrative, the passages are **Genesis 16: 1-16**, and **Genesis 21: 1-21**.

1. *Does the story of Hagar surprise you? Why or why not?*
2. *Does the story of Hagar change how you view Abraham and Sarah?*

When encountering upsetting scripture, one tactic is to take a step back ask ourselves, “Is this passage intended to be an ancient story, historical fiction vs nonfiction, a poem, a letter, instruction from God or God’s messenger, a warning, a promise, or vision for God’s ideal kingdom?” Another general question is, “Is this passage telling us how something was in ancient times, or is it telling us how it should be?” This particular narrative tells us an ancient story passed down over thousands of years that described how Israelites viewed the origins of the various tribes throughout the region. It does not instruct us on how God wants family systems to function or how we should treat our fellow humans. If anything, God uses the ancient words of the Old Testament to hold up a mirror to all of humanity.

3. *How has this story echoed throughout history in the form of human behaviors?*

Hagar lived in a society with no good options for women in her position. She becomes the first character in the Bible to be met with a heavenly messenger/angel. Just as God met her creatively in her horrific situation, God continues to meet people in their real life trauma, most tangibly in the form of Jesus. It is safe to assume that anyone connected to Jesus may experience problems – some of which might be life-threatening. In our gospel text for this week, the disciples and their loved ones have legitimate reasons to be afraid. Some people intend harm for the disciples. But Jesus overrules their fear with a command, “So have no fear of them.” (Matthew 10:26 NRSV)

4. *What is the opposite of fear?*

5. *If you were afraid and someone told you to stop being afraid, would that work? Why or why not?*
6. *How effective are people when they are afraid?*

Jesus does more than speak words to counter the fear of the disciples. He reminds his disciples of the care and concern of God towards them. Although some may fall to bodily harm, God protects the spirit of those who believe in God. There is no doubt God values and cares for humans more than sparrows – especially those humans who acknowledge Jesus before others. Those who deny Jesus before God are right to be filled with fear – a fear of God.

7. *Paraphrase Matthew 10:26-33. What is Jesus trying to say?*
8. *How does God demonstrate care for humanity?*

It is one thing to be ostracized by strangers. It is something else to be rejected by family members. Jesus is most serious about this. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth: I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34 NRSV)

9. *How could the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, not bring peace?*
10. *Why might some family members reject a follower of Jesus?*
11. *What would it mean to be alienated from family due to faith in Jesus?*

Jesus understands discipleship as a series of choices made daily – to follow Jesus or to chase after something else. Jesus desires a sole allegiance. He even encourages followers to pick up a cross and to follow. Make no mistake; a cross made of wood is heavy. It cannot be casually thrown over a shoulder along with other things. Instead, carrying a cross takes a certain determination and persistence. In doing so, a person is able to find his or her life.

12. *What does it mean to find your life?*
13. *How might carrying a cross help you to find your life?*

word among us

“Monica” is now divorced, after having been in a physically and emotionally abusive marriage. Influential voices in her life, including her former in-laws, pastor, and a few friends from her church (that she has now left), told her repeatedly that the Bible says that women should not question their husbands, and certainly not leave them. She has significant church hurt, but she wants to give your church a try and is now in your small-group Bible study.

As you study Genesis, Monica has questions about how to handle these Old Testament stories.

1. *What bigger questions and foundational beliefs about handling scripture would be helpful to discuss and explore in your group?*
2. *Are there specific stories and/or aspects of the Bible that you find troublesome? If so, what are they? Has that ever held you back from embracing scripture?*
3. *How can we as the church minister to those who’ve been hurt by certain interpretations and applications of scripture?*

Prayer

God, thank you for your word, and help us faithfully interpret and apply it. Help us all to use your word for good in the world and to share your love, not as a weapon of harm. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Romans 5:1-8

last word

Pray for those who are hurting from abuse, and empower the church to help them.

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, June 28, 2026 (A) – Matthew 10:40-42

Tips of Discipleship: *Welcome Others*

Focus Question: *How have you welcomed someone this week as if that person were Christ?*

word of life

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” Matthew 10:40 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 10:40-42

The tenth chapter of Matthew focuses on the mission of the twelve being sent into a hostile world. Jesus warns his disciples to be ready for persecution and rejection. This chapter concludes with gentler words concerning the opposite response by people – being welcomed. Not everyone rejects followers of Jesus. This news is refreshing consolation to any who are sent in the name of Jesus.

1. *What are ways to welcome a stranger?*
2. *How does it feel to be welcomed – especially when away from home?*

When someone welcomes one of the disciples it is like welcoming Jesus Christ. And there is more. To welcome Jesus is to welcome God who sent Jesus. Basic hospitality is not to be underestimated. Jesus clearly links his disciples with himself and God.

3. *How can this be?*
4. *Knowing a disciple is connected to God, why would anyone reject the disciple?*
5. *How is a disciple of Jesus recognized?*

This concept is not new. The Old Testament prophets were sent in the name of the Lord. Some were rejected, but they were also welcomed at times. If and when prophets are welcomed, the person who extends hospitality is promised a reward. Likewise, anyone who welcomes a righteous person also receives a reward.

6. *What reward might be given to the person who extends hospitality to a prophet or righteous person?*
7. *What might be the difference between a prophet and a righteous person?*

Jesus is not finished. “And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:42 NRSV) Cold water means a great deal in a desert where water is not easily available. The real question is the identity of “these little ones.” Scholars sometimes describe “these little ones” as the ordinary members of the body of Christ – those who live their lives faithfully, full of humility, and without acclaim.

8. *How do you define “these little ones”?*
9. *Who are “these little ones” living today?*
10. *Why is there such an emphasis on hospitality?*

Jesus connects himself to his followers as they bear witness to him. Thus, anyone who receives and welcomes one of his ambassadors will be recognized and rewarded.

11. *How do we prepare to welcome others in the name of Jesus Christ?*
12. *How do we respond when others welcome us?*

word among us

Many congregations gathered in the heat of summer to hear a guest pastor preach. Through the humor of his stories, they heard about him growing up in Africa and coming to the South for his high school years. At one point, he asked them to shout “Amen” if they agreed with him. How could you not agree with him as spoke eloquently about Jesus Christ? He was their guest. Why not shout an “Amen”? They realized it was enjoyable to get involved in the sermon in such a way.

Midway through the sermon, the preacher instructed them to say “ouch” if he was close to a sore point in their life. The people complied as he offered prophetic words on the hurts of their day. He preached the gospel – challenging and comforting them with his words. They in turn welcomed him in their midst, grateful for his time with them.

1. *What does it mean to welcome a representative of Christ?*
2. *Do you have to agree with an ambassador of Christ to welcome him or her? How so?*
3. *If you knew Jesus was coming tonight to a meeting at your congregation, what would you do?*
4. *If you were at a meeting at your congregation and a stranger walked in, what would you do?*
5. *Describe a time when you were warmly welcomed.*

Hospitality seems to come naturally for some people. They seem to have a knack for sensing the needs of others – ready to get a glass of water, give directions, or listen.

6. *How do we learn how to welcome people?*
7. *What advice would you give to someone who wanted to increase their welcoming skills?*

Take a few minutes to assess your own congregation’s hospitality. Imagine you are a visitor trying to find your church and attend worship. List the ways a person finds out about your worship schedule and location. Describe how that person would be received before, during, and after worship.

8. *How would you rate the hospitality of your congregation?*
9. *How might it be improved?*

Take a few minutes to assess your own personal hospitality skills. Think through a typical day. Consider opportunities to welcome people in your life. Imagine Jesus crossing your path this week. Describe the reception he might receive from you – especially if you do not first recognize him.

10. *What can we learn from this?*
11. *How might you become more welcoming?*

Prayer

Gracious God, show me ways to welcome your ambassadors into my life. Help me to be open to the needs of the stranger. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 28:5-9

last word

Take time this week
to welcome a stranger in the name of Christ.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Daily Discipleship

Sunday, July 5, 2026 (A) – Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Tips of Discipleship: *Take Rest*

Focus Question: *When and how do you take rest in God?*

word of life

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Sometimes it feels like no matter what you do – you cannot win. That’s a frustrating place to be. Jesus knows that. He describes his generation as children in the marketplace who are surrounded by important activities, but are not seriously engaged in purchasing food, making a living, or visiting with others.

Jesus is frustrated at his generation who do not have joy to play the flute at a wedding or compassion to cry at a funeral. They criticize John for eating too little and Jesus for eating too much. No matter what the situation, the people criticize and reject.

1. *What do people want?*
2. *Would it be a compliment or a criticism to be described as “children in the marketplace”?*

There is an important lesson to be learned in the way Jesus handles his frustration. Despite it all, Jesus finds a way to praise God. Despite it all! (See Matthew 11:25-26)

3. *When are we to praise God?*
4. *How can people praise God when they are discouraged?*

It seems to help Jesus to acknowledge God has not fully revealed all things to the people. That takes a certain amount of responsibility off the shoulders of the people, but they are not without some blame. God chooses to be revealed through Jesus, yet some reject him.

5. *If people have not been given full understanding about God, then how can people be responsible to come to faith?*
6. *Is it fair to hold people accountable when God has not been fully revealed? Explain.*

It actually sounds quite confusing. It is enough to make a person’s head and heart spin in confusion and exhaustion. No wonder Jesus offers to take the burdens from those who weary. Jesus says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NRSV)

7. *What kind of burdens is Jesus able to carry for us?*
8. *How might dealing with people make a person weary?*

Animals who are expected to pull heavy weight are sometimes yoked together to increase their capacity to carry a load. Jesus invites his followers to be yoked with himself. That is quite a partner to assist in carrying weight. No wonder he predicts the burden will lighten. He promises rest for our souls – a deep rest for our weariness. Thanks be to God.

9. *What does it mean to be yoked with Jesus?*
10. *How might that connection help us through difficulty?*

word among us

The ninety-year woman sank in her chair, holding the mail from the week. How was she to wade through the mail, especially the bills? Slowly, she opened the letters and rubbed her head. She could feel a headache coming on. By the time her daughter arrived, she was barely moving. She explained to her daughter, “I am weary in the head.”

1. *What does it mean to be “weary in the head”?*
2. *What is the cure?*
3. *How would you advise the ninety-year old woman?*

The woman’s daughter listened, nodded, and kept silent as she fought back tears. Today, she needed to tell her beloved mother about her own divorce. She would spare her mother the ugly and painful details, but she did not know where to begin. Her mother would not understand, but times were different now. With love she looked at her mother and felt a deep sigh released from the depths of her heart. There was no doubt about it, she felt weary in the heart and did not know what to do next.

4. *What does it mean to be “weary in the heart”?*
5. *What is the cure?*
6. *How would you advise the daughter?*

The nurse who often cared for this woman walked by the room and saw the two women huddled together. It was clear each was burdened by worry and discouraged by life’s problems. That scene only added to the personal despair felt by the nurse. For a long time, the nurse felt emptiness in his heart. He felt weary in his spirit and did not know how to make the pain go away.

7. *What does it mean to be “weary in the spirit”?*
8. *What is the cure?*

Jesus lived enough days on this earth to experience weariness – in body, spirit, heart, and mind. Weariness can come in all forms and can last a long time. Some weariness moves into depression and despair. Thus, for Jesus to extend rest for the weary, he is giving hope for those who are burdened. That hope is named – Jesus.

9. *What does weariness feel like to you?*
10. *How do you experience the rest given to you by Jesus?*

In his willingness to be yoked, Jesus commits to a partnership with us. We are not left alone. Jesus is a gentle and humble partner – one to value.

11. *What does it mean for you to give your burdens to Jesus?*
12. *What would have to change in your life in order for to give your burdens to Jesus?*

Prayer

Mighty one, take my burdens and free me from my weariness. Let me walk beside you as we are yoked in partnership. Thank you for providing rest for my soul – undeserving as I might be. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 7:15-25a

last word

Take a moment to sit and rest. Intentionally offer your burdens to Jesus.
Allow him to take those burdens.



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