

DIOCESE OF
CHICHESTER



THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

Lent Course 2026



Living the
Mystery of Faith

Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you were one of the Gospel writers, aiming to capture the significance of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

What would you include? What would you have to leave out? Could one account ever capture the impact of all that Jesus said and did?

Perhaps that's why, in God's wisdom, we have four Gospels — a gallery of portraits, each highlighting different aspects of Christ.

Mark's account is fast-paced, and action-filled. Luke unveils a beautiful picture of Jesus' compassion for the poor and the outcast. John's Gospel echoes with divine mystery.

And Matthew? Matthew paints the portrait of a promised King.

Matthew's Gospel highlights Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, or 'Christ', the fulfilment of the words spoken through the prophets. Matthew constantly reaches into the treasury of the scriptures, revealing Jesus as the one who was bringing God's kingdom.

Over the next four years, we'll walk through each gospel-writer's gallery.

This year in Matthew, we'll take in Jesus' birth, his calling of disciples, his authority as a teacher, his miracles, and his upcoming passion.

And every Sunday, our Gospel reading will add another brushstroke to our picture of Christ.

As we see Jesus fulfil God's promise we'll be encouraged and equipped to live out the mystery of faith.

This lent course is written by Revd Tom Robson with contributions from Dan Jenkins and Kim Carter.

How the course works

Each session provides an introduction,
a Bible reading, and three 'tracks' to follow



Reflective

contains guided readings and responses for quiet prayer and reflection.



Digging Deeper

focuses on study questions around the scripture passages and historical context before applying them to our lives today. This track is most suited to those wanting more in-depth group discussion.

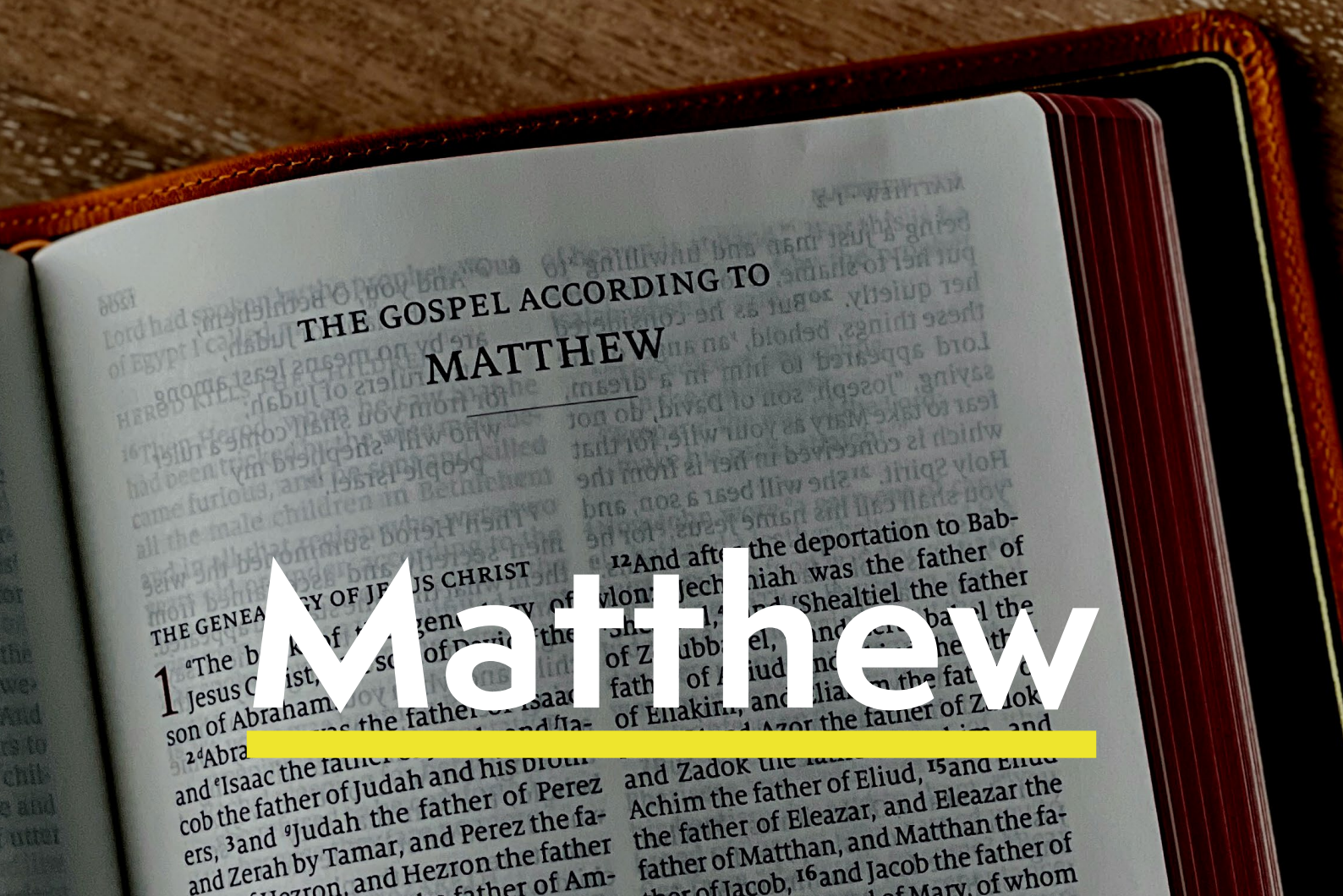


FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

has a retelling of the Bible story, interspersed with interactive activities to bring the theme to life in creative ways. These could be used in a Sunday school setting, all-age services, school assemblies and by families at home.

You can either follow one track that suits your group or pick and mix to adapt what you need in your context. All three tracks aim to connect the accounts of Jesus in the Gospels, to our lives today. At the end of each week, there are hymn suggestions and a closing prayer.

Traditional Lent disciplines connect well with the themes of these sessions. For example, you could explore giving or fasting in connection with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. But these have not been spelt out, so that they might arise naturally from your discussions.



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Matthew

A Brief Background

Matthew is often known as the 'Jewish Gospel'. It focuses on the fulfilment of many of the Old Testament prophecies in the coming of Jesus as the Christ (or 'Messiah').

Papias (the Bishop of Hieropolis in Phrygia c.AD 130) is the first recorded source connecting the apostle Matthew with this Gospel. This is told to us by Eusebius, the early church historian, who records Papias' account. (Hist. Eccl. 3.39.16). However, some scholars have argued that Matthew's reliance on Mark's Gospel indicates that it is not the work of an original eyewitness.

The writing of Matthew seems highly likely to have followed Mark (which was likely written in the 60s AD), and before the end of the 1st century, as it was known to Ignatius of Antioch by AD 110. So, a date for the writing of Matthew in the mid-late 1st century seems most likely.

The Gospel presents a predominantly Jewish-Christian outlook, although it is also laying the groundwork for the Gentile mission which so preoccupies Luke, the Gentle writer. There are two points of focus here: Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Covenant which is foretold often in the prophetic literature and the delivery of a new covenant which centres on the Kingdom of Heaven.

Your group may like to delve into the authorship and origin of the Gospel itself, especially if you follow the 'Digging Deeper' track. But for the purposes of the rest of this Lent Course, we will proceed on the traditional understanding of this being the Gospel of Matthew, written so that all may see that Jesus is the Christ, and the fulfilment of God's promise.

Introductions

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.

Matthew 9:9 NRSV

How do I know that God wants me?

It's a question we may sometimes ask ourselves. We can feel that past mistakes, our ongoing struggles, or lack of spiritual discipline place us on the outside looking in. Perhaps we fall into the trap of comparison and see others as 'better' Christians.

In this session, we meet Matthew, the person traditionally associated with writing this Gospel. We find him working in a derided profession, a collaborator with the Roman occupying forces and a social outcast. Yet it is to him that Jesus comes with a life-changing invitation: "Follow me."

As we witness this encounter and a controversial meal that followed (Matthew 9:10-13), we see the very heart of Jesus' mission. He's not come to call people who are already good enough, or only a certain sort of person, but all those who are prepared to follow him.

Matthew wants to introduce us to Jesus from the very start of his Gospel, beginning with Christ's genealogy - the roll call of his ancestors. But let's be honest: most of us skip over the Bible's genealogies. They can seem like dry, unpronounceable lists of names from a distant past - just what you don't need when it's your turn to read the lesson on Sunday.

But for Matthew, writing to his Jewish kinspeople, this family tree was the essential starting point. It's Jesus' résumé, proving he is the long-awaited Messiah, the rightful heir to King David's throne. But it's more than that. It's a story of God's faithfulness through centuries of messy human history, leading to the

ultimate moment of fulfilment. And in the story of Jesus' miraculous conception, Matthew reveals the most breathtaking truth of all: this promised King isn't just a messenger *from* God; he *is* God, come to be with us.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "Just As I Am, Without One Plea"
2. "Amazing Grace"
3. "Will You Come and Follow Me" (The Summons)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, friend of sinners, we thank you that you came for those who recognise their need for you. Thank you for calling Matthew, and for calling us. Not because we are worthy to even gather up the crumbs from under your table, but because you are full of mercy.

Forgive us for the times we stand at a distance and judge. Give us your heart for those on the outside. Help us this week to hear your simple, powerful call, "Follow me," and give us the grace to follow. In your precious name we pray, Amen.



Reflective

Let's start by reading about Matthew: Matthew 9:9-13.

Imagine the scene as Matthew is sitting at his tax collector's booth. His peers didn't see this as a respectable civil service job; it was viewed as state-sanctioned extortion. He was working for the Roman oppressors and enriching himself at others' expense. He would have been despised and viewed as religiously unclean - a 'sinner' in the contemporary sense of the word. Now, imagine Jesus walking by. He sees Matthew. He doesn't see a lost cause. He sees a man in need of him. And he speaks two words: "Follow me." There's no interview, no probationary period, no demand for Matthew to clean up his act first. The call is full of grace. And Matthew's response is immediate. He gets up, leaves the tax booth, and follows.

(Pause for a time of silence. Try to put yourself in Matthew's shoes. What might he have been feeling? Surprise? Fear? Hope?)

The story continues at Matthew's house. He throws a party and invites his friends, other tax collectors and 'sinners'. And Jesus is there, eating with them. In this culture, to share a meal was to share life, to offer acceptance. To the strictly observant Pharisees, what Jesus is doing here is scandalous. A holy man would never contaminate himself like this. Their question drips with contempt: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

In reply, Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice". His actions are not a denial of the Scriptures, but their fulfilment. God's heart has always been for mercy. In the calling of Matthew, Jesus defines his mission: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." In other words, there is no such thing as a 'better' follower of Jesus. He simply calls us to follow.

(Pause for another time of silence. Be honest with yourself, do you believe that Jesus would sit and eat with you? And are you ever tempted to see others as outside the scope of God's grace?)

Now let's go back and read how Matthew introduces us to Jesus: **Matthew 1:17-23**.

Matthew began with Jesus' genealogy: fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. This isn't just a list; it's a carefully structured story of God's sovereign plan unfolding through history.

Then he focuses on Joseph. He is betrothed to Mary, a legally binding arrangement. He discovers she is pregnant, and he knows he is not the father. His first reaction is one of quiet kindness. He is a "righteous man" (v. 19), so he decides to end the engagement quietly.

But Matthew wants us to see that this seemingly scandalous event is, in fact, the fulfilment of a great promise from the prophet Isaiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us')." The promise wasn't just for a great king or a prophet. The promise was for God himself to come and dwell among his people.

For quiet reflection, perhaps with quiet music playing:

- Have you ever felt like you were on the 'outside', spiritually or otherwise?
- Jesus' call to Matthew was simple: "Follow me." What does it look like for you to follow Christ in everyday life?
- The Pharisees judged from a distance. Jesus ate with the 'sinners'. How can our church best reflect Christ's love and grace?

Creative Prayer Response

Take a coin (or a bank card if you don't have cash). Hold it in your hand. Think about the things you cling to for security, just as Matthew could have clung to his job and his income. One by one, name them quietly before God. Ask Jesus to help you leave your 'tax booth' and follow him.

Takeaway for this week

As you go about your week, consider the people you interact with – the shop assistant, the person at the bus stop, a colleague – and silently pray, "Lord, show me how you see this person. Fill my heart with your love for them." At the end of the week, reflect on whether this small exercise changed any of your attitudes or interactions.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 9:9-13

Discussion Starters:

1. What do we know about tax collectors in first-century Galilee? Why were they so despised by other Jews? (Consider both political and religious reasons).
2. The act of “table fellowship” was hugely significant. What message was Jesus sending to the ‘sinners’ by eating with them? What message was he sending to the Pharisees?
3. Jesus quotes **Hosea 6:6**: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” What was the original context of this verse in Hosea? How does Jesus’ use of it here fulfil its meaning?
4. What does Jesus mean when he says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”? Is he saying that the Pharisees are genuinely ‘righteous’ and don’t need him? Or is a deeper irony at play?
5. Look at the genealogy in **Matthew 1:1-16**. Matthew includes four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and “Uriah’s wife” (Bathsheba, v. 6). Do you know their stories (see Genesis 38, Joshua 2, Ruth 1, 2 Samuel 11)? Why was it so unusual for Matthew to include them, and what point(s) might he be wanting to make?
6. The angel gives the divine interpretation of the name Jesus: “he will save his people from their sins” (v. 21). How might this have subverted the expectations of first-century Jews looking for a Messiah?
7. Compare this account with Luke’s nativity story (Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-7). Luke’s focus is on Mary, while Matthew’s is on Joseph. What is Matthew’s emphasis?

Applying this to our lives

- Who might be seen as the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ in our culture today?
- The Pharisees created barriers between ‘in’ and ‘out’ people. What are some of the barriers we, consciously or unconsciously, put up in our churches?
- How can we, individually and as a church, “go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” in our daily lives?

For next time

Next week’s passage is about Jesus calling his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee. Matthew intentionally sets this scene by quoting a specific Old Testament prophecy. To prepare, read Isaiah 9:1-7 during the week. This passage speaks of “Galilee of the nations” and a great light dawning in the darkness. What expectations does this prophecy evoke? Having this in mind will illuminate why Jesus beginning his ministry in this region was so significant.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 9:9-13. Jesus calls Matthew, even though he wasn't seen as a 'good' person

Required Resources:

- Toy coins (could be cardboard cutouts)
- Table
- Picture of a king/Roman leader (or mime a crown)
- Music for "Follow the Leader"
- A few sweets or alternative small snack

Helpful Resources (things to include for maximum fun)

- Cardboard cutout tax booth or 'Tax collector' sign
- Puppet king
- Play food or suitable real food if appropriate, enough to feel like plenty for your group

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

See how many different jobs the group can think of in one minute, then have a quick discussion about what types of jobs people might like to do. Whatever you end up doing, you can do it for Jesus. He promises to be with us and to help us, and he calls us to trust him and follow.

Interactive Story: Jesus calls Matthew and eats with him and his friends

[BACKGROUND SOUND PLAYING OF BUSY MARKETPLACE - TOY COINS (A COUPLE FOR EVERY CHILD GIVEN OUT AT THE BEGINNING AND POUCH, TAX BOOTH CUTOUT OF CARD, SCROLL OR SIGN THAT SAYS TAX COLLECTOR)]

It was a sunny day, in a busy town. Everyone was shuffling around in the market ready to spend their money **[GET ALL THE CHILDREN SHUFFLING AROUND WITH THEIR MONEY]** But one man was sat all alone at his table, counting his coins!

Matthew had a very important job, but not everyone liked it. He was a tax collector **[CAN YOU SAY TAX COLLECTOR?]**, which meant he collected money from the people to give to the Roman king **[CROWN/ PUPPET PROP]**. Sometimes, people felt the tax collectors took too much money and because of this, people didn't like Matthew very much

[EVERY CHILD GIVE ONE OF THEIR COINS TO MATTHEW IN THE TAX BOOTH]

[EVERYBODY LOOK GRUMPY]

One day, Jesus was walking by **[FOOTSTEPS SOUND EFFECT]** [can you say "Jesus!"], and he saw Matthew sitting at his stand collecting taxes. Jesus looked right at Matthew and said, **[SLOWLY AND CLEARLY "FOLLOW ME!"]** **[EVERYONE SAY "FOLLOW ME!"]** - Matthew was probably very surprised!

[CAN YOU DO A SHOCKED FACE?]

But guess what? Matthew got up, left all his money behind, and followed Jesus! **PROMPTS CONGA LINE/FOLLOW THE LEADER GAME FROM BELOW, AROUND HALL WITH FUN PIECE OF MUSIC (DOESN'T NEED TO BE A WHOLE SONG) FOLLOWING LEADER AS THEY PRETEND TO BE JESUS**

Later, Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, and there were lots of people there. **[HAND OUT TOY FOOD AND GET CHILDREN SITTING IN A CIRCLE PASSING FOOD AND PRETENDING TO EAT]** Not just Jesus' friends, but also many other tax collectors and people who weren't always thought of as "good." They were all eating and chatting together. - **WOULD YOU INVITE PEOPLE TO YOUR PARTY THAT OTHERS THOUGHT WERE BAD?**

Some grown-ups who often thought they were the ones God was most pleased with, saw this. They said to Jesus's friends, "Why does your teacher eat with people like that?" They thought Jesus should only be with really 'good' people, like them.

[WHO CAN DO THE BEST 'CROSS' FACE? GRUMPY FOLDED ARMS]

But Jesus said something very important, "It's not the healthy people who need a doctor, but the sick ones."

Jesus came to help everyone, especially those who felt lost or made mistakes. Just like a doctor helps people who are sick, Jesus helps people who need to learn how to follow God. He loves everyone, no matter what job they have or what mistakes they've made! And He wants us to be kind like that to everyone too.

'KIND' IN SIGN LANGUAGE - THUMBS UP (FOR GOOD) START POINTING AT OUR CHEST AND THEN MOVING OUR ARMS FORWARD TO GIVE A DOUBLE THUMBS UP IN FRONT OF US - PASSING GOOD FROM ME TO YOU!

[NOW WHO CAN DO THE BIGGEST 'HAPPY' FACE?]

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Game:** Follow the Leader. The person at the front of the line begins walking around the room, gradually incorporating actions as they go. Those behind have to copy the one in front. You can either play that those who make mistakes sit out a turn, or leave everyone in.
- **Activity/Craft:** Cut out small circles and on one side draw a coin, on the other colour in the words "Follow me". Can you carry this with you this week to remember our story? Talk about Jesus turning Matthew's life around.

TALKING POINTS

- Why did some people think that Jesus shouldn't eat with tax collectors?
- What did Jesus want everyone to see about who can be his friend?
- How can we be kind like that to other people who might be left out?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer

Calling

**And he said to them,
'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'**

Matthew 4:19, NRSV

What does it mean to be a follower or 'disciple' of Jesus?

Is it simply agreeing to a statement of beliefs? Or attending church on a Sunday?

For the first disciples, the call was something far more immediate, personal, and life-altering. As Jesus walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he interrupts the ordinary, sweat-filled workday of two sets of brothers. His call is not to a new hobby or a weekend activity, but to a radical reorientation of their entire existence. They are invited to leave their economic security and embark on a new mission. This week, we explore this compelling call and ask what it means for us to hear and respond to it today.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult"
2. "Take My Life, and Let It Be"
3. "Facing a Task Unfinished"

Closing Prayer

We thank you that you enter into our lives and call us by name. Forgive us for clinging so tightly to the nets we've made – our security, our plans, our priorities.

Give us the courage of the first disciples to respond to your voice.

We pray that you would fulfil your promise: to help us share the good news with love and grace. Show us this week how we can reflect your hope and joy where you've called us to be.

Equip us for your service, we pray. Amen.



Reflective

Let's read our passage: Matthew 4:18-22.

Picture the scene: the Sea of Galilee. The sun is glinting on the water. Simon (who Jesus will call Peter) and his brother Andrew are at work, casting their nets into the lake. It's a physically demanding and repetitive task. It is their livelihood, their family trade. This is their life.

Then Jesus arrives. He doesn't ask about their qualifications or their religious background. He simply issues a call: "Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people." He invites them to join him, to learn from him, and to be repurposed by him. Their core skill – fishing – will be transformed for a new and eternal purpose.

(Pause for a time of silence. When did you first feel that sense of calling to follow Jesus?)

Notice their response in verse 20: "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." There is no hesitation, no 'let me think about it'. The call of Jesus is so compelling that they immediately lay down their tools and follow after him.

(Pause for another time of silence. What are the 'nets' in your own life? The things that define you, that you work hard at, that give you identity and security?)

Jesus walks on and sees another pair of brothers, James and John. They are in a boat with their father, Zebedee, preparing their nets. They are part of a family business. Jesus calls them, and their response is just as immediate. Verse 22 tells us, "immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." They don't just leave their equipment, but also their family and the family business, the structure of their society and security for the future. The call of Jesus is so enticing that it takes precedence over everything. Of course, we know that they continue to fish, but from now on it will have been reorientated around the call to live as a follower of Jesus.

This isn't just a story about fishermen. It's a story about the nature of discipleship. Following Jesus is not adding a new hobby to our list of interests; it's about defining life as one of knowing, loving and following him.

For quiet reflection

- Jesus says, "I will make you..." He doesn't say "You must make yourselves..." What does that say to you?
- What does it mean to "fish for people" today, in a way that is good news and not manipulative?
- The disciples left things behind. What might Jesus be asking you to 'leave behind' to follow him more closely? (This could be an attitude, a priority, a habit, or a fear).

Creative Prayer Response

Hold your hands out in front of you, palms up. Imagine placing your 'nets' – your job, your security, your plans, your relationships – into your hands. Offer them to Jesus. Ask him to show you how to use them for his purposes, to make you a 'fisher of people' right where you are.

Takeaway for this week

The disciples had to be prepared to lay down their nets to follow Jesus. Spend time this week considering whether there's anything in your life that you need to lay down to follow Jesus more faithfully, perhaps to then pick it up again, enriched by his calling. Each morning, consciously offer that 'net' to God in a short prayer, saying, "Lord, I choose to trust you. Help me follow you."

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 4:18-22.

Discussion Starters:

1. In the first-century Jewish world disciples usually sought out and chose a rabbi to follow. Here, Jesus chooses his disciples. What is the significance of this reversal?
2. The response of both sets of brothers is "immediate". Why do you think Matthew emphasises this?
3. "I will send you out to fish for people." This is a powerful metaphor. What would it have meant to these fishermen?
4. What are the positive (and perhaps negative) connotations of this phrase today? How can we reclaim its original sense of an invitation to mission?
5. James and John leave not only their boat but also their father. In a patriarchal society, built on family honour and trade, how radical would this action have been?
6. Compare this account with the call of Elisha by Elijah in **1 Kings 19:19-21**. What are the similarities and differences? How does this Old Testament background help us understand Jesus as a fulfilment of the prophetic pattern?

Applying this to our lives

- Does following Jesus today require such a dramatic abandonment of career and family?
- If our call mirrors those early disciples, then what does that look like for an accountant, a student, a stay-at-home parent, a retiree - in other words, for any and each of us?
- The call was personal ("follow me") but resulted in a community. How important is the church in sustaining our walk with Jesus?

For next time

Our next session focuses on the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where the crowds are amazed that Jesus teaches "as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." To understand what made Jesus different, do a little research this week on the role of Scribes and Pharisees in first-century Judaism. Find out how they typically taught and what their source of authority was (hint: it usually involved citing others). This will make the unique, personal authority of Jesus's teaching next week stand out in sharp relief.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 4:18-22. Jesus calls two lots of brothers to be his followers (Disciples) and we start to hear how God will use them to share his love and good news with people.

Helpful Resources (things to include for maximum fun)

- Some old rope or netting to cut up and pass out for feeling the texture
- Space to play a running around game
- Loose pieces of string or rope for tying a net
- A beach net and objects to 'fish'

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Pass around a few sweets and ask everyone to take one and look at it. Think about the last time you enjoyed a delicious sweet, do you remember how good they are? But now imagine a friend calls you to leave those sweets and do something else. What do you enjoy so much that you would leave those sweets behind and go?

Interactive Story

[BACKGROUND SOUND PLAYING OF WATER - CAN YOU GET HOLD OF SOME NETTING OR OLD ROPE, THE MORE USED AND FRAYED THE BETTER, AND HAND OUT SMALL PIECES TO START BY HOLDING AND FEELING THE TEXTURE]

One day, Jesus was walking along a big lake called the Sea of Galilee. The sun was shining, and the water was calm. He saw two brothers, named Simon Peter and Andrew, who were fishermen. They were in a boat, working hard, throwing their big, heavy nets into the water to catch fish. It was their job, and they did it every single day. **[MIME THROWING OUT THE NETS]**

Jesus walked right up to them and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people!"

Now, that was a very strange thing to say! What did He mean by "fishers of people"? **[CAN YOU PULL A CONFUSED FACE?]**

But Simon Peter and Andrew didn't even ask a question. They knew in their hearts that they should listen to Jesus. So, they dropped their nets right away—splash! **[SEE IF YOU CAN FIND A WAY TO MAKE A SPLASH SOUND]**—and followed Him.

As they walked a little further along the shore, Jesus saw two more brothers. Their names were James and John. They were in a boat with their dad, Zebedee, and they were fixing their nets to get ready to fish. It was hard work, but it was what they always did.

Jesus called out to them as well. "Come and follow me!" He said.

And just like Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John didn't wait. They left their boat, and their job with their dad, to follow Jesus. **[YOU COULD PLAY A VERSION OF 'DUCK, DUCK, GOOSE' BUT CHANGE THE WORDS TO 'FISH, FISH, FOLLOW' - TO CONVEY THE SENSE OF IMMEDIATELY GETTING UP TO GO]**

They were all so excited to go with Jesus and learn what it meant to be "fishers of people". Instead of catching fish from the water, they would go and tell people about God's love. They would help bring people to Jesus so they could be part of His special family. And they couldn't wait to get started! **[NOW WE NEED SOME EXCITED FACES]**

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- Have loose pieces of string and learn to tie them into a simple net. Perhaps you could think of someone to pray for with each piece that's added.
- Use a beach net and some objects to practice 'fishing' for a selection of objects, you could set up a small paddling pool and fish them out of there.

TALKING POINTS

- It would be good to include a safety discussion about not following strangers who ask you to come with them. But then lead into the difference with Jesus being known as a 'Rabbi', which is a special kind of teacher, who called grown ups to become 'disciples' by following them as they taught people.
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said, 'come and fish for people'?
- How can we show people what God's love looks like?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer

Teaching

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

Matthew 7:28-29, NRSV

We live in an age that can feel saturated with information and advice.

From podcasts to self-help books, everyone seems to have suggestions on how to live well. There's nothing wrong with good and helpful ideas. But it's easy to become a consumer of so much that nothing creates a lasting change.

As Jesus concludes his revolutionary Sermon on the Mount, he gives a clear call to a new way of life in the form of a simple, powerful parable. He contrasts two kinds of people, both of whom hear his words: those who act on them, and those who don't. The difference, he says, is not a matter of who hears his teaching, but of faith that leads to action. It's the difference between a life built on a solid rock foundation and one built on shifting sand, and it often takes a storm to reveal which is which.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" (On Christ the Solid Rock)
2. "How Firm a Foundation"
3. "Trust and Obey"

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our wise master builder,

We confess that we can sometimes be foolish builders. We hear your words, we agree with your words, but we fail to put them into practice.

Forgive us for sometimes building our lives on the sand.

By your Holy Spirit, help us to be doers of your word, and not hearers only.

May our lives be so founded on you, the solid Rock, that we might withstand the storms of life, and stand as a testimony to your wisdom and faithfulness. Amen.



Reflective

Let's read the passage: Matthew 7:24-29.

Jesus has just delivered the most famous sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7). He has taught about blessing, anger, lust, prayer, money, and worry. Now he brings it all to a close. Everything he has said comes down to this.

He presents us with a wise builder. This person hears Jesus' words and, crucially, "puts them into practice". Hearing is not enough. Agreement is not enough. The wisdom is in the doing. This person's life is like a house built on solid rock.

Then Jesus describes the storm. The rain, the floods, the wind – they beat against the house. These storms are not an 'if', but a 'when'. Trials, grief, opposition, and doubt will come to everyone. But the house on the rock stands firm. Its foundation holds it secure.

(Pause for a time of silence. Think about the 'storms' you have faced or are facing. What has kept you standing?)

Now consider the foolish builder. This person hears the very same words from Jesus. They may have enjoyed the sermon, even taken notes. But they do not put the words into practice. Their life is like a house built on sand. On a calm, sunny day, it might look identical to the wise builder's house. But when the storm comes, the result is catastrophic. The house falls "with a great crash". The collapse is total.

(Pause again for a time of silence. The house on the sand looks fine until the storm hits. Be honest with yourself: are there areas of your life you're building more on 'sand' than 'rock'?)

The final verses tell us the crowd's reaction. They were "amazed", because Jesus taught with an authority they had never heard before. He didn't quote other rabbis; he spoke as the source of wisdom itself. His words are not mere advice, they are the rock on which a life can be built.

For quiet reflection

- Can you think of a specific teaching from Jesus (perhaps from the Sermon on the Mount) that you have heard many times but struggle to follow?
- What would it look like to 'put that teaching into practice' in a fresh way this week?
- What are some of the 'sandy' foundations we can be tempted to build our lives on today?

Creative Prayer Response

Find a small stone or pebble. Hold it in your hand and feel its shape and texture, its solidity. As you hold it, pray through these words of the hymn: "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Ask God to show you any 'sinking sand' in your life, and to help you build everything on the rock of Jesus and his wisdom.

Takeaway for this week

Choose one verse from the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers", or Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom...") and make it your focus for the week. Write it out and put it somewhere you will see it often. Actively look for one opportunity to live it out. For example:

- Pray for someone who has wronged you (Matthew 5:44).
- When you give (time, money, or help), do it secretly without seeking praise (Matthew 6:3-4).
- Consciously refuse to worry about tomorrow, and instead give your anxieties to God (Matthew 6:34).

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 7:24-29

Discussion Starters:

1. This parable is the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**). How does it function as a capstone for all the teaching that has come before it?
2. What is the key difference between the wise and foolish builders? Is it their intelligence, their understanding, or something else?
3. Is Jesus teaching that we are saved by our obedience? How do we square this passage with the doctrine of salvation by grace (e.g., **Ephesians 2:8-9**)? (Hint: think about the difference between the root of salvation and the fruit of salvation).
4. Verse 29 says that Jesus taught "as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law". What was the typical method of teaching used by the Scribes and Pharisees? What was different about Jesus' approach?
5. What kind of 'storms' do you think Jesus has in mind?
6. In what way is Jesus the embodiment of God's wisdom, fulfilling the Old Testament wisdom tradition?

Applying this to our lives

- How can we as a church community move beyond being mere 'hearers' of the word to becoming 'doers'? What could help with this?
- What are the biggest 'storms' facing us today? How does building on the rock of Christ's teaching equip us to face them?
- How can we cultivate a sense of Jesus as the one bringing God's wisdom, so that his words carry more weight than the thousands of other voices we hear each day?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 7:24-29 - The wise and foolish builders (at the end of the Sermon on the Mount)

Helpful Resources

- Lego or some other type of building material
- A tray that has a solid base and another tray with something wobbly and soft
- Watering can

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Ask everyone if they enjoy building sand castles, and when the last time was that they built one? What did it look like? What features did they include? Would they like to go back next time they're at the same beach to see it again? Why not? Why won't it still be there? But other castles like Arundel are still there, what's the difference with castles built on sand?

Interactive Story

!DURING THIS STORY EVERY TIME YOU HEAR THE WORD 'ROCK' YOU HAVE TO STAY STRONG AND STILL. WHEN YOU HEAR 'SAND' YOU HAVE TO WIGGLE AND WOBBLE, 'STORM' - BLOW, 'CRASH' - FALL FLAT!!

One day Jesus went up a mountain to teach about lots of different things, and how to live like him. At the end, he told a parable, which is a short story with a special meaning. This parable is about two builders.

The first builder thought very carefully about where to build, and what material to build on. When he decided to build a house, he didn't just build it anywhere. He dug and dug and dug until he found a big, strong **ROCK!** That was a lot of hard work, but he knew it was important. He built his house right on top of that solid **ROCK.** The house had a roof, and windows, and a door, and it was beautiful!

Then, a big **STORM** came. The rain came pouring down, and the wind howled and blew. A flood of water rushed toward the house and pushed against it. But because the house was built on the solid **ROCK,** it didn't move! The rain and wind couldn't knock it down. It stayed safe and strong. **!DO THE FIRST BUILD ON SOMETHING SOLID AND STRONG, SEE BELOW!**

The second builder was a bit silly. He was in a hurry and didn't want to do all the hard work of digging. He just built his house right on top of the soft, squishy **SAND.** It was a pretty house, too, with windows and a door, but it was sitting on a very weak foundation.

Then, the big **STORM** came. The rain poured down, the wind howled, and the flood of water rushed toward the house. The water washed away the **SAND** underneath the house. Whoosh! Because the house was built on the **SAND,** it couldn't stand up to the **STORM.** It wobbled and tumbled and fell down with a big CRASH!

!BUILD AGAIN BUT THIS TIME ON A SOFT AND WOBBLY SURFACE, SEE BELOW - MAKE SURE THE BUILDINGS FALL DOWN!!

Jesus said that we can be a bit like those builders in the way we live our lives. If we listen to His words and trust him, we are like the smart builder who built his house on the **ROCK.** When things get hard or scary, we can stay strong because we are listening to Jesus. But if we hear what Jesus says and don't do it, we are like the silly builder who built on the **SAND.** When things get tough, it might feel like our lives are wiggling and wobbling.

!PLAY A GAME OF MUSICAL STATUES!

Jesus wants us all to trust him and to build our lives on his wisdom (good advice).

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Song:** "The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock", can be sung without music or play a version from Youtube.
- **Game:** when the music is playing you have to wiggle and wobble like the house on the sand. When the music stops, try and stay still and strong like the house on the rock.
- **Activity:** Have a tray of sand, and another with something solid like a large flat stone. Ask everyone to try and build a small lego house and place it on the surfaces. Then, pour water over them both from a watering can, so that the sand moves and the houses become unsteady.

TALKING POINTS

- What was the difference between the people in Jesus' story?
- And what did he say it meant to be like the wise builder?
- Do you think Jesus will forgive us when we sometimes mess things up?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer

Miracles

This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.'

Matthew 8:17, NRSV

What are Jesus' miracles for? Are they simply displays of power? Divine magic tricks to prove a point?

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' miracles are much more than that. They are signs; windows into a deeper reality. They are acts of profound compassion, moments of restoration where heaven breaks into our broken world. In this short but powerful passage, we see Jesus bring healing into the home of Peter's family. This intimate act of restoration then overflows into the wider community. Matthew sees in this not just a random act of kindness, but the direct fulfilment of prophecy, revealing a Messiah who enters into our suffering and carries it himself.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "Thine Arm, O Lord, in Days of Old"
2. "At the Name of Jesus"
3. "O Praise the Name (Anástasis)"

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our compassionate healer, we praise you for your gentle touch that brings restoration and life. Thank you that you entered our world, shared in our suffering, and took up our infirmities.

We lift to you all those we know who are in need of your healing touch. Shape our hearts to serve others with the same compassion you have shown to us. In your name we pray, Amen.



Reflective

Let's read our passage for this week: Matthew 8:14-17.

This episode follows the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has just demonstrated his authority in teaching (Week 3); now he reveals his divinity in action. He enters Peter's house. This is not a public spectacle; it's a private, domestic scene. He finds Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed with a fever. In the ancient world, a fever could easily be a death sentence.

Notice the gentleness and simplicity of Jesus' action. Verse 15 says, "He touched her hand and the fever left her". It's a personal, compassionate touch. The healing is instantaneous and complete. And what is her response? She gets up and begins to wait on him. Her restoration immediately leads to generosity. She uses her renewed strength to serve the one who healed her.

(Pause for a time of silence. Reflect on a time you may have experienced some healing or restoration, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. What was your first response?)

As evening falls, news has clearly spread. The townspeople bring to Jesus "all the sick". Imagine the scene outside Peter's door – a crowd of desperate people, the hurting and the broken. And Jesus doesn't turn them away. He works tirelessly, healing all who were brought to him.

(Pause again for a time of silence. Ponder for a moment the compassion that Jesus brought, not just for the crowds then, but for you now. Let a sense of gratitude fill your heart.)

Then Matthew gives us the theological lens through which to see all this. He says this is a fulfillment of **Isaiah 53:4**: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases". This is crucial. Jesus doesn't just wave a magic wand. He takes up and bears our sickness. The healing he offers costs him something. It is a foreshadowing of the cross, where he will ultimately take up and bear the sickness

of sin in the world. His miracles are a preview of the great healing he will accomplish through his death and resurrection.

For quiet reflection

- Jesus healed with a simple touch. Where in your life do you most need to know the healing touch of Jesus?
- Peter's mother-in-law responded to Jesus' healing grace with service. How can our own experiences of God's grace motivate us to serve others?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus "took up" and "bore" our diseases? How does this change your view of his miracles?

Creative Prayer Response

Think of people you know who are in need of healing: physical, mental, spiritual, or relational. Write their names down in private. Spend time praying for each of them by name, asking Jesus, the one who bore our infirmities, to bring his healing touch into their situation. If you struggle to find the words, simply picture those people who are on your heart, and be thankful that God has compassion for them.

Takeaway for this week

In response to her healing, Peter's mother-in-law began to serve. Jesus' grace in our lives should overflow into compassion for others. This week, become an agent of his compassion. Is there someone you know who is struggling physically, emotionally, or just feeling run down? Your task is to do one small, practical thing to "bear their infirmity" with them: make them a meal, send a text to let them know you're praying, offer to do their shopping, or just sit and listen to them.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read **Matthew 8:14-17**.

Discussion Starters:

1. This event occurs in Peter's own house. What is the significance of Jesus performing this miracle in such a private setting, rather than in public?
2. The woman's immediate response to being healed is to "wait on him" (v. 15). The Greek word is diakoneo, the root of our word 'deacon'. What does this tell us about the link between God's grace in our lives and our discipleship/service?
3. Matthew quotes **Isaiah 53:4**. Read the full context of that verse in **Isaiah 53**. The chapter is primarily about the Suffering Servant bearing our sins and iniquities. Why does Matthew apply it here, to physical sickness?
4. This passage shows Jesus healing "all the sick". If Jesus is the great healer, how do we reconcile the 'now' of present suffering with the 'not yet' of eternity free from sickness and death (**Revelation 21:4**)?
5. Compare this intimate healing with the healing of the leper just before it (**Matthew 8:1-4**) and the healing of the centurion's servant (**Matthew 8:5-13**). Which aspects of Jesus' power and character does Matthew highlight in each story?

Applying this to our lives

- How can we be a community that, like the townspeople, brings the sick and suffering to Jesus? What does that look like in practice?
- The church is called to be a place of healing. In what ways can our church be a safe space for people who are physically, mentally, or spiritually struggling?
- How does the truth that Jesus "bore our diseases" affect the way we pray for the sick? Does it give us more confidence, more compassion, and anything else?

For next time:

Our final session is the great turning point where Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter confesses him as "the Messiah". That means 'the anointed one' in Hebrew, and is also translated 'Christ' in Greek. To understand the weight of these titles, read Psalm 2 this week. It is a powerful royal Psalm about God's anointed King and Son. Based on this Psalm alone, what kind of Messiah would you expect? This will help you to identify with the disciples' glorious expectations—and their subsequent shock—in next week's passage.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 8:14-17 - Jesus heals Peter's mother in law and the sick are brought to him

Helpful Resources

- Pieces of paper either cut into hand shapes, or ready to be cut into hands.
- Some appropriate snacks to hand around.
- Space to play the game described, with a chair and space all around it.

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Think about all the ways we interact with people using our hands. Try it with the person next to you (high five, handshake, fist bump, holding hands to cross the road on a school trip, any other fun or elaborate handshakes?). In the story we'll hear what happened when Jesus gently touched a lady who was sick. Put your hands altogether, in a central pile on top of each other, and let's ask Jesus to help us know what it's like to be known by him. What would you say if you met him? What would you ask if he reached out to you? Offer a short prayer for the session and high five an amen!

Interactive Story

One day, Jesus went to his friend Peter's house. Peter was one of Jesus' followers, **[CAN YOU SAY 'DISCIPLE']** who we met before when he had been in his boat.

But when Jesus got there, things weren't very happy. Peter's wife's mother, who we can call 'Grandma', was lying in bed. She was very, very sick with a fever. Her forehead was hot, and she didn't have the energy to get up. Everyone was worried about her. **[PERHAPS JUST TAKE A QUIET PAUSE HERE]**

Jesus saw how sad everyone was. He walked right over to Grandma, took her hand, and gently touched it. **[YOU COULD USE THE HELPING HAND CRAFT HERE, SEE BELOW]**

And guess what happened?

The fever left her! Just like that, she was better!

[CAN EVERYONE LIE DOWN AND SEE HOW QUIET AND STILL YOU CAN BE? THEN, TO EMPHASISE THE PERSONAL ASPECT, YOU COULD SAY EACH CHILD'S NAME. WHEN THEY HEAR IT, THEY HAVE TO JUMP BACK UP]

She felt so good that she immediately got out of bed and started offering things to Jesus and the other guests. She made food for everyone, including Jesus, to say thank you for making her feel healthy again. **[YOU COULD HAVE SELECTION OF SNACKS AND ASK EACH PERSON TO PASS ONE TO SOMEONE ELSE UNTIL EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING]**

Later that same day, as the sun was setting, lots of people heard that Jesus was at Peter's house. Many people who were sick or unwell came to the door.

Jesus didn't get tired or turn them away. He loved everyone! He spoke a few words, and made people better. He touched the sick people, and they were healed. It wasn't magic, it was because he was God come to be with us. **[CAN YOU DO AN 'AMAZED' FACE?]**

Jesus did all of this to show that He was the special person God had promised long ago—the one who would deal with the bad things in the world. He came to make everyone feel better, both on the inside and the outside, because He loves us so much!

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **'Helping Hands' craft:** give each child a piece of paper. Have them trace their own hand and (help them if needed) cut it out. They can decorate the hand with words or drawings that represent how Jesus' touch brought healing. For example, they could write 'Healed', 'Loved', or 'Comfort'. You can also encourage them to draw a picture of themselves helping someone else, and/or writing the names of people they'd like to pray for.
- **Game:** Jesus was very calm and gentle as he healed 'Grandma'. Put one chair in the middle of a circle, and one at a time the children put on a blindfold and sit on the chair. Point out volunteers to see if they can gently and quietly get close enough to tap the person on the shoulder, without them pointing to indicate where they are moving.

TALKING POINTS

- What can we do to help when people we know are not feeling well?
- What do Jesus' miracles tell us about who he is?
- Do you think we can talk to Jesus when we're feeling bad or sad or other emotions?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer

Passion

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Matthew 16:21, NRSV

This is the great turning point in Matthew's Gospel.

The disciples have been with Jesus for some time now. They've heard his authoritative teaching, and witnessed his compassionate miracles. Now, Jesus takes them to a place steeped in pagan worship and asks them the most important question: "Who do you say I am?"

Peter responds with a glorious confession of faith. But in the very next breath, when Jesus explains what being the Messiah truly means – that it involves suffering, rejection, and death –, Peter cannot accept it. He wants a victorious king, not a suffering servant. This clash reveals a tension that can still exist in our hearts: it's easier to love a Christ who gives a crown, but much harder to follow a Christ who looks to the cross.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"
2. "Take Up Thy Cross, the Saviour Said"
3. "The Power of the Cross"

Closing Prayer

Father God,

We thank you for revealing to us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the times we seek a crown without a cross, for wanting you as our Saviour but not as our Lord. Give us the courage to hear your challenging call: to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you.

As we journey towards Good Friday and Easter, may we not shrink from the reality of your sacrifice, but embrace it as the path to true life.

For it is in losing our life for your sake that we truly find it. Amen.



Reflective

Let's read the first part of our passage: Matthew 16:13-20.

Jesus brings his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a place filled with temples to pagan gods. In this place of competing loyalties, he asks two questions. First: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" The answers are varied – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah. People recognise Jesus as a great prophet, but they don't see the full picture.

Then Jesus makes it personal: "But who do you say that I am?". Simon Peter, speaking for the twelve, makes the great confession: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". This isn't a lucky guess; Jesus says it has been revealed to him by God the Father. It's the climax of everything so far.

(Pause for a time of silence. Let Jesus ask you that question directly, right now: "Who do you say that I am?". What is the honest answer of your heart?.)

Now read the second part of the passage:
Matthew 16:21-25.

The mood shifts dramatically. "From that time on Jesus began to explain that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer... and be killed..." This is the divine "must". This is God's plan of salvation. But, it completely shatters Peter's idea of what a Messiah should do. A Messiah should conquer enemies, not suffer and die at their hands.

Peter is so horrified that he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him! "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you". Peter tries to save Jesus from the cross. And Jesus' reply is one of the hardest in all the Gospels: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things". Peter, who was just the rock of revelation, has now become a mouthpiece for temptation, voicing the very thing Satan wants to dangle in front of Jesus - a crown without a cross.

(Pause for another time of silence. Why was Jesus seemingly so harsh with Peter, so soon after praising him? How would Peter feel then? And, how might he feel later in life as he looks back on this exchange?)

Jesus then lays out the cost of following him, the true Messiah. It means denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following him. It's a paradox: the only way to save your life is to lose it for his sake.

For quiet reflection

- Like Peter, we can have our own ideas of what Jesus should be like, and what he should do in our lives. When has the reality of following Jesus not matched your expectations?
- What does it mean to "take up your cross" daily? If it's not just about bearing burdens, but about a daily death to self-centredness. What would that look like for you this week?
- Jesus says we must choose between the "divine things" and "human things". What's the difference? Is Jesus advocating for his followers to take themselves out of the world?

Creative Prayer Response

Look at a cross in the room, or hold a small one if you have one. You could even just trace the shape of a cross on your hand. As you focus on it, confess to God the ways you, like Peter, have wanted a more comfortable, less costly faith. Ask for the grace to embrace the way of the cross, trusting that it is the way of resurrection and life.

Takeaway for this week

Jesus calls his followers to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me". 'Taking up the cross' means a daily choice to put God's will before our own. This week, as you approach Good Friday, practice a 'daily cross'. Each morning, ask God: "Lord, what is one area today where my will conflicts with yours?" It might be in how you speak to your family, how you spend your free time, or in your attitude towards a difficult task. Your practical challenge is to deliberately choose his way in that area each day.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 8:14-17.

Discussion Starters:

1. Do you know anything of the religious and political significance of Caesarea Philippi in Jesus' day? Why might Jesus have chosen this specific location for this crucial conversation?
2. In **v. 16**, Peter confesses Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God". What did the title "Messiah" (or "Christ") mean to a first-century Jew? What were the common expectations? How did Jesus' definition in v. 21 radically subvert those expectations?
3. Jesus gives Simon the name "Peter" (Petros) and says he will build his church on this "rock" (petra). There is much debate about this. Is the 'rock' Peter himself, his confession of faith, or Jesus? What are the arguments for each view?
4. Why does Jesus react so strongly to Peter's rebuke, even seemingly calling him "Satan" (v. 23)? How is Peter's well-intentioned advice a "stumbling-block" or a temptation? (Compare with Jesus' temptations in the wilderness in Matthew 4).
5. Unpack the three commands in **v. 24**: "deny themselves," "take up their cross," and "follow me". What did crucifixion mean to the original audience? How does this redefine discipleship from a triumphal march to a sacrificial journey?

Applying this to our lives

- In what ways do we in the modern church still prefer a "Christ without a cross"? (e.g., prosperity gospels, faith as a tool for personal happiness, avoiding talk of sin and repentance).
- "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it". How have you seen this paradox to be true in your own life, or the lives of other Christians?
- This passage is a prelude to the Passion. As we approach Easter, how does this conversation prepare us to understand the necessity and the glory of Good Friday and Easter Sunday?

For next time:

This passage is the hinge of the whole Gospel. Everything changes from this point on. This week, read the passage that immediately follows the Transfiguration in **Matthew 17:1-8**. How does this mountaintop experience confirm Peter's confession ("This is my Son, whom I love")? And, how does the Father's command ("Listen to him!") reinforce the challenging message about Jesus' upcoming suffering and death? Reflect on how these two events, held together, and how they give a complete picture of who Jesus is as we journey through Holy Week.

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 16:13-25 - Jesus' explains what he's come to do, and it's hard to hear.

Helpful Resources

- Smooth, small pebbles
- Acrylic paints

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Try and list all the things you **have** to do each week (eating, sleeping, brushing teeth etc). How many can you get to? What is the difference between the things we want to do, and the things that we have to do? Today we're going to hear about what Jesus said he **had** to do...

Interactive Story

One day, Jesus was walking with his friends in a place called Caesarea Philippi. He looked at them and asked, "Who do people say I am?" **(IF YOU'RE GROUP IS OLD ENOUGH, YOU COULD PLAY 20 QUESTIONS' GUESSING THE FAMOUS PERSON THROUGH A SERIES OF YES/NO QUESTIONS)**

His friends answered, "Some people say you are John the Baptist, come back to life. Others say you are a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah."

Jesus nodded, but then he asked an even more important question. He looked right at his friends and said, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Simon, one of his best friends, spoke up right away. With a big smile on his face, he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" This meant he believed Jesus was the special one God had promised to send. **(DO A SMILING FACE FOR PETER)**

Jesus told him, "You are right! God himself told you this wonderful secret". Jesus then gave him a new name, "Peter," which means "rock". He said Peter would be a strong leader, like a rock. **(DOES ANYONE KNOW WHY THEY WERE GIVEN THEIR NAME OR WHAT IT MEANS?)**

But then Jesus told his friends how he was going to change things in the world. He said he would have to go to their capital city, Jerusalem. That some people would hurt him, and he would even die. **(NOW TURN THOSE SMILES INTO SADNESS)**

This made Peter very upset! He didn't want anything bad to happen to Jesus. So Peter took Jesus aside and said, "No, Lord! That will never happen to you!"

But Jesus looked at Peter with a serious face and said, "You are not thinking about this in the way that God sees it". Jesus knew that to help everyone, he had to go through that difficult time. **(YOU COULD USE THE 'PEBBLE' CRAFT HERE, SEE BELOW)**

Then Jesus spoke to all his friends and said a very important thing, "If you want to follow me, you must not always think about just yourself. You must be willing to put others first, and follow me".

Jesus meant that following him isn't always easy, but it is always the best way. He wants us to love him and others so much that we are willing to be kind, even when it's hard. When we do that, we get to be part of God's amazing family and have a happy life with him forever!

(A FINAL CHANGE FROM SAD FACES BACK TO HAPPY AGAIN)

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Craft:** Give each child a small, smooth rock. Have them use permanent markers or acrylic paint to decorate it. They can write a special word on it, like 'Jesus' or draw symbols that remind them of the story, like a cross or a heart. This craft helps them remember Peter's new name, "The Rock", and the idea that Jesus is their strong foundation.
- **Game:** 'Who am I?' A version of '20 questions' that is appropriate for the age group you have. Either one child or an adult thinks of someone very well-known and the rest of the group can only ask 20 yes or no questions to try and work out who it is.

TALKING POINTS

- What would you say if someone asked you 'who is Jesus?'
- Can you understand why Peter was so upset when Jesus explained what would happen? Do you think you would have felt the same?
- Why did Jesus say it had to happen? And, did it end with sadness or happiness?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



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