

LENTEN READINGS FOR DUNN'S CORNERS CHURCH 2017
READINGS FROM MATTHEW

Daily Readings:

Day One: Thursday, March 2 Matthew 1

Regarding Joseph and the appearance of the angel, Aaron Klink writes, "The message part of this text brings is that unexpected things, things outside of convention can often be wonderful signs that God is at work. Amid all our less-than-picture-perfect Christmases, the Christmas trees that are not quite as perfect as we want them to be, the lives that are not as perfect as we want them to be, God does something new. Somehow Joseph has to trust this strange news: That this child is from the Holy Spirit; that he already has a name, Jesus; and that he will save people from their sins...as Mary and Joseph journeyed to this first Christmas, they did not know where God would take them; all they knew was that something wonderful had been promised and that they had been beckoned to follow. So too the text calls us to rise and follow God's call, not knowing where the journey will take us, or the path that God has set us on." (Aaron Klink, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 1, pgs. 94 and 96)

Day Two: Friday, March 3 Matthew 2

According to Martin Luther "The wise men here teach us the true faith. After they heard the sermon and the word of the prophet they were not slow to believe, in spite of obstacles and difficulties. First they came to Jerusalem, the capitol, and did not find him, the star also disappearing. (It would have been easy for them to say) Alas, we have traveled so far in vain, the star has misled us, it was a phantom...Yet when the wise men had overcome their temptation (to doubt and give up) they were born again by the great joy and took no offense at Christ...For although they enter a lowly hut and find a poor young wife with a poor little child, and find less of royal appearance than the homes of their own servants, they are not led astray. But in a great, strong, living faith they...treat the child as a king." (Sermons of Martin Luther, Volumes 1-2, "Epiphany, p. 363)

Day Three: Saturday, March 4 Matthew 3

The Holy Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism fulfilled messianic texts such as Isaiah 11:2, *And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him*, and Isaiah 42:1, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations*. "While for Matthew Jesus was already Messiah at his conception, here at the Jordan...he receives divine empowerment through the visible conferral of the Holy Spirit. By this power he will be able to attack Satan's forces and thereby exhibit the proximity of the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 12:28) The words of the heavenly voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased,' confirm the application to Jesus of the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1: 'Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased.'" (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, pgs. 21, 22)

Day Four: Sunday, March 5, Matthew 4:1-11

“The basic, underlying temptation that Jesus shared with us is the temptation to treat God as less than God. We may not be tempted to turn stones into bread, but we are constantly tempted to mistrust God’s readiness to empower us to face our trials. None of us is likely to put God to the test by leaping from a cliff, but we are frequently tempted to question God’s helpfulness when things go awry...Pagan idolatry is no more a temptation for us than it was for Jesus, but compromise with the ways of the world is a continuing seduction. It is indeed difficult for us to worship and serve God only. We should be continually grateful that we have a great high priest who, tempted as we are, was able to resist all such temptations by laying hold of Scripture and firmly acknowledging that only God is God.” (Hare, p. 25, 26)

Day Five: Monday, March 6, Matthew 4:12-25

“Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” The word I have rendered ‘here comes,’ has exercised many interpreters. Does it mean the kingdom is near, or does it mean the kingdom is present? Does it suggest a future or a present kingdom? It means both: it is on its way, it is just about to break in, in fact it is breaking in, in some ways, as Jesus’ very words are spoken—‘here comes!’ The translation ‘here comes’ keeps the kingdom from being a static object either in heaven (is near) or on earth (is here); it protects the kingdom from the desecration of being so present it can be taken for granted and from the irrelevance of being so future it doesn’t matter... ‘Here comes the kingdom’ means the kingdom is breaking in right now through Jesus’ person and Word like a great landslide or like lightning from heaven. The kingdom is vital, alive, moving, and breaking in.” (Dale Bruner, “The Christbook”, p. 123.)

Day Six: Tuesday, March 7, Matthew 5:1-16

“Let me put this another way. The only way the Beatitudes of Jesus make sense is if Jesus Christ himself, the one who speaks them, is strong enough to make them really true. We are able to endure persecution and actually to believe we are on the right path if our companion in the middle of that persecution is the living Lord. These Beatitudes are the words of authority; they boldly challenge every way of looking at life that people ordinarily hold.” (Earl Palmer, “The Enormous Exception”, 25.)

Day Seven: Wednesday, March 8, Matthew 5:17-48

“‘The Lord who accompanies us on our journey offers his own cheek to slaps and his shoulders to whips, to the increase of his glory’. (Hilary of Poitiers) We are called here to love as God loves. This cannot be done out of our own resources. So this is no admonition to try harder—if it were, it would indeed be recipe for despair. It is a plan of action rooted in the promise to be made ‘children of your father in heaven’. (Matthew 4:45) The Sermon here and elsewhere is a portrait of the very heart of God, one who loves the unlovable, comes among us in Christ, suffers our worst, and rises to forgive us. Turn the cheek, give the cloak, go another mile, lend, love the enemy—because that is how God loves. If you want to follow this God, fleshed in Jesus, you will be adopted into a life in which you find yourself loving this way before you know what you are doing.” (Jason Byassee, “Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume I, p. 382)

Day Eight: Thursday, March 9, Matthew 6:1-18

“Prayer is a particular kind of language. Not all language is of the same kind. The vocabulary of prayer is not the same as that for the application of a grant or a job...Prayer is the language of confession. By ‘confessional language’ I do not mean merely admitting that we have done wrong, but confession in the sense of expressing faith, the language that gives expression to our deepest convictions. This kind of language is not merely expressive, a venting of emotions, but represents a reality of human life...It is the insider language of the community of faith...Once we realize something of the nature of the language of prayer...we can confess our own need and lift up our intercessions and petitions to God without reservation. The Lord’s Prayer offers a model for doing so. Matthew’s text presents the opportunity for deepening our understanding of the nature of the language of prayer.” (M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew”, The New Interpreter’s Bible, p. 207)

Day Nine: Friday, March 10, Matthew 6:19-34

“Jesus has not only warned us against the dangers of coveting...he follows that with his teaching on a clear vision as the secret to the healthy way. We need to see the world around us in the right way, in a healthy way...God’s will for us is not negative but positive: We will see the world in a generous and healthy way, not in a grasping and desperately clutching way. In the deepest sense, what Jesus does is to urge his listeners to see the world from God’s perspective so that we discover our own personal worthy from God himself; and not only that, but also the worth and meaning of every earthly treasure from God’s perspective. When this happens, we are set free from the various despairing results of the attachment of our lives to anything other than the true author of our existence—God himself.” (Earl Palmer, “The Enormous Exception”, p. 115)

Day Ten: Saturday, March 11, Matthew 7

Ask...seek...knock. “Martin Luther said that in the monastery he was never really taught to ask in prayer. But the discovery of justification by grace, which puts a person’s feet on the ground, taught him afresh the marvelously uninhibited and normal way we may approach the living God—as askers, as human beings who are in need. Asking is what prayer is; this passage and the Lord’s Prayer together carve this gracious fact into the doctrinal conviction of the church. If this passage can succeed in making disciples prayerful, the Sermon on the Mount is on its way to fulfillment ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’ Jesus does not leave his church with a great deal of equipment, but he knows that if he can leave her with the simple, open-ended gift of prayer, he has already met most of her needs.” (Bruner, The Christbook, p. 278)

Day Eleven: Sunday, March 12, Matthew 8

“In the Law, the touch of the leper was contagious, but as there is such purity in Christ he absorbs all uncleanness and pollution, he does not contaminate himself by touching the leper, nor does he transgress the Law. For in assuming our flesh, he has granted us more than the touch of his hand, he has brought himself into one and the same body with us, that we should be the flesh of his flesh. He does not only stretch out his arm to us, but he comes down from heaven, even to the very depths; yet catches no stain thereby, but stays whole, clears all our dirt away, and pours upon us his own holiness. Now, while he could heal the leper by his word alone, he adds the contact of his hand, to show his feeling of compassion: no wonder, since he willed to put on our flesh in order that he might cleanse us from all sin. So the reaching out of his hand was a sign and token of his vast grace and goodness. Here is a thing which we pass over without much impression at an idle reading, but must certainly ponder, with much awe...that the Son of God, so far from abhorring contact with the leper, actually stretched out his hand to touch his uncleanness.” (John Calvin, “A Harmony of the Gospels”, volume I, 244)

Day Twelve: Monday, March 13, Matthew 9:1-17

“Jesus’ messianic authority, revealed in the calling of Matthew as well as the miracles reported in this text, opens up the twofold issue in which his ministry is already engaged. First, Jesus does not employ his authority for judgment, but rather for compassion and mission. Second, his compassionate use of his own

authority issues in judgment nevertheless, for his mighty works demand response and therefore evoke a decision and produce a division. This twofold issue has been building throughout the narrative. The crowds who witnessed the healing of the paralytic ‘were filled with awe and glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings’ (9:8). This is paired with the Pharisees, who take offense at him, challenging his authority to eat with tax collectors and sinners.” (F. Dean Lueking, “The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels”, p. 49)

Day Thirteen: Tuesday, March 14, Matthew 9:18-38

“The men and women listening to this passage who may be contemplating their own ailments or questioning their own worthiness should be encouraged by the universal accessibility this story ascribes to Jesus. Ministers and other leaders may find their lofty positions all the more precarious as they listen to the hypocritical denunciations of the scoffing Pharisees, yet they can find comfort in the attention Jesus pays to a synagogue leader who approaches him with a father’s plea. Those in the congregation who are sitting with invisible pains or who do not feel comfortable with voicing their concerns can be reassured by the inclusive invitation Jesus extends to Matthew and inspired by the plucky faith of a long-suffering woman.” (Alexander Wimberly, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3*, p. 120)

Day Fourteen: Wednesday, March 15, Matthew 10

“The intent of verses 7-8 is summarized in the two imperatives ‘preach’ and ‘heal’. As in the ministry of Jesus, the disciples’ proclamation of the good news of the kingdom must be corroborated by signs of the kingdom. Although the miracles they are empowered to effect are not insignificant, the emphasis clearly lies less on producing spectacular displays of supernatural power than on manifesting concern for God’s hurting people. The message about the coming of God’s rule must be rendered believable through concrete demonstrations of God’s caring. The modern church understands this principle and tires to be faithful to it. Mission boards send out not only evangelists but medical personnel, educators, agricultural missionaries, and others who will communicate the living gospel through visible acts of compassion. Likewise churches reach out to their neighborhoods in effective evangelism when concern for souls is accompanied by genuine concern for bodily existence...There must be no divorce between ‘preach’ and ‘heal.’” (Douglas Ware, *Matthew*, p. 112)

Day Fifteen: Thursday, March 16, Matthew 11

The twentieth-century Protestant theologian Karl Barth regarded John the Baptist as the prototype of Christian discipleship. Over Barth’s desk in Basel, Switzerland, hung a reproduction of the Isenheim altarpiece (executed by Matthias Grunewald). To the left, John the beloved disciple holds Mary, Jesus’ mother, as she looks in horror at the body, pierced body of her Son on the cross. To the right, John the Baptist, in bare feet and camel’s hair cloak, holds a book in one hand and with the other raises his long bony index finger toward Jesus on the cross. That, says Barth, is true discipleship; simply to point to all that God has done for us in Christ...In John the Baptist, we find an answer: to be a disciple is no longer to look at oneself, but rather to look at Christ. In pointing to him alone, the disciple’s own identity finally becomes clear: “Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God. I am thine.” John Burgess, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1*, p. 72) The final lines Burgess quotes are from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his letters and papers from prison.

Day Sixteen: Friday, March 17, Matthew 12:1-21

“The words of Jesus have irony: ‘So it is biblical on the Sabbath day to do the right thing.’ God’s purposes in giving the Sabbath command were for the good of human beings, to give them a rest, to contribute to their physical and spiritual health, to give people time to ‘be’ and not just ‘do,’ and then to give them time for worship, which is the world’s most wholesome reality. ‘It is biblical to do good on the Sabbath.’ The fact that the Pharisees have to be told this shows the pit into which they have fallen.” (Bruner, *The Christbook*, p. 452)

Day Seventeen: Saturday, March 18, Matthew 12:22-50

“The idea of an unforgivable sin, axiomatic to first-century Jews and Christians, is problematic to modern Christians, because it seems to set limits on God’s ability to deal with even the worst sinners. It is

probably that Jesus and others who espoused the idea of an unforgivable sin did not by any means intend thereby to restrict God but wanted instead to emphasize as strongly as possible that human resistance to God is ultimately futile. God's patience with those who insist on calling good evil and evil good will come to an end. Innumerable Christians have tormented themselves unnecessarily by the thought that they are guilty of the unforgivable sin. As wise interpreters have frequently reminded us, those who worry about the unforgivable sin cannot be guilty of it!" (Douglas Hare, Matthew, 140, 141)

Day Eighteen: Sunday, March 19, Matthew 13

As you read the parables in Matthew 13, consider these words about the kingdom. "Jesus did not say that the kingdom was like a rock, fixed and solid and firm and unchanging. Jesus did not say that the kingdom was like a giant machine that you put some things in and you get some things out and that what you get out depends upon what you put in. He said it was like an enormous tree that grows out of a tiny seed. A tree that grows so enormous that all the birds of the air can come and find shelter in its branches, even strange little ducks like you and me. He said that God was like a housewife who puts a smidgen of yeast in three measures of flour and that yeast yields its life into the whole batch of dough. That is the way that the kingdom is, growing from the very beginning into all that God has intended...From the foundations of the world, the very first moment of creation, it is the kingdom that has been on God's mind, and God is infinitely patient as it grows." (Patrick J. Wilson, "God is not finished," a sermon quoted in Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, p. 265)

Day Nineteen: Monday, March 20, Matthew 14:1-21

"In words and actions anticipating the Eucharistic scene, Jesus breaks the bread, and the disciples distribute it to the crowd, satisfying their hunger. The abundance of leftover fragments is not a moralizing lesson in conservation, but a documentation of the greatness of the miracle. It is a counterpicture of the Mosaic manna, which could not be preserved, and portrays the messianic times, when hunger will be replaced by extravagance. (Matthew: The New Interpreter's Bible, M. Eugene Boring, 325)

Day Twenty: Tuesday, March 21, Matthew 14:22-36

Take Heart, It Is I; Do Not Be Afraid (v. 27). Jesus says *ego eimi* (Greek), which can mean simply 'it is I'; but more is being suggested here. For Matthew's audience, this Greek phrase is packed with significance. These are the words that the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) uses to translate the Hebrew name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). Jesus is using the divine name to announce his presence. *I am* is here, trampling victoriously over the waves. In these brief but charged words and in the awesome vision that unfolds before the disciples, Jesus is identifying himself with God, the liberator and redeemer of Israel, who is at the same time the creator of the world and the victor over chaos. His words, instilling courage and banishing fear, assure the disciples that this awesome vision in the midst of the storm is intended as good news...Given its utterance at important moments throughout Scripture...'Do not be afraid' is a keynote of the gospel itself. The unveiling of God's majesty is not intended to terrorize or diminish, but to save, uphold, and establish the creature." (Iwan Russell-Jones, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, p. 334, 336).

Day Twenty one: Wednesday, March 22, Matthew 15:1-20

"This passage (15:1-20) has much to say to modern Christians. It reminds us, in the first place, that we too can be guilty of placing tradition ahead of God's moral will. Local tradition (We have always done it this way) can impede the work of the kingdom. Ecclesiastical tradition can get in the way of ecumenical cooperation. And, like Jesus' opponents, we too must be warned not to put the merely legal above the truly moral. It is a regrettable habit of many Christians to speak disdainfully of 'Jewish legalism.' Rabbis sometimes ask ministers, 'Why is it legalism when we take our tradition seriously, but when you do, it is merely a matter of carefully observing the mandates of your book of order?'" (Douglas Hare, Matthew, p. 175)

Day Twenty two: Thursday, March 23, Matthew 15:21-39

When the Canaanite woman is initially turned away, Martin Luther asks, "But what does the poor woman do? She does not give up, she clings to the Word although it be torn out of her heart by force, is not turned away by this stern answer, still firmly believes his goodness is yet concealed in that answer, and

still she will not pass judgment that Christ is or may be ungracious. That is persevering steadfastness....And her reply is a masterly stroke...she catches Christ with his own words... Truly, people let the dogs have the crumbs under the table; it is entitles to that. Therefore Christ now completely opens his heart to her and yields to her will, so that she is now no dog, but even a child of Israel.” (Sermons of Martin Luther, Volumes 1 and 2, p. 152)

Day Twenty three: Friday, March 24, Matthew 16

“From that time on...” After the Holy Spirit reveals to Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, from that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering. “While the paradoxical statement that finding one’s life comes only in losing it may have the ring of popular proverb, it has a special application in the mouth of Jesus. Discipleship requires losing one’s life ‘for my sake,’ for the sake of God as revealed in Jesus. This is not a call to lose oneself in a selfless cause—as noble as that idea may be. It is a specific demand placed upon those who would be the followers of Jesus. They must be willing to surrender their own self-centered ambitions, goals, and lifestyles for the way demonstrated by Jesus.” (Mitchell G. Reddish, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4, p. 25)

Day Twenty four: Saturday, March 25, Matthew 17

“The transfiguration does not intend to transport the faithful into a transhistorical realm, where Jesus is lit up from the inside and having discourse with famous figures long since dead! Rather, it intends to confess that these untutored, down-to-earth men and women who left everything and followed Jesus, hardly knowing why—these same persons, later, knew that they had been drawn to him because, for all his obvious humanity, something radiated from him that spoke of ineffable and eternal truth. Some of them remembered now, when he had left them, one incident in particular when this radiance seemed to manifest itself almost...visibly...what (the transfiguration) affirms about the early church’s foundational belief about Jesus is namely, that he was not just another exceptional human being, prophet, or great teacher and example for all, but the decisive representation of the Divine, the source and judge of life.” (Douglas John Hall, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 1, pages 454 and 456)

Day Twenty five: Sunday, March 26, Matthew 18:1-20

“Matthew goes beyond Mark (Mark 9:33-37) not only by making the child a model of humility but also by urging disciples ‘to become little’, namely, before God. That this requires a turnaround in life is said by Jesus’ words explicitly (‘Unless you turn your lives around...’). According to Jesus not the significant one, the important one, the esteemed one who ‘in the world’ is considered great, but the little one, the unimpressive one, the one standing in the background and in the shadow of the mighty ones is the person whom Jesus considers great...Jesus wants no Great People in his church; only disciples.” (Dale Bruner, The Churchbook, p. 635)

Day Twenty six: Monday, March 27, Matthew 18:21-35

These words about Peter’s question regarding forgiveness may be helpful as you consider the parable Jesus tells in today’s reading. “Peter’s proposal to forgive seven times sounds extravagantly generous, especially since there is no mention of repentance by the offending party. It reverses the sevenfold pronouncement of vengeance in Genesis 4:15. Jesus’ response is far beyond Peter’s proposal, and not only in greatly extending the quantity. The Greek number can be legitimately understood as ‘seventy seven times’ or ‘four hundred ninety times’. The difference between Peter’s proposal and Jesus’ pronouncement is not a matter of math or linguistics, but of the nature of forgiveness. Whoever counts has not forgiven at all, but is only biding his or her time. The kind of forgiveness called for is beyond all calculation, as the following story communicates.” (M. Eugene Boring, Matthew: The New Interpreter’s Bible, p. 380).

Day Twenty seven: Tuesday, March 28, Matthew 19:1-15

“It seems probably that Jesus’ saying was understood by Matthew and his church as authorizing the practice of including children and young people in the corporate life of the church. This is suggested also by his inclusion of children with men and women in the great feeding scenes (14:21; 15:28). Regarded from a sociological point of view, this may have been one of the reasons why Christianity spread so

rapidly in the Roman world. There were popular religions for men (Mithraism) and for women (the religion of the *bona Dea*). Christianity offered a family religion in which both sexes and all ages could participate together. In the present context the symbolic function of the children has a special importance. They are allowed to come to Jesus ‘because of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ Matthew has already introduced this idea at 18:3: ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’ The child is the paradigm of what it means to be helplessly dependent on the Father in heaven.” (Douglas Hare, *Matthew*, 224).

Day Twenty eight: Wednesday, March 29, Matthew 19:16-30

“The young man (rich young ruler) is a fine specimen who ‘has it all’: youth, money, morality, a sense that there is still something more, an interest in eternal things. Matthew resists the temptation to make the disciples (and his own church) look the better by painting the man in dark colors. He was a good, sincere, wealthy young man, and every church would be glad to ‘get’ him. What did he lack? He anticipated being given one more commandment, one final achievement, and then his quest would be fulfilled. Not just the young man, but also the reader is surprised when he is told that he lacks all, that his salvation is impossible. At one level, the story communicates that salvation is not any kind of achievement, that on human terms entering the kingdom is not merely hard, but impossible. It is only when this ‘no’ to all human claims is heard that the ‘yes’ of God can be heard: But for God all things are possible. Binding this pronouncement to the call to discipleship keeps it from being cheap grace.” (M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew: The New Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 394).

Day Twenty nine: Thursday, March 30, Matthew 20

The parable of the workers in the vineyard, “Is essentially about the generosity of God. It is not about equity or proper disbursement of wages but about a gracious and undeserved gift. It is not about an economic exchange but, rather, about a bestowing of grace and mercy to all, no matter what time they have put in or how deserving or undeserving we may think them to be. God’s generosity often violates our own sense of right and wrong, our sense of how things would be if we ran the world. Are we unable to celebrate another’s good fortune because we have not celebrated our own? How often am I ungrateful for God’s graciousness and mercy? How often do I deny God’s love and forgiveness in my own life? Jesus leaves us with a question: can we learn to see through the eyes of God? Our ideas of right and wrong, of what is just and unjust, are not necessarily God’s ideas—and that is a very good thing. We are reminded by this parable that the tables are turned. When we look for equity, we are surprised to find generosity.” (Charlotte Dudley Cleghorn, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*, p. 96).

Day Thirty: Friday, March 31, Matthew 21

“Cast your sins from yourself upon Christ, believe with a festive spirit that your sins are his wounds and sufferings, that he carries them and makes satisfaction for them, as Isaiah 53:6 says: ‘The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all;’ and Peter writes ‘Who in his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree’, (I Peter 2:24,; and Paul in II Corinthians 5:21, ‘God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him.’” Martin Luther wrote these words as he reflected on the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, as the crowd cried out, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Sermons of Martin Luther, Volumes 1 and 2, p. 189)

Day Thirty one: Saturday, April 1, Matthew 22:1-22

Regarding the parable of the Wedding Banquet: “Most human institutions have some restrictions and limitations on who can be admitted. Yale University received 26,000 applications for admission to the class of 2013. Of that number, only 7.5 percent were actually admitted. Yale does not say, ‘Come unto me, all that are weary and burdened.’ Most public universities admit no more than 60 percent of those who apply for admission. There is no institution or organization of which I am aware where everybody/anybody can freely come, whether they are good or bad. That is rule number one with Jesus; the Lord will take anybody who shows up. This is the good news of the gospel; Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Paul says, ‘While we were still sinning, Christ died for the ungodly’ (Romans 5:8). This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, ‘The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life’ (Romans 6:23).

This is the message that has mesmerized the world; 'For God so loved the world...that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16)." (Marvin A McMickle, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4, p. 169)

Day Thirty two: Sunday, April 2, Matthew 22:23-41

In this reading Jesus shares the two great commandments of Scripture: Love of God and love of neighbor. "In an age when the word 'love' is greatly abused, it is important to remember that the primary component of biblical love is not affection but commitment. Warm feelings of gratitude may fill our consciousness as we consider all that God has done for us, but it is not warm feelings that Deuteronomy 6:5 demands of us but rather stubborn, unwavering commitment. Similarly, to love our neighbor, including our enemies, does not mean that we must feel affection for them. To love the neighbor is to imitate God by taking their needs seriously." (Douglas Hare, Matthew, p. 260)

Day Thirty three: Monday, April 3, Matthew 23

"In the Sermon on the Mount, which the Beatitudes began, Jesus taught how to live; in the Sermon of Woes Jesus teaches how not to live. (The Sermon of Woes is the counterpart of the Sermon on the Mount). Since Jesus baptizes with both Spirit and Fire (Matthew 3:11), and since Jesus is both Savior and Judge, we should allow him both to bless and to warn. Yet the church that follows Jesus has been called to extend only God's saving mission into the world; she has been explicitly forbidden to exercise God's judgment (Matthew 7:1-3...thou shall not judge), except in the discipline of her own community (Chapters 7, 16, 18 in Matthew)...We must be careful to apply this chapter first to ourselves as Christians and then to our practices as churches..." (Dale Bruner, The Churchbook, p. 809)

Day Thirty four: Tuesday, April 4, Matthew 24

The prophecies in Matthew 24 are certainly difficult to comprehend. An interesting perspective on the command to flee during this difficult time is given by Eugene Boring. "The directive in 24:17-19 to leave everything and flee is neither cowardice nor eschatological (end times) panic, but is related by Matthew to the character of discipleship and the nature of the Christian mission. The disciples left everything when they were called to become 'fishers for people' (Matthew 4:18-22) and when they were sent out on a mission (Matthew 10:5-10). The community scattered and fleeing is the community in missionary mode. The regathering of the community is God's responsibility and promise at the eschaton (end time)." (Boring, The New Interpreter's Bible, Matthew, p.443)

Day Thirty five: Wednesday, April 5, Matthew 25:1-30

"The parable of the Talents must be understood against its eschatological horizon. The parable sets for positive and negative examples of conduct while awaiting the return of the Lord. Not to be overlooked is the characterization of the master: as one who bestows gifts abundantly, carefully calibrates gifts on the basis of ability, gives his slaves freedom to respond with loving responsibility, and rejoices in their fidelity. While the parable initially intimates that the talents bestowed are external to the recipients (i.e., only to be managed by them), the detail in verse 29—'to all who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance'—suggests that the talents do, in fact, enrich the recipients. The parable's ending warns of the tragedy of acting timidly in response to God's generosity." (Thomas D. Stegman, SJ, Feasting on the Word, Year A, volume 4, p. 313)

Day Thirty six: Thursday, April 6, Matthew 25:31-46

"It is easy to read this passage and miss the gospel. As we watch sheep and goats being separated for eternity, we may see and preach little more than a humanitarian call to work on behalf of society's undervalued members. Subsequently, salvation is understood as that which we achieve. Instead, this Scripture testifies that salvation is something we discover, often when we least expect it...the righteous are surprised to realize they had cared for the King of creation; evidently, they simply shared who they were and what they had freely, without calculation or expectation...the unrighteous are shocked that they missed opportunities to show love to the King; had they known God was in their midst, they have done the right thing. Yet, the King is looking for a natural overflowing of love, not calculated efforts designed to project a certain image. This is the kind of love Jesus has come to demonstrate and to share." (Lindsay, P. Armstrong, Feasting on the Word, Year A, volume 4, p. 337)

Day Thirty seven: Friday, April 7, Matthew 26:1-35

“The story of Jesus’ last night has many scenes, beginning with the disciples’ preparation of the Passover seder and concluding with the sorry tale of Peter’s denial. The mood throughout is somber, yet the story is shot through with the conviction that what is happening is not mere happenstance or blind fate but in some mysterious way the outworking of God’s plan for the world.” (Douglas Hare, Matthew, p. 295)

Day Thirty eight: Saturday, April 8, Matthew 26:36-75

Consider these powerful words about the way Jesus responds during his arrest. “The way of non-violence, non-retaliation, love of enemies, is to be pursued to the end. What Jesus has taught, he lives out, at the cost of his life. Just as he practiced the prayer he taught his disciples, so also he practices non-retaliatory self-giving. Violence is self-destructive and futile, resulting only in a vicious spiral of violence. The sword is a symbol not only of mob violence or self-defense, but also of government itself. Jesus represents a redefinition of kingship; the way of God’s kingdom is to absorb evil rather than inflict it, and bring the spiral finally to an end.” (Boring, The New Interpreter’s Bible, Matthew, p. 477)

Day Thirty nine: Sunday, April 9, Matthew 27

A place called Golgotha, meaning Skull-Place. “Place names suggest geographicity, historicity, and factuality of an event. No Gospel story begins ‘once upon a time...’ The death of Jesus happened on this planet on a piece of land with a strange but ordinary name like Skull-Place. We do not know if this place got its name from its shape or from its awful job of death. Hebrew Golgotha became Calvarium in Latin, from which we get our English ‘Calvary’. (Dale Bruner, The Churchbook, p. 1039)

Day Forty: Monday, April 10, Matthew 28

“Garret Keizer, a minister in Vermont, tells of conducting an Easter vigil in his little church. Only two people show up for the service, but Keizer nonetheless lights the paschal candle and says the prayer. ‘The candle sputters in the half darkness like a voice too embarrassed or overwhelmed to proclaim the news that Christ is risen...but it catches fire, and there we are, three people and a flickering light in an old church on a Saturday evening in the spring, with the noise of cars and their winter rusted mufflers outside. The moment is filled with ambiguities of all such quiet observances among few people, in the midst of an oblivious population in a radically secular age. The act is so ambiguous because its terms are so extreme: either the Lord is with us, or we are pathetic fools.’ So it is always with the church. WE take a fragmentary community, a fragmentary faith, a fragmentary understanding of the Trinitarian God, and we go into the world with everything Jesus has taught us. Either the Lord is with us and all authority has been given to Christ, or we are indeed pathetic fools.” (Tom Long, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, p. 49...quoting Keizer, A Dresser of Sycamore Trees).

So we come to the end of the gospel of Matthew. Perhaps some consider people of faith to be pathetic fools. But we have this great assurance: Jesus Christ is with us now, and forever, even unto the end of the age. Receiving this good news let us go into all the world making disciples in his name.