

Evangelism through a Matthew 25 Lens

Worship & Liturgy Ideas



Invitation to Confession

Leader: Telling the truth is terrifying. Telling the truth about ourselves is both scary and the only way to face down the part of us that is frightened to be known both in community and by God. We have to practice real trust to step into our own belovedness enough to say, “this is what is true of me.”

The words of this prayer might resonate with you today, and they might not, but I invite you to pray with me, trusting that we hold each other in this shared practice, through the words we say together—and that over time, our practice of naming the truth will bring us closer to the larger truth, that God’s love for us is more than all we have done—and more than we can fathom.

Responsive Prayer of Confession

Congregation: Holy God, here’s the truth. We’ve been afraid to trust your good news enough to speak it aloud. It’s actually terrifying to hold a big and daunting hope. It’s more than a little vulnerable to carry a probably naïve, certainly illogical and radical hope--especially in the face of pain and suffering. It feels even worse to voice that hope out loud to other people.

The truth is: there have been times when we’ve shifted our holy hopes a little bit, to make them more black and white, a little less of a risk, a little bit more plausible to ourselves and the world around us. A little bit less holy and a little bit less true.

Unfortunately, an easier hope is no hope at all. Love without risk is not love at all. To keep ourselves safe, we have made deals with the injustice and supremacy culture already at work in the world.

We’ve attempted to simplify good news into something we have already figured out that others haven’t--something *they* desperately need to learn from *us*.

Leader: We confess, Lord, that we need your courage to hope again. We need the eyes to see your Spirit at work in the world, we need your strength to walk forward into the unknown, to trust the good news of the gospel, to risk sharing our own stories of hope.

Congregation: Jesus who walked in hope on Palm Sunday, who declared good news into the teeth of the empire, walk with us again, and give us the strength to see and speak of your good news as it continues to meet us in the world you made.

Leader: Friends, hear the unaltered good news: Christ has come for us and Christ will come again. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Communion

This is a table of friends and a table of strangers. A table of collaborators, allies, and traitors—a table of sheep and goats, hosted by the least of these. When we hear the stories of those sheep, welcomed into heaven by feeding and visiting and offering water to the least of these—we tend to imagine ourselves as those who do or don't offer food, share a jacket, or visit those in prison. Jesus is the one we visit, the one we cared for in his lowest moment. Or that we didn't care for.

But what if we let go of our main character syndrome for a minute?

What if we are the other folks in prison—the other folks who need re-hydrating, the least of these in need of a meal? I don't mean to be alarmist, but what if that is why we are all here right now? Desperate and half blind with hunger and deep aloneness? Hungry and frightened and completely unable to get what we need on our own, coming for this strange bread crumb or Styrofoam wafer and juice shot. Where are we to find God, or Jesus, or help, or even a snack to get us through the day if we are just crowded in here together with each other, a whole crowd of the least of these? To whom will we turn?

If we are looking for grace—if we are looking for solidarity in the midst of all our pains and hungers—the parable of the sheep and goats tells pretty clearly us where to look. What we seek might not actually be that righteous sheep handing out clothes or a holy hand to break bread here.

What if what we really seek—the God who might really know us—is one we will meet in each other, just one of the least of these, sharing our chair or pew in this ornate cell, one of these people we have known so long or just met today, with their funny hair or crooked smile, their lack of power, their everyday life and their modest hopes.

What if they, across the table, are the body of Christ for the moment of this meal, the least of these reminding us that we are not alone? Or what if Jesus is among the least of these beyond our walls, waiting to meet us at table out there, waiting to be fed with us, the face of God we so desperately need to see.

This table is for meeting the least of these over a meal—and meeting God there too.

So may this table do its work, on our eyes and on our hearts, that we might go out into the world and gather more tables, eat more meals, catch more holy eyes across the plates before us. We, the least of these, are being called out, and God, as the least of these, is waiting to meet us. May this meal be the fuel we need to go out again, to find our God and ourselves on the move in this beloved and broken world.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Let us pray:

Holy Spirit, come upon this meal that it may be to us a tangible grace, that we might know it as the grace that has been, the grace that sustains us even now, and the grace that will surely lead us home again, to this table.

In this meal may we remember that even we were welcomed here and carry the good news we have seen into your world so that all might be comforted and fed, loved and welcomed in the communion of saints beyond these walls.

Jesus, we have been so hungry—remind us that true food meets us in this meal. May we meet your saints here and find ourselves in their number. Amen.

Sermon

- Look to the worship resource, *A Year with Matthew*, to find lectionary passages, sermon prompt, and hymn suggestions for Evangelism Sunday in September, or look at Christ the King Sunday in November--when the Matthew 25 passage is specifically featured.

A Year with Matthew:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/a-year-with-matthew-2022-2023/>

- Try Lectio Divino with reflection stations around the sanctuary instead of a sermon.

Hymns & Songs

- Hymn suggestions for Evangelism Sunday from *A Year with Matthew* resource (see link above):

Jesus Knows the Inmost Heart *Glory to God* 427
God, How Can We Forgive *Glory to God* 445
Help Us Accept Each Other *Glory to God* 754

- Hymn composed in 2022 for Mr. Rogers Day/Neighboring Sunday:

Jesus, Teach Us to be Neighbors

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/jesus-teach-us-to-be-neighbors-hymn/>

(Guitar chords, melody music, and audio recording of this song can be found here:

www.pcusa.org/mrogers)

- Hymn suggestions related to the 7 Marks of Vital Congregations (including Intentional Authentic Evangelism):

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/s-even-marks-hymns/>

Offering

- Collect donations for a specific neighborhood partner: food pantry, school, shelter, etc.

Creative Worship Ideas

- Hold a shorter Morning Prayer service and then go out into the community in small groups of 2 or 3 and be the church--living out Matthew 25. Offer multiple opportunities which work for people of differing ages, abilities, and interests. Some possibilities could include:
 - Serve lunch at a shelter
 - Work in a community garden
 - Clean up the neighborhood park (bring bubbles and stories to engage the families at the park on a Sunday morning)
 - Assemble "manna bags" for a homeless shelter
 - Create at-home formation bags for families of the church's weekday school
 - More ideas to use with intergenerational groups can be found here:
<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/neighboring-sunday/>
- Hold your worship service outside the doors of the church--on the front steps, in a nearby park, or even in the church parking lot.

