

# encounter

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,  
for I am gentle and humble in heart,  
and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

- *Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)*

In Matthew's Gospel, people keep coming to see, and hear, and touch Jesus, because they've heard stories of the encounters of others and they want to experience the same kind of healing and hope they've heard in those stories. So what can we learn from Matthew about these experiences of meeting Jesus and those who told their stories? And do these kinds of experiences happen today? This Lent, we're going to explore **encounters** with Jesus.

## encounter

**FEB 26**

**encounter: faith**

**Matthew 8:1-13**

After the Sermon on the Mount, the first two people healed by Jesus are an outcast with leprosy and the servant of a Roman centurion. The two stories have one important thing in common. Both the leper and the centurion track Jesus down because they believe in the power He brings. Jesus doesn't come to them. They find Jesus. Matthew shows his audience that what distinguishes those who comprehend who Jesus is and experience His power isn't status, or experience, or study. It's faith!

**The positive and healing encounters we seek in life come not from waiting for Jesus to come to us, but from pursuing relationship with Him.**

**FEB 27 – MAR 4**

Monday	Read Matthew 8:1-2. If Jesus was present with you in person in this moment, what would you want to ask of Him?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 8:3-4. How can your prayers express both what you desire and your trust in what Jesus will (or won't) do?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 8:5-9. What is the relationship of humility and faith? Should we expect Jesus to do whatever we ask? Why or why not?
Thursday	Read Matthew 8:10-13. How would you describe "great faith" (NIV) in Jesus?
Friday	Read Matthew 8:14-17. Do you believe in the power of Jesus to heal? What does Matthew say is the purpose of the healings Jesus offers in this part of His ministry?
Saturday	Read Matthew 8:18-22. What is the difference between faith that will follow Jesus anywhere no matter what, and faith with conditions?

### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. How would you define "faith"?
2. What can get in the way of having faith, or what threatens one's faith?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian pondered the difference between waiting for Jesus to come to us and pursuing Him. How do you understand, or how have you experienced, the difference?
4. What are the conditions we sometimes put on our faith in Jesus?
5. In what ways can you pursue a relationship with Jesus today?

### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Write down a list of what makes for a good friendship or good relationship – spending time together, trust, conversation, etc.. Use the list to pray and ask: Which of these do I need to focus on to grow in my relationship with Jesus?

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**MAR 5**

### **ENCOUNTER PEACE**

#### **Matthew 8:23-27**

How do we weather the storms of life? Do we panic, assume Jesus isn't paying attention, assume the worst, or give up? An encounter of the disciples with Jesus shows us another way to respond when it feels like the waves may capsize our boats.

**The peace we seek in the storms of life comes from knowing Jesus is on the boat with us.**

#### **MAR 6-11**

Monday	Read Matthew 8:23-25. What are the storms of life you have faced, or are facing right now?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 8:26. What can make it difficult to trust Jesus when we're in the stormy times of life?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 8:27. How can our faith in Jesus provide peace in our lives?
Thursday	Read Matthew 8:28-29. Who are those living on the margins or removed from society today because of their "demons", and where would Jesus encounter them?
Friday	Read Matthew 8:30-34. What makes it easier to see the disruption or the cost of change instead of the blessing or opportunity?
Saturday	Read John 14:27. How is the peace Jesus offers different than the peace the world offers?

#### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Share a time in your life when you felt a deep sense of peace.
2. What causes you the most anxiety in life? What are you most afraid of?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian said finding peace wasn't simply mastering a practice, but putting full trust in the presence of Jesus, no matter the circumstance. What spiritual practice (or practices) in your life can help you trust Jesus when you're anxious or afraid?
4. In this week's daily readings, Jesus says to his followers, in John's Gospel, that His peace isn't like the peace the world gives. What do you think he means? How is the peace of Christ different?

#### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Work this week to memorize Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Once memorized, when you are anxious or afraid, repeat this verse to yourself.

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**MAR 12**

### **ENCOUNTER FORGIVENESS**

**Matthew 9:1-13**

Two very different stories – one about a healing of a paralyzed man, and another about the calling of a tax collector to follow Jesus – are held together in Matthew's Gospel by an important truth. Jesus came to humanity to offer God's forgiveness for our sins.

**The healing we seek, the community we desire, begins with offering the forgiveness shown to us in Jesus.**

**MAR 13-18**

Monday	Read Matthew 9:1-2. Who do you know that needs to be introduced to Jesus to experience His forgiveness and love?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 9:3-8. How have you experienced the power of God's forgiveness in Jesus?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 9:9. What do we leave behind if we fully commit to following Jesus?
Thursday	Read Matthew 9:10-11. In what ways can the actions and teachings of Jesus make you or others uncomfortable?
Friday	Read Matthew 9:12-13. How does the church today reflect, or not reflect, the forgiveness Jesus offers to everyone?
Saturday	Read Hosea 6:6. What are practical ways that we can choose mercy over sacrifice in our lives and relationships today?

#### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. How would you define sin? How would you define forgiveness?
2. How have you experienced the power of God's forgiveness in your life?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian shared that in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus never criticizes or lectures sinners. He just eats and drinks with them. How is this encompassed in the mission of the church today?
4. What do people experience when they cross paths with followers of Jesus, and/or encounter the message of the church, today? Do they encounter forgiveness and mercy? Why or why not?
5. What can guard us from falling into the dangerous trap of trusting in our own righteousness while judging others?

#### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Set aside a time this week to pray about forgiveness. During your prayer time, make a list of the things in your life for which you need to know and claim God's forgiveness, things you've done or left undone. Then make a list of things you need to forgive in relationships with others. When you've finished, accept the forgiveness God offers you and pray about next steps you might take in forgiving others.

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**MAR 19**

### **ENCOUNTER HEALING**

**Matthew 9:18-34**

Jesus didn't heal everyone. He didn't eradicate all disease, or there wouldn't be any in the world today. But encounters with Jesus did lead to healing. A closer look at these healing stories may give us a deeper understanding of the healing Jesus extends, and offer insight into how we can experience healing in our own lives and in our community today. We celebrate the healing power of Jesus not because it provides the kind of healing we expect in every situation, but because it points to the power of Jesus that can overcome our greatest fears, including death.

**Seeking encounters with the healing power of Jesus connects us to the grace, mercy, and eternal promises of God.**

**MAR 20-25**

Monday	Read Psalm 147:1-3. What comes to mind when you think of "healing"?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 9:18-22. What common thread do you see in the healing stories of Jesus?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 9:23-25. How do the healing stories of Jesus provide hope and point to a greater promise of life eternal?
Thursday	Read Matthew 9:27-31. Why do you think Matthew emphasizes that the blind men asked not for healing, but for mercy?
Friday	Read Matthew 9:32-34. Knowing that God can handle questions, what questions do you want to ask about these healing stories?
Saturday	Read 1 Peter 2:21-25. What do you think Peter means when he says, "by [Christ's] wounds we have been <i>healed</i> "?

### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. How would you define healing?
2. Have you ever experienced healing in your life? If yes, how did the healing happen? What did you feel and experience? What was the source of your healing?
3. How do the stories of the healing provided by Jesus give hope and encourage faith? How can the same stories cause discouragement or struggle with faith?
4. Jesus doesn't heal everyone who asks in the way we might desire or expect. But Jesus does provide healing for everyone in a love that conquers all. How do you need to experience healing right now in your life?

### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Pray this prayer whenever appropriate for yourself or others this week:

*Lord, I pray for healing for \_\_\_\_\_ in Your will and in Your mercy.*

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**MAR 26**

### **ENCOUNTER REST**

**Matthew 11:25-12:14**

Studies today show growing reports of depression, anxiety, emotional stress, and distrust of support systems among all ages. In an era when we have more ways to be connected than ever, more resources that are supposed to make our lives better, we're generally less happy, more lonely, and more stressed. While the full landscape of the challenge is complicated, perhaps we need to remember an encounter with Jesus where he said to his followers: "Come to me, all of you who are weary, and I will give you rest."

**Encountering Jesus in the practice of Sabbath can help those of us who are weary find the rest we need.**

**MAR 27 – APR 1**

Monday	Read Matthew 11:25-27. How does Jesus reveal God the Father to people today?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 11:28-30. What burdens you or makes you weary, and how can following Jesus provide rest and relief?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 12:1-2. What is the purpose of keeping Sabbath?
Thursday	Read Matthew 12:3-8. What is the difference between Sabbath-keeping as a requirement and Sabbath-keeping as a way to stay focused on relationships with God and neighbor?
Friday	Read Matthew 12:9-14. How is the true intent and practice of Sabbath a challenge to the world today?
Saturday	Read Mark 2:23-28. What do you think Jesus means when he says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath"?

### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What activities help you to feel rested and renewed?
2. In the message, Pastor Brian shared that the intent of Sabbath-keeping isn't checking off a box, napping, or time off; but knowing when to say enough to the world and reorienting one's priorities around God. How is this similar or different than you've thought or been taught about Sabbath before?
3. In what ways are your priorities in life focused on worldly values and goals? In what ways are they focused on God?
4. How can a Sabbath practice of resetting priorities and focusing on relationship with Jesus lead to rest and renewal?

### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Create a list of activities or practices that help you reset your priorities around what is most important and help you focus on your relationship with Jesus. Choose one activity or practice from your list and schedule time for it in the next seven days.

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**APR 2**

### **ENCOUNTER JESUS (PALM SUNDAY)**

#### **Matthew 25:31-46**

As Jesus attempts to prepare the disciples for what lies ahead, to understand that he will leave but return, the disciples get worried. They ask Jesus how they will know when He and the end of the age are coming. They want to know what sign to watch for and what to do. Jesus answers them in parables and symbols, and at the heart of His teaching is this: Keep watching! Even more: Live as though it could be any moment. You may even find, Jesus tells his followers, that as you're watching for and serving those on the margins, you'll serve me without knowing it and encounter me in those acts of service.

**The way to be sure we encounter Jesus is to keep watching and keep serving!**

**APR 3-8**

Monday	Read Matthew 25:1-13. What does it mean to you to be ready for Jesus coming?
Tuesday	Read Matthew 25:14-23. How does sharing and multiplying the gifts God has given you bring happiness to you and to God?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 25:24-30. Do you believe we will someday have to account for how we share the gifts God has given us with others? Why or why not?
Thursday	Read Matthew 25:31-36. When Jesus teaches about being ready for God's kingdom, what does He say His followers should be doing?
Friday	Read Matthew 25:37-40. How have you encountered Jesus while caring for the needs of others?
Saturday	Read Matthew 25:41-46. In what ways does our world ignore the needs of those on the margins of our communities?

#### ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Do you worry about the future? Why or why not?
2. What are the consequences, personal and communal, of ignoring the needs of others in our world?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian shared that if we read all of Matthew 24 and 25 together, we realize that Jesus is inviting his followers not to worry about the "end times" by looking for signs, but to encounter Jesus in the here and now through acts of service and care. How can the church today encourage encounters with Jesus?
4. In what ways do we tend to waste our gifts or use them selfishly?  
In what ways do we share our gifts and use them to serve and care for others?

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### ***FaithFit Challenge:***

In a time of prayer this week, reflect on the following questions.

- 1) Am I ready for an encounter with Jesus?
- 2) How am I using my time, money, and talents to honor God by multiplying God's goodness?
- 3) How am I helping to meet the needs of the "least of these" in our community?