





## IMAGE DESCRIPTION

Near the town of Medyka on the Polish side of one of the borders between Poland and Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees arrive every day. Nonprofits and Polish organizations offer them food, clothes, and other necessities before they board free buses to nearby transit centers and humanitarian aid centers. Since the war in Ukraine began, millions of Ukrainians — mostly mothers and children, because men aged 18 to 60 are required to stay in Ukraine — fled to Poland to escape bombs and bullets in their hometowns. Many of the refugees are children. This photo was taken at the Medyka border crossing the day before the bombing of the Ukrainian town Yaroviv, less than an hour away and only 16 miles from the Korczowa border crossing. Yaroviv was a location used for military training and was the target of more than 30 missiles, killing 35 and injuring 134.

## PRAYER

Pray aloud together the following prayer:

*Come, Lord, and open my eyes.*

*Come, Lord, and help me see with eyes of compassion, peace and justice.*

*Come, Lord, and open my eyes to your world and your people. Amen.*

## VISIO DIVINA

The practice of Visio Divina simply means holy seeing. It is the practice of opening your heart to hear God speak to you through an image. As you begin today's study, you are invited to enter into the practice of Visio Divina. **Spend five minutes in silence seeing your neighbors in the image above.** The image description provides background information.

Let your gaze focus on the people and place before you.

- What stands out to you?
- Is there something that makes you want to turn away?
- Where do you see hope?
- How is God speaking to you through the picture?

**After spending time individually with the image, discuss as a group your response to the questions above.**

## INTRODUCTION

With so many images vying for our attention every day, how do we respond faithfully to the needs of God's people? How do we respond to people we haven't met but whose stories become intertwined with our own? In our global world and economy, what happens across the ocean impacts us. When war and violence overtake a country, so many are affected. When people are forced to flee their country and become refugees, we're all connected.

Over the next three weeks, you're invited to delve into the words of Matthew 25 and read it alongside the stories of people living through the war in Ukraine. You'll also hear stories about people outside of Ukraine who have responded to their neighbors, and others who are experiencing the ripple effects of war.

The parable of Matthew 25 has been referred to as the parable of the goats and the sheep, or the judgment of the nations. This may be a new Scripture to you, or perhaps you've heard it many times. Maybe you have questioned whether you would be separated as a goat or a sheep. However you are coming to this study, the next three weeks are a time to see how God could be using these words to instill a commitment and connection to sharing your love with your neighbors. And for the reminder that what we do for the least of God's people, we do to God.

## DISCUSSION

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

- What scenes and images from Ukraine and Europe have most affected you?
- Have you turned away from any of the images or video?

## BIBLE STUDY

Some background information about the Gospel of Matthew is helpful to consider. This Gospel was most likely written after Mark's Gospel. Matthew uses about 90 percent of Mark's material. This passage from chapter 25, however, only appears in Matthew's Gospel. Many scholars believe that Matthew's intended audience was primarily Jewish and urban. Two major themes in Matthew's Gospel include lifting up God's presence here on earth (in Jesus, the church, and the world) and describing what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We see both themes in chapter 25 as the Son of Man sorts the people of the nations based on how they treated God's people.

**Read together Matthew 25:31-46.**

### MATTHEW 25:31-46

**31** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, **33** and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. **34** Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; **35** for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' **37** Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? **38** And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? **39** And when

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**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. What words or phrases stood out to you in the reading?
2. How do you respond to the Son of Man separating people from one another “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats?” Does this bring you peace? Is it troubling to consider?
3. Can you recall a time you felt like either a sheep or a goat? If so, how?
4. Does this Bible reading invoke comfort or fear?

In Matthew 10:40, Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” The writer of Matthew’s Gospel reminds the disciples repeatedly that God’s presence is found in Jesus. And Jesus is found in both the church and the world. We hear Matthew 10:40 played out in chapter 25 when those seated on the right and the left-hand sides of the Son of Man both ask: When was it that we saw you? As disciples, we are called to see Jesus in those we meet – whether we want to or not. And even when we don’t believe that Jesus could be present.

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. Can you recall a time when you felt you encountered Jesus in someone? If so, share the experience with your group.
2. Is it easier to see Jesus in certain people? If so, who?
3. When are you most challenged to see Jesus in someone else?



**IMAGES**

*See story on next page.*

**TOP:** Mothers support one another as they arrive to St. Martin’s shelter, grateful for the peacefulness and warmth of the hostel. “They sheltered us, you know?” said guest Svitlana Andryshchenko. “Here we are with all these bags. I can’t even express how grateful I am.”

**MIDDLE:** Halyna Tadai and her children, Nadya and Vladimir, were some of the first refugees to be welcomed at St. Martin’s. Halyna left Ukraine out of fear for her children’s safety.

**BOTTOM:** When she heard the violence was spreading, Svitlana Andryshchenko packed a suitcase and fled Ukraine with her two daughters. Pictured here with daughter Hanna, Svitlana told us, “To leave your country in one day with your children, going into nowhere, is very difficult, I just can’t tell you.” Svitlana and her daughters found refuge at St. Martin’s.

# SEEING OUR NEIGHBORS FROM UKRAINE



“What do you need?” Sometimes it’s the simplest questions that mean the most.

Pastor Łukasz Ostruszka, the newly inducted pastor of St. Martin’s Lutheran Church in Krakow, Poland, didn’t hesitate with his answer. He urgently needed supplies so his congregation could welcome and care for Ukrainian refugees.

To prepare, the congregation of St. Martin’s rapidly remodeled the church basement to shelter several families. In the space of a week, the ordinary bathrooms were fitted with showers, beds were brought in, and workers redid water pipes and electrical wiring to accommodate more users.

“This was a space for our parish meetings, but now it’s a hostel for refugees,” said Pastor Ostruszka. “A place to sleep, to be warm.”

When Lutheran World Relief staff in Poland found Pastor Ostruszka’s church in desperate need, the timing seemed almost divine. Because of your compassion, when families arrive at the church, they are greeted with toys and milk for the children, toothpaste and toothbrushes, hygiene products, toiletries and energy biscuits.

“We were in shock. It’s like something from a movie,” said Pastor Ostruszka of his congregation members. “We never expected this. We didn’t expect so many people from Ukraine.”

The first group of families came from Kharkiv, a city heavily hit by the war. Pastor Ostruszka’s wife coordinated the families’

3-hour journey by bus from the border to Krakow. The women and their children will have a safe place to rest and won’t have to worry about finding essential items.

St. Martin’s has helped refugees before, like during a crisis on the Belarussian border. They also helped people coming from Afghanistan, Iraq and countries in Africa.

“Everyone is welcome,” said Pastor Ostruszka. “We hope they will feel at home.”

The numbers now are staggering, and it’s clear that the renovated church hall will be a haven for an ongoing stream of frightened, exhausted mothers. As the buses keep coming, your love also carries Ukraine’s refugees, bringing them support and aid in a time they need it the very most.

Pastor Ostruszka knows there’s a long road ahead. “This is just the start,” he said heavily.

He and the congregation are committed to the long haul, and with your love, so is Lutheran World Relief.

“We should do this. Our Lord gives us something beautiful, and we should go to other people and give to them,” he said.

**ABOVE:** Pastor Łukasz Ostruszka and his congregation are able to host 25 to 30 refugees at a time in their converted church basement.

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. What stood out to you in this story about St. Martin's Lutheran Church?
2. Would our congregation extend the same welcome if we were in a similar situation?
3. Recall a time that you were a stranger. How did you feel? Who helped you feel less alone?
4. Make a list of the people in your community who may feel like strangers.
5. Pastor Ostruszka said, "Our Lord gives us something beautiful, and we should go to other people and give to them." What do you think he is referring to when he says, "something beautiful?"
6. What is something beautiful that you've been given that you could share with others?

## PRAYER

**Looking at the map**, pray for the countries of the world. Look for Ukraine, Russia, Poland and the countries surrounding them who are taking in refugees. **Then, as a group, pray the following prayer aloud:**

*God of welcome,  
be with us.  
Open our hearts  
and our hands  
to your people.  
Help us to see your world —  
broken and beautiful,  
full of your presence,  
waiting for our love —  
to reach those in need.  
Amen.*



## SHARE YOUR LOVE

The needs and the number of refugees in the world continue to grow. Lutheran World Relief teams are on the ground meeting immediate needs and planning longer-term responses as families rebuild their lives around the world. But we can't do it without you. **To care for your neighbors and share your love where it's needed most**, give online at [lwr.org/share](http://lwr.org/share) or **mail a check** to Lutheran World Relief, PO Box 17061, Baltimore, MD 21297-1061. Write **2022 Bible Study** in the memo. ■



## IMAGE DESCRIPTION

Adrianna Pogan, 26, works with the Order of Malta and is volunteering in the Krakow, Poland train station after she finishes at her full-time job. She treats Ukrainian refugees for non-life threatening illnesses and issues they may be experiencing. Many of the refugees are dehydrated and some have more serious conditions because of their long, tiring journeys from Ukraine.

## PRAYER

**Pray aloud together the following prayer:**

*Come, Lord, and open my eyes.*

*Come, Lord, and help me see with eyes of compassion, peace and justice.*

*Come, Lord, and open my eyes to your world and your people. Amen.*

## VISIO DIVINA

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**After spending time individually with the image, discuss as a group your response to the questions above.**

## BIBLE STUDY

As we continue in Matthew's parable, we'll be looking at the questions asked of the nations, and ultimately, asked of us. Every question deals with a physical aspect of a person: hunger, thirst, shelter, clothing, safety. The Bible reading is not asking how we have shared our faith in doctrine and words, but rather how we have met the needs of our neighbors.

It feels overwhelming to think about all the needs in the wake and aftermath of war in Ukraine: refugees, mental and physical health, hunger, shelter, safety. There is so much devastation, hurt, and loss. We wonder what we can do. What difference could we make? Yet, this passage invites us to see in challenging yet hopeful ways that we are called to do something. One thing. Jesus wants us to meet the people who are placed in front of us and see them. And perhaps most importantly, to see Jesus in the least of those who are all members of God's family.

**Read together Matthew 25:31-46.**

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. What words or phrases stood out to you this week in the reading?
2. Talk about a time when you received care while you were sick. What do you remember?
3. Share a time you cared for someone who was sick. What do you remember?
4. Verses 35-36 name real physical and emotional needs we all experience. Consider the video and images you have seen from the war in Ukraine. Describe the ways you have seen these needs being met (or not met).
5. Have you ever felt that you are seeing the face of Jesus as you watch or read the news? If so, please describe.

Matthew 25:31-46 demonstrates that God is with us in the mess and violence and uncertainty of life. The gift of the incarnation is found in God choosing to come into the world as a baby to know human pain and suffering. Turning our eyes to those who hurt, we turn our eyes to God and see Jesus reflected back upon us. It can be easy to turn away from those in need when we ourselves are hurting or lacking in resources. But when we open ourselves to our neighbors and see God in them, we bring God's kingdom to earth.

## MATTHEW 25:31-46

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# SEEING OUR NEIGHBORS FROM UKRAINE



From the start of the conflict, many Ukrainians have been cut off from basic health care services. Hospitals and health care workers alike have been attacked, leaving behind only destruction and hopelessness. Families in crisis situations are prioritizing their safety over their health, ignoring urgent health needs until they escape from immediate danger.

Responding to the needs of Ukrainians, Nurse Lidia Justyna Wierzbicka used her vacation time to volunteer at a refugee reception area in Poland near the border with Ukraine. Working in a medical tent where sick or distraught refugees go for help, “we see a lot of panic attacks every day,” she says. She also ensures that pregnant and nursing mothers, and children with special needs, are cared for properly.

“When I go on break and I rest, it seems to me I don’t have the strength to come back,” Lidia says. “But when I remember that if I can help at least one person and give them some comfort,

like a breastfeeding mother so that she can change her baby, strength comes back then,” she says. “And hope, that there would be fewer tears for this woman.”

Lutheran World Relief is putting your love in action by supporting health facilities in Ukraine. Through a partnership with the Order of Malta, we are providing much needed medical supplies like surgical and wound care kits, gauze, IV kits, oxygen masks, defibrillators and stretchers. We are also identifying key gaps in the availability of health services related to gender-based violence, mental health services and psychosocial services and communicable diseases. This work will be used to inform our response to support the Ministry of Health and other health care providers in Ukraine.

Lidia’s actions remind us that seeing Jesus in one person is what we are called to do. It is Lidia’s strong faith that motivates her to care for the sick. “My faith won’t let me just sit at home.”

**ABOVE:** Lidia Justyna Wierzbicka, a Polish nurse, volunteers at a medical tent in the Medyka, Poland border reception area.

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. What or who brings you comfort when you are sick?
2. Imagine yourself sick and fleeing your country. What feelings emerge?
3. How does your congregation provide care for those who are sick in your congregation? Have you ever participated in this ministry? If so, please describe.
4. Who is sick in your community? What is one small act of love you could do to help someone who is sick?

## PRAYER

**As a group, pray the following prayer aloud:**

*God of healing,  
stretch out your hands  
to the hurting and sick,  
to the new mothers and young children,  
to the elderly and immunocompromised,  
to those receiving treatments and those in need of medicine.  
God of healing,  
thank you for doctors, nurses and volunteers.  
Grant your peace,  
give your comfort  
and open our eyes  
to seeing you in all we meet.  
Amen.*



**ABOVE:** Adrianna Pogan, 26, treats Ukrainian refugees for non-life threatening illnesses and issues they face as a result of their long, tiring journeys to safety.

## SHARE YOUR LOVE

In a world of plenty, those who have the very least too often cannot access quality healthcare. Lutheran World Relief saves and improves lives in the poorest parts of the world. But we can't do it without you. **To care for your neighbors and share your love where it's needed most**, give online at [lwr.org/share](https://lwr.org/share) or **mail a check** to Lutheran World Relief, PO Box 17061, Baltimore, MD 21297-1061. Write **2022 Bible Study** in the memo. ■



## IMAGE DESCRIPTION

Haresh Solanki and four of his friends from India were living and working in Ukraine at the time of the Russian invasion. After escaping the violence and finding refuge in Poland, Haresh volunteers as a cook outside of a center receiving and providing aid for refugees at a popular border crossing location.

## PRAYER

**Pray aloud together the following prayer:**

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## BIBLE STUDY

Read Matthew 25:31-46 together one last time.

As a group, discuss the following questions:

1. After reading these verses from Matthew several times throughout this Bible study, have you found yourself recalling or reflecting upon them throughout the week? If so, how or when?
2. Are there any new words or phrases that stood out to you this week as you read the words again?

It's easy to look at this passage and feel fearful about eternal punishment when we don't live as God desires. Yet we've been reminded that the heart of this passage relies not on what we don't do, but what we can do. Throughout Matthew's Gospel there is an emphasis on discipleship — following the way of Jesus. The disciples very rarely fully understand what Jesus' life and ministry mean. Yet, they have just enough faith to follow Jesus and live as he lived. They serve others, they welcome, they pray, they stumble and they keep following. We are also invited into this way of serving God and others.

We don't need to have answers or a deep theological understanding before we act. This passage shows us concretely that we can follow Jesus not solely on what we believe, but on what we do. If we have food, we can share. If we have shelter, we can invite someone in. If we have clothes, we can give them away. We can do something for someone.

As disciples of Jesus, Matthew wants us to know that our faith in Jesus continually puts us in contact with others. The passage begins: "All the nations will be gathered." At the end of Matthew's Gospel, the word "nation" appears one more time (28:19) when the disciples are commanded to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." It can be that hard and that simple to follow Jesus: see the people in front of us and ask how we can serve them.

As a group, discuss the following questions:

1. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
2. How do you see yourself as a disciple?
3. What is one way you could grow as a follower of Jesus?

## MATTHEW 25:31-46

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# SEEING OUR NEIGHBORS FROM UKRAINE



**H**aresh Solanki and four of his friends from India were working in Ukraine when they heard that Russia might be invading soon. They drove in Haresh's sedan together to the Polish border. It took several days for them to go the short distance from Lviv to the border because there were so many refugees. Haresh and his friends saw many individuals and families sleeping on the road who had traveled by foot. There were also many people struggling to get enough gasoline for their cars in the long car line leading up to the border. Luckily, Haresh and friends had fuel cans in their trunk full of gas.

"We slept in the car, but since I was the only driver, I barely slept," he says. "By the third day, our food was gone. We'd go into gas stations to find food, but there was nothing." Haresh shared his own gasoline with others who were stranded.

Safe in Poland now, Haresh started volunteering as a cook outside of a refugee humanitarian aid center located inside of an old Tesco shopping center a few miles from the Medyka border crossing. "People like my cooking," he smiles. "Even my mother likes my cooking."

Being a refugee means relying on the kindness of strangers for food, and meals are often skipped when there are no other options. This can be especially detrimental for still developing young children. This concern can remain even

after they have made their way to physical safety, without a regular source of food.

Because of your care and generosity, Lutheran World Relief is responding to food insecurity faced by Ukrainians, both in Ukraine and in neighboring Poland. In Ukraine, your love is providing meals, along with other essential supplies and equipment, to supply 60,000 nights of shelter for people who need a place to stay and food to nourish their bodies. We're also distributing emergency cash and vouchers to more than 1,300 refugee families so that food and other essentials can be purchased.

But sadly, it's not just Ukraine, Russia and the surrounding countries that will be affected by the ongoing war. Countries like Lebanon, Yemen, and Indonesia depend on Ukraine for more than 20% of their wheat imports. Neighbors in these countries have already been dealing with food insecurity, and the destabilizing effects of the war in Ukraine will only further the need.

And so it is even more important that we remember the words of Jesus, "For I was hungry and you gave me food." As disciples of Jesus, we see the neighbors before us — and just like Haresh and his friends — we do something.

**ABOVE:** Haresh and his four friends spent four days in his car as they escaped the violence in Ukraine.

**As a group, discuss the following questions:**

1. Imagine, if you can, the feelings Haresh, his friends and the millions of Ukrainian refugees fleeing to border countries might experience. Name those feelings aloud.
2. What images stand out in your mind from Haresh's experience or those of individuals fleeing Ukraine you've seen in the news?
3. Have you ever served a meal to someone who was in need and truly hungry? What was that experience like for you? For the other person?
4. Who is someone in your community that is hungry with whom you could share a meal?

**PRAYER**

**As a group, pray the following prayer aloud:**

*God of nourishment,  
you feed your people  
with mercy and grace.  
You offer your love freely  
so that we can love others as you love us.  
As we are fed,  
help us feed others.  
Give us strength to walk with neighbors and stranger,  
offering food and drink,  
so that bodies and spirits  
may never go hungry  
but be filled.  
Amen.*



**ABOVE:** Haresh volunteers as a cook outside of a refugee humanitarian center near the Poland and Ukraine border.

**SHARE YOUR LOVE**

Lutheran World Relief is working to ensure all of God's children struggling to survive have food to eat, a safe place to stay and a chance for a brighter future. But we can't do it without you. **To care for your neighbors and share your love where it's needed most**, give online at [lwr.org/share](http://lwr.org/share) or **mail a check** to Lutheran World Relief, PO Box 17061, Baltimore, MD 21297-1061. Write **2022 Bible Study** in the memo.