I have omitted the reading from Mark since it is a parallel of the same stories. There is a good deal of merit in studying each version on its own. It is a mistake to think that these stories are simply repetitions of the same events and, therefore, the writers are telling us the same thing. However, space and time make it difficult to look at both Mark’s version and Matthew’s in one lesson. I omit notes for Luke 9:18–36 for a similar reason: it too covers the transfiguration.

There are a number of stories in the reading from Matthew, and they appear not to be given in a haphazard way. Matthew arranges them as he does for a purpose. Notice the progression from one to the other:

1. Jesus heals the Canaanite woman’s daughter (Matthew 15:21–28).
2. Then he heals many and multitudes come to him (Matthew 15:29–31).
3. He not only heals them, he feeds 4,000 (Matthew 16:32–39).
4. Having just given a miraculous sign, Jesus warns the Pharisees and Sadducees against sign seeking (Matthew 16:1–4).
5. And he tells the disciples to beware the leaven, the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:5–12).

6. Then he asks the disciples who he is, and Peter testifies that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:13–20).

7. However, when Jesus tells the disciples that he will be killed and resurrected, Peter denies that teaching and is rebuked (Matthew 16:21–23).

8. Following that rebuke, he teaches the disciples what it means to be a disciple (Matthew 16:24–28).

9. Then, taking Peter, James, and John as witnesses, Jesus is transfigured and speaks with Moses and Elijah; the Father testifies of him (Matthew 17:1–9).

10. Finally the disciples ask whether this vision of Elijah was a fulfillment of the prophecy that Elijah will come to restore all things (Malachi 3:23–24), and Jesus answers that he has already come in the person of John the Baptist, distinguishing between the prophet Elijah and the priesthood calling that has that same name. (The names Elijah and Elias are the same in Greek. We make that distinction by using the name Elijah for the prophet and Elias for the calling.)

In these stories, how do we see Jesus preparing for what is soon to come? How is he preparing the disciples? Do they understand what he is teaching, or is he teaching them something that they will understand only later, on reflection? How often do we understand only on reflection? What
does that suggest about how we should approach doctrine, revelation, and scripture?

Matthew 15

Verses 21–31: What comes before the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter, and how is that related to the story of her healing?

Matthew calls the Gentile woman who comes to Jesus a Canaanite, using an Old Testament term that doesn’t have a specific reference in New Testament times and occurs no place else in the New Testament. Why do you think Matthew uses that Old Testament name rather than a contemporary name? (Mark says that she is Greek speaking and from Syro-Phoenicia; see Mark 7:24–30.)

What do we see in the story of that healing that is similar to the second story, in which the multitudes follow Jesus to be healed? What is different?

Verses 32–39: How is the story of feeding the multitude related to the two previous stories?

What do the first three stories show us about Jesus? Does Alma 7:11–12 give any insight into these stories? What do they say to us?

Matthew 16

Verses 1–4: What does the discussion with the Pharisees and Sadducees about sign seeking have to do with the previous three stories?
Verses 5–12: The Pharisees and Sadducees were not usually in agreement. The former believed in the necessity of the Oral Law (in other words, the Pharisaic interpretation of and tradition concerning the Written Law) as well as the Written Law; the latter believed that only the Written Law was law. The former believed in the resurrection; the latter did not. The Pharisees believed that it was sinful to adopt Hellenic (Greco-Roman) culture; the Sadducees did not and for some time had been advocates of it as long as it didn’t interfere with temple worship. The former believed that the temple priesthood was corrupt; since the latter were composed primarily of temple priests, they did not.

Jesus warns against the teaching of both the Pharisees and Sadducees. Against what teaching is he warning the disciples? Think about how his warning is a response to what the Pharisees and Sadducees have just demanded and how this story fits with the stories in the previous chapter.

Verse 13: How is the warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees connected to Jesus’s question about who the disciples think he is? Why do you think Jesus asks that question at this particular point in his ministry?

Verse 14: What do these answers tell us about the apostles? Do they believe in reincarnation, for example? If not, how do you explain what they say?

Verses 15–16: The word Christ means “Messiah,” in other words “the Anointed One.” Who was anointed in Israelite history? Does the anointment implied by the title Christ have anything to do with that anointment?
In what ways does Peter’s addition of “the Son of the living God” clarify his reference to Jesus as the Christ? What might the phrase “son of God” have meant in Israelite history? Look at the use of the phrase “sons of God” and “Son of God” in the Old Testament to see whether that is helpful. What does it tell us that the Davidic king is called “son of God” three times in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalms 2:7; 89:26)?

Is Peter doing any more than saying, “You are a rightful heir of King David”? Presumably so, but how do you know? What is the connection between being the Messiah as Christianity understands Jesus and being the Davidic king?

**Verses 17–20:** Why does Jesus call Peter “Peter, son of Jonah” (bar-Jonah means “son of Jonah”)? How were Peter and Jonah alike?

As the footnote indicates, Jesus gives Peter a name, Petros, that is the masculine form of the Greek word for rock, petra. The Aramaic word would have been Cephas, also meaning “stone,” a name that occurs several times in the New Testament.

Why does he give Peter the name “rock” when Peter is going to need rebuking immediately afterward and when he knows how Peter will behave at Jesus’s trial?

We often teach that the rock Christ has in mind is the rock of Peter’s testimony. But that doesn’t seem to be the plain sense of verse 18: “Thou art Peter [“rock”], and upon this rock I will build my church.” Can you give an explanation of our interpretation, perhaps by putting it into context? Or is the plain sense the correct one: Peter is the leader on which the Church will be built?
Against what will the gates of hell not prevail, the Church or the rock? If the Church, then how do you explain the apostasy? If the rock, then how do you explain Peter’s martyrdom?

The word translated church was a general term meaning “assembly,” a place in which people met to judge cases, debate issues, and come to decisions. The word did not yet have the specific meaning that it has for us. Why do you think this word came to be the word for church as we understand it?

What are the keys of the kingdom?

Are church (verse 18) and kingdom (verse 19) parallel? If so, what does that teach us? If not, how do they differ?

Why does Jesus want to hide his messiahship from the public?

Verses 21–23: What does Peter’s denial of Jesus’s coming death suggest about his testimony?

Why does Jesus rebuke Peter so severely, calling him Satan and an offense? The name Satan comes from a Hebrew word meaning “accuser.” The word translated offense means “stumbling block.” What meaning does that add to what Jesus says?

What does Jesus mean when he says that Peter’s mind is on the things of men rather than God? The Greek word translated savourest means “to give careful attention to something,” “to set one’s mind on.”

Verses 24–26: Why is Peter’s denial of Jesus’s coming execution followed by the teaching about discipleship?
What does it mean to “take up one’s cross”? What is the image? Why does Jesus use that image in particular as an image of discipleship? Why not, instead, an image of resurrection? How do we take up the cross today?

To deny oneself, as the term is used in verse 24, seems not so much to be to give up one’s goods, but to give up one’s self. How do we do that? Why would we want to do it?

When verse 25 teaches that we ought not to try to save our lives, what does it mean? What does it mean that we must lose our lives “for my sake”? In what sense do we find our lives if we lose them for Jesus’s sake?

**Verse 27:** Is verse 27 a threat or a promise? In Romans 3:10 Paul quotes Psalm 14:1, “There is none that doeth good.” If that is true, should we fear being judged by our works?

How does the teaching of this verse follow from the teaching of verses 24–25?

**Verse 28:** How do you explain this promise to the disciples? How do you explain it when it has been given in patriarchal blessings to people who have since died?

**Matthew 17:1–13**

How do the previous eight stories lead up to the transfiguration?

**Verse 1:** Why does Jesus take Peter, James, and John to the mount to witness his transfiguration? What does that experience have to do with Jesus’s teaching about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees and with Peter’s testimony?
**Verses 2–5:** How does this incident relate to Moses’s experience on Mount Sinai? Are we supposed to see a parallel between them?

Moses and Elijah have symbolic as well as literal significance: Moses can stand for the Law (God’s first revelation of himself) and Elijah for the Prophets, the second major part of Old Testament scripture (God’s second revelation of himself). Understood that way, Jesus stands for the fulfillment of God’s revelation.

In verse 4 Peter suggests that they build tabernacles, reflecting the Feast of the Tabernacles, a commemoration of the Israelite stay at Mount Sinai. Why does he make that suggestion?

Peter is prevented from erecting tabernacles by the voice of the Father commending his Son. What might that interruption signify?

How does what the Father says differ from what he said at Jesus’s baptism? How is that difference significant to Peter, James, and John?

**Verse 7:** Why is it significant that Jesus touched them? Why did Matthew think it important to include that fact?

**Verse 9:** Why does Jesus tell the disciples not to speak of what they have seen until after the resurrection? How would it have been important to the early Church after the resurrection? Why do we need to know of the transfiguration?

**Verses 11–13:** How does the experience on the Mount of Transfiguration lead to the question about Elias? Why do you think the disciples asked that question? How do you think they understood Jesus’s answer? How do we understand it today?