



## Unfinished: Discovering God's Call in the Not Yet Palm/Passion Sunday

*Called to experience God's presence*

### Warm-up Question

*Have you ever watched a friend suffer and not been able to do anything about it? What was that like?*



Photo by [Alicia Quan](#) on [Unsplash](#)

### Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

“Near and Now” is a resource provided by the Nourishing Vocation Project through the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community at St. Olaf College. This edition is written by Linnea Peterson. They are in their mid-twenties and live in Minneapolis. They work for 1517 Media, the Publishing House of the ELCA. In their spare time, they enjoy reading, writing, and going on long walks.

## **Take, eat . . . drink**

Read [Matthew 26-27](#)

### **Bible Story Reflection**

At the church where I grew up, the junior high students put on a passion play each year on Good Friday. The play took us from Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, through the Last Supper, to Jesus' arrest, trial, torture, crucifixion, and death. Attending the play as an elementary schooler, I found it powerful, but performing in it alongside my friends when I reached junior high turned the dial up to eleven.

I remember being a seventh grader, watching my friend break bread and pour grape juice, proclaim that he would die, pray for his fate to be otherwise, be grabbed and manhandled by our confirmation classmates, stand defiantly on trial, be led away for an offstage "flogging" that echoed and resounded through the otherwise silent space, return in a robe whose back was dyed with splatters of red, carry a cross, be hoisted onto that cross, and pretend to die. This experience led me to an entirely new understanding of what the disciples must have gone through. Suddenly this wasn't some tale out of a book, a story with a glorious, predetermined ending whose plot required some suffering first; instead, it was the wrenching horror of watching your friend suffer and die while being powerless to stop it.

Rehearsing and performing the play also brought home the humanness of everyone involved in the passion story. The Garden of Gethsemane scene had to be adjusted because the kid playing Jesus had trouble kneeling. Everyone flinched during Jesus' trial because the kid playing Caiaphas really yelled their lines, transforming from an eighth grader into a terrifying authority figure. This is an embodied story about real people who got tired, who got hungry, who got scared. It is good to remember that God is present in our embodied lives, even as things are going wrong. And though death was the end of our passion play and the end of today's Bible passage, God will not allow death to have the last word.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How easy or hard is it for you to remember the humanness of the people in the Bible, especially the ones in the passion story?

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2. Does focusing on the humanness of the people involved in this story change anything about the way you see it?
3. What role do you think you would have played if you had been alive at Jesus' time in Jerusalem? A disciple? A member of the crowd? A centurion? Do you think you could have stood up for Jesus, or would you have gone along with everyone else?
4. What do you think motivated Judas to betray Jesus? Do you think there's more to his story? Does his later repentance redeem him in any way?
5. Have you ever hurt someone else to get something you wanted? Did it feel as good as you thought it would, or did you regret it afterward?
6. Why do you think Peter denied Jesus so shortly after swearing he wouldn't?
7. Have you ever been in a situation where you weren't able to be as brave as you'd hoped to be? What was that like?
8. Does it surprise you that Jesus prayed repeatedly for his fate to change? How does that affect your view of the relationship between Jesus and God the Father?
9. Have you ever been swept up in "mob mentality" or "groupthink" and gone along with something that you later realized wasn't right? What was that like?
10. Are you eager to get right to Easter now that we've heard the story of Jesus' death, or do you want to linger in this in-between space where Jesus has died and not yet risen? Do you see any spiritual or emotional benefits of experiencing the in-between space of Holy Week?

### **Activity Suggestions**

If you are with others, act out a short scene from today's Bible reading. For the participants, how does it feel to try to embody a figure from the Bible? For everyone else, how does it feel to watch these events happen to people you know?

At your next meal, reflect on the Last Supper and how it would feel to know that a meal was your last, or the last meal of someone you were eating with.

Send a text, email, or card to a friend who is going through something difficult, or give them a call.

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## **Vocare Practice**

Reflect upon your **experiences of God's presence**

- When, where, and how have I encountered or experienced the presence of God today?
- What surprised me about where I encountered or experienced the presence of God today?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

## **Prayer Concerns**

People who are near death, those who are searching for bravery, and those being unjustly punished

## **Closing Prayer**

Reveal yourself to me, O God, in the everyday experiences of my life. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

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