

Gospel

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Participants: 4-6 players + 1 game master

Genre: theological drama

Time to play: 3 - 4 hours

Version: 1.0

Introduction

Two thousand years ago a carpenter from Galilee was crucified. The impact on the world would be enormous. But not yet. Right now, only those that knew him are grieving. And the tomb has yet to open.

This is a theological drama about fate, hope, and love in which we follow Jesus and his closest confidants.

In this scenario we want to explore events that have had an enormous impact on western culture - the days leading up to Jesus' death on the cross. We do not intend for this to be a historical reenactment, nor to interpret the Bible faithfully to the letter. Instead, we wish to invite each group playing this scenario to approach the story in their own way.

Three keywords for this scenario are faith, hope and love - and we intend for these to shine through in this story. The themes we want to explore are those of faith and doubt, and the relationships between the people in this story.

Reading this manuscript

This manuscript is mainly intended for whoever wants to game master Gospel. To participate in Gospel as a player, you do not need to read this material.

If you will game master Gospel we suggest you go through the entire text before starting the game.

Some sections are written in *italics*, these are intended to be read out aloud for the players. You do not have to read them word by word, they are there to guide the players through the different parts of the game.

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Props and preparations

You can play Gospel wherever you and your players have enough space.

You will need the following props to run this game:

- ☐ Speakers, to play music
- ☐ Chairs
- ☐ Hourglass measuring 2 minutes (or other way of timing the players)
- ☐ Bowl/basin (big enough to wash one's feet in)
- ☐ Towel
- ☐ Bread
- ☐ Wine (non-alcoholic)
- ☐ Plastic cups
- ☐ Pitcher with water
- ☐ Large-ish nails, two per player
- ☐ Deck of cards
- ☐ Wet-wipes

Some things you need to prepare before the game starts:

- ☐ Prepare the scenario by cutting out the characters (see page 17)
- ☐ Make sure you can play the songs, e.g. using your phone

You will also need to prepare things before some of the scenes (more details under each scene):

- ☐ Entry into Jerusalem: Prepare by setting up water in the pitcher and plastic cups for all players
- ☐ Last supper 1: Pour lukewarm water into the basin, set up the towel and prepare wet-wipes for the player of Jesus to wash their hands with after the scene.
- ☐ Last supper 2: Prepare wine, bread and cups to be set out.

Schedule

This is an estimate of how long each part of the game will take. You can adjust this somewhat depending on how much time you have. More details on the timing of the different parts can be found through the manuscript.

Workshop (~45 min)

Game time (~2 h)

Debrief (~15 min)

Workshop

Background information

Tell the players the background of this game:

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This is a theological drama about fate, hope, and love in which we follow Jesus and his closest confidants.

In this scenario we want to explore events that have had an enormous impact on western culture - the days leading up to Jesus' death on the cross. We do not intend for this to be a historical reenactment, nor to interpret the Bible faithfully to the letter. Instead, we wish to invite each group playing this scenario to approach the story in their own way.

Three keywords for this scenario are faith, hope and love - and we intend for these to shine through in this story. The themes we want to explore are those of faith and doubt, and the relationships between the people in this story.

This game does not focus on the historical details. This is what the players will need to know:

Jesus was a Jewish carpenter who had a group of followers. He preached, among other things, faith, hope and love, and he was at odds with the establishment. He was crucified on a Friday, and, according to the Christian tradition, it was discovered the following Sunday that his grave was empty and he had risen. This story forms the basis for Christianity.

Your characters have traveled to Jerusalem and the great Temple to celebrate the Jewish Easter, Pesach (you don't have to remember this word). The Jewish Easter celebrates the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The word "Pesach" means Pass-over, and refers to the Angel of Death passing by the Israeli houses which they had marked using the blood of a sacrificed lamb, and thereby sparing the Israelite children. Up until the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, lambs were sacrificed at the Temple for Easter, which were then eaten at a feast at night. The celebration is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread to commemorate that there had been no time to let the bread rise as the Israelites left Egypt.

You don't have to remember the details, but this is the reason for your characters traveling to Jerusalem.

This scenario is not about historical reenactment, you don't have to think about what would be historically correct behavior in the scenes, etc. You also do not have to play out the story as it is told in the Bible. This story is your story about what happened, and it is set many years before the texts in the New Testament were written. There will be quotes from the Bible, in your characters and as introduction to the scenes. However, you do not have to say the lines in those quotes. They are there to give atmosphere to the scene, bring what you like and do as you please with those texts.

How the game is played

Explain the schedule of the game (see Schedule). Inform the players of any other practicalities, such as toilet breaks.

Explain the layout of the scenario:

During the game, we will alternate between monologue scenes and regular scenes. During the monologue scenes, all players except Jesus will be asked to do a short monologue on a specific theme that will be presented before each scene. The monologues are from the perspective of the character and are often based on a theme or emotion from the scene before.

We will use the hourglass to show whose turn it is to speak, and when you are done you should pass the hourglass to the next player. The hourglass should measure roughly two minutes. You don't have to use the full two minutes, but should not speak for much longer. If you are passed a half-full hourglass, turn it over when it runs out and speak a little while longer.

In the regular scenes, you all play together, most often in the whole room. Before each scene, you will get short directions on the theme and setting for the scene, and I will read a quote from the Bible relating to the scene.

The end of a scene is signaled by the lights being turned down. Please gather, sit down if you want to, and wait for the instructions for the monologue scene.

A few scenes will have a slightly different setup, and you will get clear instructions before each scene.

The general safety mechanism for this game is saying "off game". For example, if you want to stop something that is happening you say "Off game, I don't want to/let go of my arm/don't push me/etc." and go on playing the scene in a different direction.

We ask you to consider if you want to participate in the following things or not: In one of the scenes, Jesus will wash everybody's feet, and in another (non-alcoholic)

wine and bread will be served. If you do not feel comfortable having your feet washed, or if you do not want to eat or drink, you can simply say “Off game - no, I don’t want to.” in a low voice during that scene and go on playing as if your character did participate. If you already know you don’t want to participate you can say so now, but it is also okay to say it later on. However, if it is your character who does not want to participate, please make a bigger deal of it during the scene to make sure everyone catches the difference.

Open up for questions.

Energizer: Penguins and flamingos¹

In this exercise, the players are either penguins or flamingos. The exercise ends when all penguins have been turned into flamingos.

Penguins are only able to move with their feet together and arms pressed to the sides of the body, whereas flamingos can only walk slowly with long slow strides with one arm stretched out and the hand shaped like a beak. All but one player start out as penguins, the last one is a flamingo. The flamingo will hunt the penguins, walking slowly, while the penguins try to flee. When the flamingo catches up with a penguin, it will eat the penguin’s brain (with a slurping noise). This turns the penguin into a flamingo, and they will hunt the penguins together until there are no more penguins, only flamingos.

Character creation

Choosing the characters

Place the texts you cut out with the characters on a table and let the players choose freely. Someone will have to play Jesus, and we also recommend that Judas is played. Other than that, they can choose as they please.

When everyone is done, ask the players to present the characters briefly to the other players.

¹ Adapted from:

<https://workshophandbook.wordpress.com/2012/02/18/penguins-and-flamingos/>

Trust walk²

Ask the players to divide into pairs. One player will close their eyes and the other will lead them around the room, guiding them by touch, making sure they are safe. After a while, ask them to switch roles within the pair. Then ask them to switch up the pairs, and run the exercise again.

Creating memories

Ask the players to divide into groups of two or three. Within these groups, the players should come up with a short scene where their characters interact, preferably around something mundane such as Judas and Peter fishing and talking about life. The scene should be short, and can for example be timed by the two minute hourglass. Give the players a few minutes to prepare and then ask them to play the scene in-front of the others.

If you have a lot of time, switch up the groups and have them create another scene.

² Adapted from: <https://workshophandbook.wordpress.com/2012/04/14/thrust/>

The game

The game consists of seven monologue scenes and six regular scenes. After the game, you will lead an epilogue and a short debrief. All this is detailed below.

For each scene below there is a text in italics with instructions you should read out to the players before the start of the scene. For some scenes, there are also preparations to set up before the scene and instructions about music to play during the scene.

You begin the monologue scenes by asking the players to gather in a circle, read the italic text and then you hand the hourglass to one of the players, who passes it to the next when they have finished their monologue. The scene ends when everyone has had their turn. Jesus never participates in the monologues.

The regular scenes start with one Bible quote (or two, in one case) that you should read aloud to the players. You end these scenes by turning down the lights when you feel the scene has run its course, after approximately the time stated for each scene.

Some advice: While the players are engaged in one scene, make sure to have a look at the instructions for the next scene to see if there are any preparations you can do while waiting for the players to finish this scene.

Monologue 1 (10 min)

Music: Dream 0 (till break of day) - piano version, Max Richter

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/5rUOARIQzLRr0exy27jFo4?si=562ad8f003ea437f>)

Some of you have traveled with Jesus for three years now, others have joined more recently. What is it that draws you to him, what are you hoping he will be for you? What feelings does he evoke in you? What do you think about the things he says?

The theme for this monologue is: Who are you, why are you following Jesus?

Entering Jerusalem (10 min)

Theme: Hope

Preparations: Set out the water pitcher and plastic cups for all players.

This is your last break before you reach Jerusalem. You have all sat down in the shade to rest a bit and have a drink of water. You talk about what has been, and about what you expect will happen now that you reach Jerusalem, and during the Easter celebration that will follow.

The theme for this scene is hope.

Luke 19:37 - As he was drawing near, already on the way down the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

Monologue 2 (10 min)

What do you feel for these people in this very moment, just outside the walls of Jerusalem?

Cleansing the Temple (2-4 min)

Theme: righteous anger

Preparations: Set up plastic cups (to wreck) all over the place. If possible, set up more things that the players can turn over and throw down without actually breaking anything.

Music: Bomb track - Rage against the machine

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/2rBHnIxbhkMGLpqmsNX91M?si=065e2033e6af4f01>)

You arrive at the great temple of Jerusalem, and you see that it is full of merchants and commerce. They have made a den of thieves out of the holy temple!

The theme for this scene is righteous anger. Let it fill you. They have destroyed the holiest of holy, but you can change that! Wreck everything! Mosh-pit, scream, throw and crumple the cups. Scream and rage! And celebrate together that you have cleansed the Temple.

There will be music during this scene, when the music ends, the scene ends. The music is about 4 minutes long, so go wild!

Matthew 21:12 - And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

Monologue 3 (10 min)

Look at each other and let the feeling of your communal strength fill you. Give a monologue on what you could accomplish together and of the difference you could make.

The Last Supper 1 (15 min)

Theme: Love and communality

Preparations: Make sure to have lukewarm water in a basin, and a towel ready. Prepare at least one chair. Have the wet-wipes ready for the player of Jesus to wash their hands after the scene.

Start preparing for the Easter meal, talk of life and of the coming celebration. When all has been made ready, Jesus will wash the feet of each of you. The theme of this scene is love and community.

John 13:4 - [Jesus] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Monologue 5 (10 min)

Sit or stand, back to back. Feel the person right there, next to you. Feel their breath. Do a monologue on what love and community means to you, here at the Easter supper.

The last supper 2 (10 min)

Theme: faith, and loving without reserve

Preparations: Prepare bread, wine, water, and cups.

Eat and drink together. Pour wine and break bread. The mood is both gentle and charged with meaning. The themes of this scene are faith, and loving without reserve.

Luke 22:19 - And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood [...]"

John 13:33 - "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Monologue 5 (10 min)

Stand in a circle and hold each other's hands. In this monologue, tell of your faith and what this new covenant means to you. What is the new commandment of love to you?

The garden of Gethsemane (5 min)

Theme: Doubt

Music: Devil is Fine, Zeal & Ardor

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/2CaZCVH2Z79ABFcsHzUU6y?si=0de82e0ebfd24fae>)

Preparations: If Judas is not played, draw lots among all players except Jesus to see who will play Judas for this one scene. Take one black card and as many red cards you need from the deck until you have as many cards as you have players (exempting Jesus). The person drawing the black card plays Judas in this scene.

In this scene, all players but Judas' will portray Jesus' doubts. The person playing Judas will wait to the side until the game master signals that they should enter. They will then play a short scene with Jesus ending in the betrayal.

Stand up. It is night, and everyone has gone to sleep in the olive grove. The disciples are sleeping, but Jesus is awake and wrestling with his doubts. In this scene everyone who is not playing Jesus or Judas will portrait Jesus' doubts. You will attack and question Jesus. Jesus gets to defend himself as best he can.

The night ends when Judas enters the scene. Jesus and Judas will play a short scene that ends with Judas betraying Jesus by kissing him on the cheek.

The theme of this scene is doubt.

Matthew 26:36 - Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Monologue 6 (10 min)

In this monologue, talk about what would make you betray or deny Jesus. What would the devil tempt you with to get you to choose a different path?

The Crucifixion (10 min)

Theme: hope and despair

Preparations: Prepare two nails per player

In this scene you first hand the nails to the players and then in turn put your hand on the head of each player to give them the word. Let Jesus be the last to speak - for the

rest, pick whichever order you deem best. If need be, prompt the players by supplying the phrase “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In this scene everyone will experience being crucified, as their own character, even though it was only Jesus who was crucified. Hold a nail in each hand and stand with your arms outstretched and close your eyes. Hold your arms out for as long as you feel it is ok, or until the scene ends. I will put a hand on your head, and then you will say “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” and do a short monologue on your character’s despair, abandonment, broken dreams and shattered hopes. The sit down. If you forget the line “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, just ask and I will whisper the line to you.

The theme of this scene is hope and despair.

Matthew 27:42 - He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’

Monologue 7 (10 min)

Preparations: Prepare the deck of cards. At the start of the scene, pass the deck to the players so that they can choose a red or a black card.

Music: Panoptikon Omnia Citra Mortem, Maria W Horn

(<https://open.spotify.com/track/5AADoPkUGorRoPKDUrGbi9?si=723f7e1c117c431e>)

Let the music continue into the Epilogue.

It is now Easter morning, and you are walking towards the grave. You do not know what awaits you. Is the grave empty, or is the body of Jesus still there?

I will now pass around a deck of cards. Choose a red or a black card. A red card means that when you arrive the grave is empty, a black card means that the body is still there. Pick one, without showing it to the others, to represent what your character sees when they arrive.

In this monologue, talk about what these people and your time together meant to you.

Epilogue

The game is now over. We will let the music continue playing. Take a minute or so, and when you are ready come and join the circle. When we turn off the music, the game is over.

When everyone has gathered in the circle, ask the players to show which card they chose.

One by one, show the card you chose. You do not have to motivate or defend your choice, but you may talk about it briefly if you want to.

Debrief

After the game has ended we suggest that you as the game master conduct a short structured debrief. We suggest you do the following:

- Going round in a circle, ask the players to one by one say something how they feel now that the game is over.

If you want to go around the circle more times with other questions feel free to do so. Then open up for a general, open discussion, if you want to.

Acknowledgements

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Characters

Jesus

Luke 5:8 - But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus ' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Themes: God and man

You are a carpenter from Galilee who gathered a large following and challenged the authorities view on what faith is and came be. You were crucified during the Easter celebrations in Jerusalem, and in the coming centuries you will be known as the messiah, the son of God. In this character you will explore the human behind the messiah.

Instructions: You will not be giving monologues during the monologue scenes. You should be careful not to dominate the game, but still clearly take the role of the leader in the group. During the last supper scene you will wash the other's feet, you need to be comfortable with that level of physical intimacy.

Judas Iscariot

Matthew 26:14 - Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.

Theme: Disappointment and betrayal

You will go down in history as the one of Jesus' disciples who betrayed him, but before that you were his follower. This character is about exploring what leads you to this treachery.

Instructions: You have to betray Jesus at the end of the scene in Gethsemane.

Peter

Matthew 16:18 - And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Themes: Faithfulness and betrayal

You are a fisherman from Galilee who became a follower of a man you met on the beach. You were one of his closest, his rock: but on the day he died, you denied knowing him. This character is about that conflict.

Mary Magdalene

Luke 7:37 - And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Themes: Sin and absolution

You are a woman who has been outcast and detested by the community, even so you have been accepted as one of Jesus' followers. This character deals with forgiveness, and who is worthy of it.

Martha

Luke 10:40 - But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Themes: The every day and the holy

You are a woman who received a man from Galilee in your and your siblings' house. After this you choose to follow him. You take care of the everyday practicalities, the things that in your opinion needs to be done here and now. This character deals with the conflict between preparedness and trust. Can you let go of the demands to take care of everything and trust that the Lord will look after his own?

Simon

Matthew 10:21 - Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name 's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Themes: Righteous wrath and revolution

You follow the carpenter from Galilee for the hope he brings of change, about an uprising of the people and the promise of a new era. This character is about what hope does to a human, and what happens when it falters.

Thomas

John 20:24 - Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Themes: Faith and doubt

You follow a carpenter from Galilee that speaks of change and a new era. Do you dare to believe in him, and in all that they say he is? This character is about what ground faith rests on.

John

John 1:35 The next day again John [the Baptist] was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

Themes: Duty and love

You used to be the disciple of John the Baptist, but you left him for the carpenter from Galilee. You will go down in history as one of his most beloved and dutiful followers - why is that? This character is about duty and love.