

An imaginative contemplation of the gospel reading for Vocation Sunday.

There is a long tradition in Christian prayer of seeking to put ourselves into the gospel passage – to imagine what it would be like to be there, to see Jesus, to hear the disciples chatting amongst themselves, to feel the dirt in our sandals.

This kind of prayer can bring us very close to Jesus and by allowing God to use our imagination, we can sometimes hear God's voice more clearly.

It's not a Bible study – we're not seeking historical accuracy nor analysing the text (that absolutely has its place but it's not we're doing here).

We are seeking God's word for us as we put our imagination at God's disposal.

You might like to try this out for yourself using the gospel reading for Vocation Sunday:

John 10:22-30

Read the Passage

The first thing to do is to read the passage through a few times. It's not too long.

Then when you actually settle to pray you can put the passage to one side because you already have the story in your head:

John 10:22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. Jesus answered, I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.

Prepare

When you are ready to pray, don't rush into it. After all, you are about to come consciously into the presence of God, the Holy One who made heaven and earth, yet who cares about the tiniest detail – even numbering the hairs on your head!

Trust yourself to God who cares about each person, who cares about **you** and is inviting you into a deeper relationship.



So pause for a moment. Find a quiet space. Turn the phone off.

Maybe light a candle or place a Bible in front of you.

Ask God for what it is you desire – to know more clearly what God is calling you to – what work might he be inviting you to undertake with him; or simply to come closer to Jesus.

Take some time to leave behind the activity of the day and to still the busy thoughts of your mind. Take a few good, deep breaths - breathing in what you need for life; breathing out all that you no longer need.

Picture the scene

When you are ready, allow the gospel scene to take shape in your imagination (close your eyes if it helps):

It was Winter – How does the sky look? What's the weather like? Is it windy, rainy or dry, cold or warm? Take your time.

Jesus was walking in the temple – Look around you at the temple. What can you see and hear? What can you smell? Reach out and touch something in your imagination – a temple pillar, a leaf, a fold of cloth. Again, take your time.

Jews gathered around him – Allow yourself to build a picture of the people around Jesus. Don't worry about historical detail...they might be wearing what you see in Bible pictures or they might be wearing jeans and a hoodie. There is no right or wrong – allow your imagination some freedom. Some people see the scene vividly and clearly. Others have more of a vague impression.

Place yourself in the scene

Take your own place in the unfolding scene.

Where are you in the temple? Are you involved in the action, or watching from the sidelines?

Look at Jesus. Listen to him. Let the story develop.

Spend time there in the temple with Jesus and with those gathered around him.

How do you feel when you look at Jesus, hear him, spend time around him?

How do you respond to what he is saying?

Maybe you find your imagination engaging with the sheep rather than the temple.

That's fine – allow what happens to happen.

Remain in the scene until you feel the time comes naturally to a close.



Speak to Jesus

You may have found yourself having a conversation with Jesus in the temple. But you may like to have a conversation with him afterwards, having finished the imaginative prayer. What do you want to say to him after spending time with him in the temple, having listened to what he was saying?

Talk to Jesus as you might talk with a friend. What does he say to you?

Bring your prayer to an end

End your time of prayer in a way that feels natural to you.

You might like to say the Lord's Prayer, or simply to stand and bow – something that marks the end of your prayer time.

Make some notes

Often it can be helpful to make some notes as you look back over your time of prayer.

You might want to grab a cuppa before doing this – just to mark the move from your prayer into a different frame of mind.

Note down anything which particularly moved you, anything of significance or anything you found difficult. Notice whether there's anything which feels unfinished or to which you would like to return next time you pray.

Over time your notes might show a direction of travel, or there might be themes emerging which prompt you to action.

However the time was for you – whether easy or difficult, fruitful or apparently dry, thank God for it and go into the rest of your day with gratitude.

