

CHRIST INTERRUPTS A FUNERAL

One word from Jesus, and death lets go.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Student handouts, one per child
- Pencils
- A whiteboard, divided into two columns before class starts
- Bibles, one per student or one per pair, since they will look up Genesis, Romans, and 1 Kings themselves

THE TEXT

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

FOR THE TEACHER

This is the level where your students start asking why, and this text has a why worth chasing all the way back to Genesis.

Here is the argument you are making today, in four moves. God made people to live. Death came in as a punishment, exactly as God said in the Garden. It has been claiming everyone ever since, and it is claiming the boy on the bier. Then Jesus walks up and ends it with four words.

Do not let the room settle for "Jesus is powerful." Power is not the point. A prophet can be powerful. The crowd says "a great prophet has arisen among us," and they are not wrong, they are just short. Elijah raised a widow's son and so did Elisha, and both of them prayed and pleaded and stretched themselves out over the body. Jesus does not pray. He gives an order. That difference is the doctrine.

Your students will already have absorbed the idea that death is a natural part of life. They will have heard it in a movie, at a funeral, from a well-meaning adult. Contradict it directly. Death is an intruder. It is the wage sin earns. That is why we hate it, and it is why God is not fond of it either.

One caution. Do not let this turn into a lesson about how the widow deserved help, or about how sad she was, as though her grief moved Jesus to act by its own weight. He acts because He is compassionate, not because she qualified.

LAW AND GOSPEL IN THIS TEXT

The Law. We were created by God to live forever. In the Garden of Eden, there was no death, but the devil came along and tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and the punishment was severe: "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The Gospel. From Adam and Eve, all the way to us, death claims us because we are sinners, but Jesus comes to free us from sin, death, and the devil. We see it beautifully when he stops this funeral: the boy in the coffin, with his grieving mother, and with a simple word, Jesus undoes death. "Arise," he says, and the boy is alive again.

That's the same voice that will speak on the last day, when Jesus returns and says to us and to all his beloved dead, "Arise." The reign of death is ended, and we will live with Jesus in the new heaven and the new earth forever.

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

Get the facts on the table before you interpret anything.

Jesus goes to a town called Nain with His disciples and a large crowd. At the gate He meets a funeral procession coming out. The dead man is an only son. His mother is a widow, which in that world means she has just lost her last provider along with her last child. A considerable crowd from the town is with her.

Jesus sees her. He has compassion. He says, "Do not weep." He touches the bier and the bearers stop. He says, "Young man, I say to you, arise." The dead man sits up and speaks. Jesus gives him to his mother. Fear falls on everyone, they glorify God, and the report spreads through Judea.

Ask: how many people asked Jesus for anything in that account? None.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Three things, and take them in order.

Jesus is God. The crowd calls Him a prophet and Luke immediately reports the fuller confession: "God has visited his people." A prophet asks God to act. Jesus acts. Compare 1 Kings 17:20-22 if you have time, where Elijah cries out to the Lord and stretches himself over the child three times.

The touch runs backward. Under the ceremonial law, contact with a corpse made you unclean. Jesus touches the bier and no uncleanness transfers to Him. Life transfers out of Him instead. This is what He does with everything He touches that is unclean or dead or under judgment.

This is a preview, not the main event. That young man died again eventually. What Jesus did at Nain is a small, local, temporary picture of what He will do permanently and universally on the last day.

WHAT DOES IT DEMAND, AND WHAT DOES IT GIVE?

This is your level's own question, and this text answers it cleanly.

What it demands. Have them look up Genesis 2:17 and read it aloud. Then Romans 6:23 and read that aloud. Put the demand plainly: the wage for sin is death, the debt is real, and it falls on every single person, including everyone in this room. The widow could not stop it. The crowd could not stop it. Medicine could not stop it. Being a good person does not exempt anyone. If the lesson stopped here it would be true and it would be unbearable.

What it gives. It does not stop here. Look at the second half of Romans 6:23 with them, out loud, and notice that Paul does not say wages twice. Death is what we earn. Eternal life is a free gift. At the gate of Nain the widow pays nothing, asks nothing, and earns nothing, and she gets her son back alive. That is the shape of everything God gives.

Land it here: what the Law demands, Christ gives away.

THE LESSON

1 • The Classroom Opening (8 min)

Invocation: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Sing stanza 6 of LSB 578, "Thy Strong Word," printed on the student handout.

Recite together the Third Article of the Creed, printed below in From the Small Catechism.

Then pray the Opening Prayer.

The Opening Prayer. O Lord Jesus Christ, who met a widow at the gate of Nain and would not walk past her grief, but touched the bier and called her only son out of death by Your word alone: bless our study of Your Word this day, that we who hear it may know You to be the Lord of life, and grant us to bring our own dead and our own dying to You without fear, waiting for the day You will speak that same word over all who sleep in You; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

2 • Read and mark the text (8 min)

Read Luke 7:11-17 aloud together from the handout. Have them circle every verb that belongs to Jesus: went, drew near, saw, had compassion, said, came up, touched, said, gave. Nine actions, and only two of them are words.

3 • Two words of God (15 min)

This is the heart of the hour. Put two headings on the board.

Left column: "You shall surely die." Have a student read Genesis 2:17 aloud. Ask what God said would happen. Ask whether it happened. Write under the heading everything death has taken in this story: a husband, a son, a future, a household.

Right column: "Young man, I say to you, arise." Read Luke 7:14 aloud. Ask what Jesus said would happen. Ask whether it happened.

Then the question that makes the lesson: whose voice is in each column? The same God speaks both sentences. He means both. The first one is what our sin earned. The second one is what He gives us anyway.

4 • The wage and the gift (10 min)

Turn to Romans 6:23 and read it in halves, first half and second half, with the room split. Ask what a wage is. Ask what a gift is. Ask which one you can quit earning. Work the difference until they can say it back: death is paid to us, life is given to us.

5 • Elijah and Jesus (5 min)

Have a student read 1 Kings 17:20-22 aloud. Elijah is standing over a widow's dead son too, in almost the same situation.

Ask what Elijah does. He cries out to the Lord. He stretches himself over the boy three times. He begs.

Now read Luke 7:14 again. Ask what Jesus does. He says four words.

Then the question: why is Elijah asking and Jesus telling? Because Elijah is a prophet, and a prophet has to ask God to act. Jesus does not have to ask, because He is God. That is exactly what the crowd half missed when they called Him "a great prophet."

6 • Memory work (7 min)

Romans 6:23, whole verse. Say it together three times. Then erase words from the board one phrase at a time and have them fill the gaps from memory.

7 • The Classroom Closing (7 min)

Closing Prayer, then the Lord's Prayer together, then the Apostolic Benediction.

WHAT CHILDREN ASK

"If Jesus beat death, why do Christians still die?" Because the last day has not come yet. Christ has broken death the way a general breaks an army that has not surrendered yet. Christians die, and then they get up. Paul calls death the last enemy to be destroyed, which means it is on the list.

"Was the boy in heaven, and did Jesus make him come back?" Scripture does not tell us where he was, and we should not invent an answer. Notice what Luke reports and what he leaves out.

"Why did Jesus say don't cry? Crying is normal." He is not scolding her. He is telling her the reason for the crying is about to be removed. Ten seconds later she has her son. Jesus Himself wept at a grave in John 11.

"Is it a sin to be afraid of dying?" Nobody wants to die. It seems like a very scary thing, but Jesus was not afraid to die, and He promises to be with us in death and take us to eternal life. Jesus helps us to not be afraid of death.

FROM THE SMALL CATECHISM

The Third Article. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

Point out the exact words "the resurrection of the body." The Creed does not say the survival of the soul. It says bodies come out of graves.

The Second Article stands behind it: "The third day He rose again from the dead." Jesus does not raise the dead as an outsider to death. He raises the dead as the one who went into it and came out.

MEMORY WORK & HYMN

Memory Work. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23 ESV)

Hymn. LSB 578, "Thy Strong Word," stanza 6, the block hymn through October 11. Sung in the Classroom Opening and printed on the student handout.

God the Father, light-creator, To Thee laud and honor be. To Thee, Light of Light begotten, Praise be sung eternally. Holy Spirit, light-revealer, Glory, glory be to Thee. Mortals, angels, now and ever Praise the holy Trinity!

Franzmann spends the hymn on a Word that accomplishes what it announces rather than merely reporting on things. Hold that next to Luke 7:14. Jesus does not describe the boy as alive. He says "arise," and because of who is speaking, it is so.

The last stanza answers the question the rest of the hymn raises: who is speaking? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, named one at a time. "Light of Light begotten" says the Son is God of God, not a creature sent on an errand, which is exactly what the crowd at Nain half missed when they settled for "a great prophet." "Holy Spirit, light-revealer" is the One our Third Article says will raise us on the last day.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Lord of life. We have earned death and You have given us life instead, without our asking and without our paying. Teach us to hate death the way You hate it, and to be unafraid of it the way You are. Keep us in the faith, and on the last day call us out of our graves as You called the young man at Nain. Amen.

Then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Then close with the Apostolic Benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen."

CREDITS

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These Sunday School Lessons are built especially for St. Paul Lutheran Church by Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller with Claude AI on the same Sunday Gospel Lesson.

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