

CHRIST INTERRUPTS A FUNERAL

One word from Jesus, and death lets go.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Student handouts, one per student
- Pencils
- A whiteboard
- Bibles, one per student, since they will be turning to Genesis, Romans, and 1 Corinthians

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

Your room has a standing rule, and it holds today. The Bible gives us wonderful truths about God, and about everything in the world. But a great many other ideas are out there, and different people think different things. So we compare what the Bible says with what other people say, and we test the claims the Bible makes to see how true they are.

Say it that way, and mean it. Testing a claim is not the same as doubting it, and the difference is worth keeping clear. We test the Bible's claims because they hold up, not because the outcome is open. The Lord has answered these questions, and our job today is to find out how.

The claim on the table is large: death is not a natural feature of the world, and Jesus of Nazareth commands it. Your students are surrounded by the opposite claim, usually in a gentle form. Death is part of the circle of life. Everything that lives dies and that is beautiful. It is on greeting cards and in nature documentaries and at most funerals they have attended.

The Christian answer is blunt. Death is an intruder, it is a wage, and God has scheduled its destruction. Paul calls it the last enemy. Not the last transition, not the last chapter. Enemy.

One more thing to get right. A student may name a real loss today. If someone moves from arguing to disclosing, that is a Discussion Guardrails situation, not a debate to win. See below.

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?

Establish the facts before anyone interprets. Luke is specific in a way that matters: a named town, a named relationship, a quoted crowd, a report that spread through a region where it could be checked.

Two processions meet at the gate of Nain. One is a funeral for an only son whose mother is already a widow. The other is Jesus with His disciples and a great crowd. Jesus sees her, has compassion, tells her not to weep, touches the bier, and orders the dead man to rise. He does. He speaks. Jesus hands him back to his mother. Fear falls on everyone and the report spreads through the whole of Judea.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Jesus does not petition. Elijah in 1 Kings 17 cries out to the Lord and stretches himself over the boy three times. Elisha in 2 Kings 4 prays and lies on the child. Jesus gives a command to a corpse and is obeyed.

Luke sets the crowd's two sentences side by side deliberately. "A great prophet has arisen among us" is true and insufficient. "God has visited his people" is the report Luke wants you to leave with. This account is not primarily about power. It is about who Jesus is.

WHAT DOES IT DEMAND, AND WHAT DOES IT GIVE?

Demand. Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23. Death is the wage sin earns, and the debt is universal. Nobody in the account can do anything about the boy on the bier, and nobody in your room can do anything about their own death.

Gift. The second half of Romans 6:23. Not a smaller wage, a different category entirely. The widow asks for nothing, pays nothing, and earns nothing.

WHAT DOES THIS TEXT CLAIM, AND HOW DOES THE LORD ANSWER THOSE WHO DENY IT?

The claim, stated as sharply as you can put it. Jesus of Nazareth is God in the flesh, death is a punishment rather than a feature of nature, and death takes orders from Him.

Denial one: death is natural. This is the common one and it usually arrives sounding wise. Everything dies, it is the circle of life, it is what makes life precious.

How the Lord answers. Genesis 2:17 says death entered as a sentence. Romans 6:23 calls it a wage. 1 Corinthians 15:26 names it an enemy scheduled for destruction. If death were natural, God would be destroying part of His own good creation on the last day. Instead He destroys an intruder. Ask your room: if death is natural and good, why does every human culture treat a funeral as a wound?

Denial two: this did not happen. Ancient people made up miracle stories. Let students put the objection at full strength before you answer it.

How the Lord answers. Notice Luke's method in Luke 1:1-4. He claims to have investigated and to be writing an orderly account for a named reader. He gives a town, a crowd, a family situation, and a report that spread through a whole region within living memory of people who could contradict it. That is not the shape of a legend. This does not close the argument in twelve minutes, and you should not pretend it does. It shows that the question can be taken seriously rather than waved off in either direction.

Denial three: he was not really dead. A common modern move.

How the Lord answers. The text does not leave room. He was being carried out for burial by people who had prepared his body, in a culture that buried its dead the same day and knew exactly what a corpse was. Luke calls him "the dead man" in verse 15, after he sits up.

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 locate the claim (7 min)

Read the text aloud. Then ask them to state, in one sentence, the biggest thing this account claims about Jesus. Write their attempts on the board and sharpen toward: Jesus is God, and death obeys Him.

3 • Is death natural? (15 min)

Put the sentence on the board: "**Death is a natural part of life.**" Give them five minutes to argue it from both sides before you weigh in at all. Let the strongest version get said out loud.

Then work the three passages in order: Genesis 2:17, Romans 6:23, 1 Corinthians 15:26. Ask what each one calls death. A sentence. A wage. An enemy.

Land it: Christianity is the one account of the world that lets you hate death honestly and still have hope. Every other answer asks you to either pretend death is fine or pretend hope is impossible.

4 • Prophet or God? (10 min)

Turn to 1 Kings 17:20-22 and read what Elijah does. Then read Luke 7:14 again. Ask what is missing from the Nain account that is present in the Elijah account. No prayer. No pleading. No intermediary.

Then verse 16. Two sentences from the crowd. Ask which one Luke leaves you holding.

5 • Was he really dead? (7 min)

Put the third denial to the room directly: he was not really dead, he was unconscious, and the heat and the hurry did the rest.

Let them build the case for it before you answer. Then work the text against it. He is being carried out for burial, by people who prepared the body themselves. The burial is the same day, which is what that culture did. A whole town is walking in the procession, and none of them thought he might still be breathing. Luke still calls him "the dead man" in verse 15, in the same sentence where he sits up.

Then ask the harder question underneath it. If we decide in advance that a man cannot be raised, what do we do with any report that he was? Notice that the objection is not weighing the evidence. It is ruling out the conclusion before the evidence is read.

6 • Memory work (7 min)

Romans 6:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:26. Say each three times. Then ask which of the two is Law and which is Gospel, and make them defend the answer, since Romans 6:23 is both in one verse.

7 • The Classroom Closing (6 min)

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

WHAT CHILDREN ASK

"If Jesus is God, why does He pray to the Father anywhere else?" Because He is true God and true man, one person with two natures. Name that as the shape of the answer, say it will come up repeatedly this year, and do not try to finish the doctrine of the two natures in four minutes.

"Why doesn't Jesus do this now? People die every day." He is going to, and all at once. What He did at Nain He will do for everyone who is His, on the last day. The delay is not indifference. Ask them to read 2 Peter 3:9 this week.

"My grandfather died and nobody stopped that funeral." This is the question under most of the others. Do not answer it with an argument. Say that Christ has not walked past that funeral either, that He has promised to call your grandfather out of the grave by name, and that the promise is for a day that has not come yet. Then tell Pastor Wolfmueller or Pastor Davis.

"Is heaven where we stay forever?" No, and this is worth correcting now rather than later. Those who die in Christ are with Him, which Scripture calls better by far. But the last day is a resurrection, not a permanent arrangement in the clouds. Bodies come out of graves and God makes a new heaven and a new earth.

FROM THE SMALL CATECHISM

The Second Article. "The third day He rose again from the dead."

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.

The order matters and Scripture sets it, not the Creed. The Creed says it back to us carefully. Christ raises the dead at Nain. Christ is Himself raised on the third day. Therefore the Spirit will raise all the dead and give eternal life.

Each one rests on the one before it.

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)

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:26 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 is writing about a Word that performs what it says. Hold the hymn next to Luke 7:14 and ask the room to name the difference between a word that describes and a word that does.

Then ask a second question, which is the better one. A hymn about God's strong word ends by naming the Trinity rather than the word. Why? Because a word is only as strong as whoever speaks it, and the last stanza finally says out loud who that is. "Light of Light begotten" is a deliberate claim that the Son is God of God. It is the answer to the crowd in verse 16, who settled for "a great prophet."

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, You are God, and death is Your servant and not Your equal. We confess that death is our own wage and that You have paid it. Give us honest grief and unembarrassed hope. Guard us from every teaching that makes death out to be harmless or final, and raise us up on the last day, body and soul, with all Your beloved dead. 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."

DISCUSSION GUARDRAILS

Questions are wanted, and so is real testing. Keep the standing rule as it is: we compare what the Bible says with what other people say, and we test the Bible's claims to see how true they are. Let a hard question be asked at full strength, because the claims hold up under real weight.

Keep the difference between arguing and disclosing. A student pressing the hardest version of "this never happened" is doing what you asked. A student who quietly says they are not sure they believe any of it, and means it about themselves, has changed the register. Do not treat that as a debate to win and do not diagnose it in front of the room. Take it seriously, say something short and true, and follow up privately.

Anything unresolved goes to Pastor Wolfmuehler or Pastor Davis. Especially anything touching a recent death in a family, and especially if a student sounds frightened rather than curious.

Do not let a student leave under the Law. If the hour has spent twenty minutes on death as the wage of sin, spend the last five on the gift. The order is not decorative. End on Christ.

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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