

CHRIST INTERRUPTS A FUNERAL

One word from Jesus, and death lets go.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Student handouts, one per student
- Bibles, one per student
- A whiteboard
- Nothing else. This hour is discussion, and the room should be able to see each other

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

The standing rule holds. The Bible gives us wonderful truths about God, and about everything in the world. 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. Push for the strongest form of every objection rather than the polite version, because a claim that is actually true survives real testing.

The work of this hour is one word in the Creed that your students say every week and have probably never noticed. Body. "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Not the survival of the soul, not the immortality of the spirit, not a better place. Bodies, out of graves.

Almost every alternative on offer to your students agrees that something survives death and disagrees about whether the body matters. That is the fault line, and it runs through ancient gnosticism, through several Eastern religions, and through the sentimental spirituality of American funerals, which is where your students actually meet it. They have heard "she is free of her body now" at a graveside and nobody corrected it.

Be careful and be fair here. Describe these positions accurately and charitably before you draw the difference. A Hindu or Buddhist account of release from the cycle of rebirth is a serious, coherent answer to suffering, held by serious people, and your students may have friends who hold it. Misrepresenting it teaches them that Christianity needs a straw man, which is the opposite of what this room is for. State the other position as its own adherents would recognize it, then say plainly where the Christian confession parts ways and why.

Watch one more thing. The materialist denial comes from the other direction and is probably more common in your room than any Eastern one. Nothing survives, this account is a legend, and the comfort is a coping mechanism. Take it at full strength too.

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?

Two processions meet at the gate of Nain. Luke gives the details a witness gives: the town, the crowd size, the family situation, the exact words. Jesus sees the widow, has compassion, tells her not to weep, touches the bier, and commands the dead man to rise. He sits up and speaks. Jesus gives him to his mother. Fear falls on the crowd, they glorify God, and the report spreads through Judea.

Nobody petitions Him. That is the first thing worth noticing and the easiest to miss.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Jesus commands rather than prays. Elijah and Elisha each raised a widow's son, and both interceded and lay across the body. Jesus speaks four words to a corpse and is obeyed. Luke reports the crowd's half-confession, "a great prophet has arisen among us," and then the fuller one, "God has visited his people," and leaves the reader holding the second.

The touch is the other thing. Under Numbers 19, contact with a corpse defiles. Here the transfer runs the other way. This is the pattern of the incarnation in miniature: God takes hold of what is unclean and dead, and it is the uncleanness that gives way.

WHAT DOES IT DEMAND, AND WHAT DOES IT GIVE?

Demand. Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23. Death is a sentence and a wage, universal and unpayable. Nobody at that gate had any leverage over it.

Gift. The second half of Romans 6:23 changes the category. The widow asks nothing, pays nothing, earns nothing, and receives her son alive. Grace is not a smaller wage.

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

The claim. Jesus of Nazareth is God in the flesh. Death is a punishment for sin rather than a feature of creation. It obeys Him, and He will destroy it.

Denied as legend. Luke 1:1-4 is the answer to start with: a stated method, an investigation, a named recipient, and verifiable public detail in a region where contradiction was possible. That does not end the argument and you should not pretend it does. It moves the objection from an assumption to a question that can be examined.

Denied as impossible in principle. If a student says the resurrection cannot happen because nothing like it happens, notice that the argument assumes its conclusion. Nobody claims this is ordinary. The claim is that God did something, once, on purpose.

Denied as unnecessary. The most common form: something survives, so the body is beside the point. That is the next section.

WHO DENIES THIS, AND HOW IS IT CONFESSED TO THEM?

Work these in order, and be accurate about each before you answer it.

Ancient gnosticism. Matter is a prison, the spirit is the real self, and salvation is escape from the body. It taught that Christ only appeared to have flesh, because God would not soil Himself with matter. The Church answered it in the Creed with two flat sentences. He was "born of the virgin Mary," and we look for "the resurrection of the body." Both are anti-gnostic on purpose.

The funeral-parlour version. Your students have heard it: she is free of her body now, he is an angel, she is at peace somewhere. It is meant kindly and it is not the Christian hope. Confess it gently: the body in that casket is not discarded packaging, it is part of the person God made and part of the person God will raise.

Eastern religion. Hindu and Buddhist traditions hold that rebirth binds a person to suffering and that release, moksha or nirvana, is liberation from the cycle and from individual embodied existence. Stated fairly, that is a coherent and serious diagnosis: existence in a body is the problem, and the goal is to be free of it. The Christian confession diagnoses the opposite. Embodiment is not the problem. Sin is. The goal is not release from the body but the redemption of it. Christ did not come to get us out of our bodies. He got into one, permanently, and He has it still.

Materialism. Nothing survives, and the comfort is a story we tell. Confess to this one by taking its honesty seriously. It is at least not sentimental about death. Then point at the empty tomb, which is a claim about a body in a specific place at a specific time, and is either true or false rather than comforting.

How it is confessed, in one sentence. We do not believe that we go on. We believe that we are raised. Job says it in a single line, and that line is the memory work below.

THE LESSON

1 • The Classroom Opening (7 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.

Then pray the Opening Prayer. There is no catechism recitation at this level.

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 review the text (5 min)

Read Luke 7:11-17 aloud together. Then walk back through it and make sure the room has the facts in hand before any argument starts. Who is in each procession. What the widow has lost. Who asks Jesus for anything. What He

touches. What He says, and what happens next.

3 · The word *nobody* notices (10 min)

Have the room say the Third Article from memory. Then put it on the board and ask what noun follows "the resurrection of the." Let them sit with it.

Ask directly: what would change if the Creed said "the immortality of the soul" instead? Take answers before you supply any.

4 · Four denials (20 min)

Take the four positions in the section above, roughly five minutes each. For each one, have a student state it as strongly and as fairly as they can before anyone answers it. Do not let a caricature stand, including a caricature of a religion somebody's friend actually practices.

Then ask, each time: what does the Christian confession say instead, and where does it say it?

5 · Job at the graveside (8 min)

Read Job 19:25-27 aloud. Ask what Job expects to happen to his skin, and what he expects to see, and with what.

Then 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. Ask what is sown and what is raised. Same body, changed, not swapped for a different kind of thing.

6 · The gate again (5 min)

Return to Luke 7. The boy sat up and began to speak. A body, doing what bodies do. Then Jesus gave him to his mother, which required arms.

7 · The Classroom Closing (5 min)

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

FROM THE SMALL CATECHISM

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

And the conclusion of Luther's explanation: "that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

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.

Note the ordering, and state it rather than assuming it. Scripture reports the events and the Creed confesses them back carefully. Christ raises the dead at Nain. Christ is raised on the third day. Therefore the Spirit raises all the dead. The Creed is the Church's careful statement of what Scripture says, not a second authority alongside 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's subject is a Word that accomplishes rather than describes. Put it beside Luke 7:14 and ask the room to name the difference between a word that reports a fact and a word that creates one.

Then work the phrase "Light of Light begotten," which is worth two minutes with this room. It is lifted from the Nicene Creed, where the Church answered Arius, who taught that the Son was the highest and best of created things but not God in the same sense the Father is. The Creed replies that He is Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten and not made. That is the same distinction Luke draws in verse 16 between "a great prophet" and "God has visited his people," and it is the distinction this whole hour has been about. A creature, however exalted, cannot order a corpse to sit up.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, You took a body from the Virgin Mary and You have it still. You met a funeral and turned it around, and You have promised to do the same at every grave that belongs to You. Keep us from every teaching that treats our bodies as garbage or our death as a friend. Give us Your own honest hatred of death and Your own certainty about the last day, when You will call us by name and we will rise, body and soul, to live with You in the new heaven and the new earth. 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: we compare what the Bible says with what other people say, and we test the Bible's claims to see how true they are. Ask for the sharpest version of an objection rather than a tidy one, because the claims hold up under pressure and your students need to see that they do.

Be accurate about other traditions. If a student describes a religion their friend practices, and the description is a caricature, correct it even when the caricature is convenient for us. Charity first, then the difference.

Keep arguing and disclosing distinct. Pressing an objection hard is the assignment. A student saying, about themselves, that they are not sure any of it is true has changed the register. Do not argue that down in front of the room and do not diagnose it. Take it seriously, say something short and true, follow up privately, and tell Pastor Wolfmueller or Pastor Davis.

Watch for the student with a fresh grave. This text will find them. If someone goes quiet during the Job section, that is worth a private word after class.

End on Christ. If the hour has spent thirty minutes on denials, the last five belong to the promise. Do not let anyone leave holding only the argument.

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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