



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

The Widow of Nain | Service for the Departed | Angels

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October

God’s greatest expression of love for mankind was delivered to the world through the compassion of Jesus. Just as with the widow, Jesus’s compassion for mankind was followed by His actions on the cross. It is God’s work to extend salvation to all. By following Jesus’s example, we can live on purpose for our God and extend His love to the world around us when we pause to see, be moved by compassion, and take action. Fueled with knowledge that our God is with us we should discard our own vulnerability and face uncomfortable situations in order to help the broken, the grief-stricken, and those who have been cast aside so they can come to faith in Jesus Christ.

That concludes our session. Next time we’ll discuss service for the departed and how God works in those realms.

Bible Reference

Luke 7:11-17

Going Deeper

Being a witness...

From the script: When we recognize Jesus impacting our life, our expression and our witness should be changed forever.

Properly, a “witness” (martyr) is “one who testifies” (martyreō) by act or word his “testimony” (martyrion) to the truth. This act of testifying is called his “testimony” (martyria). In ancient days, as at the present, this was a legal term designating the testimony given for or against one on trial before a court of law.

In Christian usage the term came to mean the testimony given by Christian witnesses to Christ and his saving power. Because such testimony often means arrest and scouraging, exile, or death, the Greek was transliterated to form the English word “martyr,” meaning one who suffers or dies rather than give up one’s faith. However, in the NT suffering was an incidental factor in the word. A thorough study of witnessing would necessitate a study of the whole Bible.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you let compassion drive your actions?

2. “Do not weep.” Everything Jesus said and did was with purpose and He used these words with purpose. For what purpose do you use your words?

3. Why did Jesus cross the boundaries of ritual purity and tradition? Refer to the side column for more information on ritual purity. What boundaries do you have to cross in order to be like Jesus?

4. Have you ever stopped yourself from speaking to or helping someone because of your stereotypes, traditions or how your involvement would look to your friends? How can you overcome these obstacles to demonstrate God’s love to the world around you?

Going Deeper

Ritual purity

In Old Testament times a person or thing could contract ritual “uncleanness” (or “impurity”) in a variety of ways: by skin diseases, discharges of bodily fluids, touching something dead (Num 5:2), or eating unclean foods (Lev 11 ; Deut 14). An unclean person in general had to avoid that which was holy and take steps to return to a state of cleanness. Uncleanness placed a person in a “dangerous” condition under threat of divine retribution, even death (Lev 15:31), if the person approached the sanctuary. Purification always involved waiting a period of time (until evening for minor cases, eighty days for the birth of a daughter), and could also involve ritual washings symbolizing cleansing, atoning sacrifices, and priestly rituals.

The central lesson conveyed by this system is that God is holy but human beings are contaminated. Everyone by biology inevitably contracted uncleanness from time to time; therefore, everyone in this fallen world must be purified to approach a holy God. Although “uncleanness” cannot be equated with “sin,” since factors beyond human control could cause a person to be unclean, nonetheless, there is a strong analogy between “uncleanness” and “sin.” The “sin offering” (better, “purification offering”) served to cleanse both sin and ritual impurity (Lev 5:1-5 ; 16:16-22).

Jesus deliberately touched rather than healed by his word to show compassion and to anticipate by his action the coming change in law under the new covenant. Jesus did not hesitate to touch the dead (Matt 9:25; Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54), and allowed a sinful woman (e.g., a prostitute) to touch him (Luke 7:36-38), despite her ritual (as well as moral) uncleanness. In such cases, and that of a woman with a flow of blood (Matt 9:20-22 ; Mark 5:27), Jesus is not defiled (he went through no ceremonial purification), but those are cleansed and healed. This speaks theologically of Christ's impeccable person.

5. In the video, it said, “God in Jesus Christ manifests Himself as Lord over the living and the dead.” What does this mean? How does this change your perception of death and of those who have passed away?

6. In the story of the Widow of Nain, we see Jesus, without hesitation, entering into her pain. Do you move toward people who are in pain? Or do we instinctually move away from them? How can you fight against this instinct?

7. Moving towards someone's pain, loss, and vulnerability is uncomfortable. But that's where Jesus goes. This also parallels the Good Samaritan. He does the uncomfortable, he gets his hands dirty and binds up the wounds of the traveler. Uncomfortable is never easy. How do you get through uncomfortable situations? How can you model your reactions to Jesus' reactions?

8. The people exclaimed in the story “God has come to help His people,” through His Son. When was the last time you did something that would warrant such an exclamation? Do you think, as Christians, that those around us should feel that “God has come to help His people,” through us? How could someone see you as an instrument of God?

9. In the Bible, widows often were, and represented, the outcast, the broken, and the vulnerable. Do you feel a responsibility to take care of the outcast and vulnerable in your congregation? In your community?

Now is a good time to ask yourself: when you call Christ “Lord”, is it because you’ve given Him that role in your life? Have you personally witnessed His power to change things in your life?

The third notable aspect that will help us prepare for Service for the Departed is that we see Jesus being motivated by His compassion to take action. Love and compassion are at the very core of Jesus’ nature, and they are fundamental to His mission. Try to note something strikingly different about this action compared to the healing of the centurion’s servant. The centurion already knows of Christ and has faith in Him. He reaches out and asks for His help with complete belief in the outcome. Jesus marvels over this faith and responds. Being lost in her own condition of grief, the widow may have been unaware of the approaching group of Christ and His followers. We can assume that she doesn’t know Him, believe in Him, or ask Him for His help, yet He still acts out of compassion.

What conclusions can we draw about God’s intentions towards both the living and the dead? How about those who know Christ and those who don’t? Think about those questions and, when you’re ready, turn to your study guides and discuss the rest of the questions with your group.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Christ wipe away feelings of hopelessness, fear, insecurity, and uncertainty in your life?

2. “God has come to help his people.” What help are we receiving by acknowledging that Jesus is Lord of the living and the dead? (reference CNAC 4.4)

3. When you call Christ “Lord,” how is it demonstrated that He has that role in your life? When have you personally witnessed His power to change things in your life?

Bible Reference

Luke 7:11-17

CA Thoughts

“The dead in Christ and those who are living in Christ are of one and the same congregation...”

-Thoughts from the Chief Apostle for July 2015 Service for the Departed

NAC Catechism

Catechism 4.4

Holy Scripture uses the term “salvation” in the sense of “deliverance”, “protection”, and “redemption”. God’s activity is intended to bring about salvation. This process is known as the history of salvation. In it we can recognize a sequence of divine actions that follow a plan made by God... The nature and extent of salvation to be imparted are variously structured by God during the different phases of the history of salvation. But above all stands God’s will to save, which applies to all of mankind in every time period.

Catechism 9.2

Holy Scripture provides various interpretations of the term “death”. First of all, the term describes a person’s physical death, the end of his earthly existence. Once death has occurred, the soul and spirit have left the body. “Spiritual death” is the separation of man from God, which is brought about through a life of sin (Romans 6: 23)... Jesus Christ conquered death and thereby made it possible for mankind to gain access to eternal life (2 Timothy 1: 9–10). His power was already manifested when He raised people from the dead (Matthew 9: 18–26; Luke 7: 11–15; John 11: 1–45), but above all in His own resurrection (1 Corinthians 15: 54–57). At the end of all things, death will be relieved of all its power (1 Corinthians 15: 26; Revelation 20: 14).

Catechism 9.6.1

Hope in the resurrection of the dead has always been a fundamental component of Christian teaching. Associated with it is also the conviction that intercessions for the dead are necessary, and that these intercessions will have an effect on them. The same is true for the dispensation of sacraments for the dead. The biblical basis for this is found in 1 Corinthians 15: 29: in Corinth, the living were baptized on behalf of the dead. This practice inspired by the Holy Spirit has been readopted by the Apostles of today. From this developed the services for the departed that are customary today.

4. Why did Christ help the widow? Did it have something to with more than just compassion?

5. Before we can be moved by compassion, we have to be alert to those in need of it. Give examples of how it’s possible to miss the opportunity to be compassionate. What gets in the way?

6. Have you ever tried to be compassionate to someone who was overwhelmed with fear, grief, or another emotion? Did you give up? What was it like? What would you do if someone rejected your compassion?

7. What conclusions can we draw about God’s intentions towards both the living and the dead? How about those who know Christ and those who don’t?

Session 3: Angels

Continuing with the theme of the month of “the works of God”, we’ll look at an experience from the early church. The church was growing, and large numbers of people had come to Jerusalem to bring their sick to be healed by the apostles. This angered the Sadducees, and, as a result, the apostles were thrown into prison. It says in Acts 5:19-20, “But at night the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’”

Let’s talk a little about angels. What do we know about them? They appear in many places in the Old and New Testament. The term angel is the translation of the Hebrew word malak which means “messenger”. In the Catechism it states that “the task of angels is to worship God, fulfill His instructions and thereby serve Him. The angels are described as those “who excel in strength”. We know about Gabriel, the one who told Mary she would be the mother of Jesus. The angels who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds and the angel that strengthened Jesus in Gethsemane are also well known. The special task of these angels is to help mankind, according to Hebrews 1:14, which says, “Are they not ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” In Acts 27:23-24, Paul writes, “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whose I serve, saying ‘fear not Paul, you must be brought before Caesar, and lo, God hath given you all that sail with you’”. Angels are used by God for our benefit and can sometimes help us out of our “prisons”.

There are certain circumstances in which we end up in a prison of our own making. These prisons could include fear; being afraid to live our lives of faith because of what other people might think or say. Also, we may fear that we’re not capable or strong enough to confront and overcome challenges in our lives. How about bad habits or vices? None of God’s children are perfect. We’re all sinners. If we sit back and do nothing, accepting it as normal, these character traits take control of us. Irreconcilability is another prison which prevents us from approaching our neighbor, or our brother or sister, in the mind and spirit of Christ, and it often leaves us bitter, resentful, and alone. Yet another is misplaced priorities; we’re so busy that we don’t have time for our spiritual growth. When we experience trials, we can become trapped in the prison of blindness to God’s help and support.

So now that we see all these prisons which take away the liberty to live our life of faith, where do we go for help? In the same way that God sent the angel to free His apostles, He's ready to free us from our prisons.

Angels are primarily to be understood as messengers of God, whose task is to serve Him. In individual cases, angels can, if God wills, become visible. Holy Scripture relates that angels brought messages to human beings and offered them help and protection at God's command. But we could also consider God using those around us with the same purpose as He does angels, because it's possible that we can "worship God, fulfill His instructions, and thereby serve Him." God uses who He wants to help us and He might also use us to help others. Angels are heavenly beings that God can send. However, a brother or sister who comforts, supports, and counsels us; an impulse from the Holy Spirit which we are filled with; a role model in faith; or a neighbor or co-worker can also serve God by helping others. We must be ready and willing to recognize these various ways that God helps us.

Now for our call to action. When the Apostles were freed from prison, the angel told them to "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." We have also been given the freedom to go and speak about the Gospel of Christ, the love of our God, and the great gift of the Holy Spirit to all people of the world. Once we are set free from our prisons, Romans 8:21 says we'll be "delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Especially with the approaching Service for the Departed, we pray and intercede that those in eternity can experience this glorious liberty through God's offer of salvation.

Over the last few weeks we've seen how the works of God give us direction for our lives. From Jesus raising the widow's son from the dead, to God's work in eternity, to the actions of angels, God gives us the means to also go out into the world and do His work. God has done His part. Have you done yours?

Discussion Questions:

1. Who has been a messenger in your life?

NAC Catechism

3.3.1.1

From the biblical account we can conclude that the invisible creation incorporates the realm where God rules on His throne (Revelation 4 and 5), the angels (see 3.3.1.1.1), the immortal soul of man (see 3.3.4), as well as the realm of the dead (see 9). The Devil, the adversary of God and the enemy of mankind, as well as his followers also belong to the invisible world, although they were not created as evil (see 4.1 and 4.1.2).

2. How can a brother or sister be like an angel to us if angels are supposed to be messengers of God?

3. How do you recognize an angel that God has sent to you?

4. What are prisons that a person could make for themselves?

5. What is a prison that you have made for yourself? Share with the group if you're comfortable. If not, just write it down.

6. In this session we've learned about angels, but what other ways does God give us to free us from our prisons?

7. How can being in a prison help us grow spiritually? How do we experience God's help and support during the time we feel imprisoned?

Going Deeper

Angels

The term chosen by Scripture to denote angels gives us the clue to the function by which they are primarily to be known and understood. They are God's messengers or ambassadors. They belong to his heavenly court and service. Their mission in heaven is to praise him (Revelation 4:5). They devote themselves to doing his will (Psalm 103:20), and in this activity they behold his face (Matthew 18:10). Since heaven can interact directly with earth, they also have a mission on earth. They accompany God in his work of creation (Job 38:7), though they themselves are also creatures (Psalm 148:2, 5). They also assist in God's providential ordering of affairs (Daniel 12:1). Above all they are active in the divine work of reconciliation (from Genesis 19:1-2 onward). In fulfillment of their mission they declare God's word (e.g., Luke 1:26-27) and do his work (e.g., Matthew 28:2). There seems to be some ordering in their ranks: some are referred to as archangels, while others are simply angels (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9).

The function of angels may be seen clearly from their part in the saving mission of Jesus Christ. They are naturally present when this begins with the nativity (Matthew 1; Luke 1-3) and when it ends with the resurrection (Matthew 28:2) and ascension (Acts 1:10-11). They also assist the church in its early ministry (e.g., 5:19; 10:3). They will play an important part in the events of the end time (Revelation 7:1-3; etc.). Finally, they will come with Christ when he returns in glory (Matthew 24:31) to separate the righteous and the wicked (13:41, 49). They do not do the real work of reconciliation, which is Christ's prerogative, but they accompany and declare this work, praising the God of grace and glory and summoning people to participate in their worship (Luke 2:13-14).

8. Have you ever had the opportunity to proclaim God's goodness and glorious liberty because He has freed you from a prison? Who did you tell? If that hasn't happened to you yet, who would you tell if you had the chance?

9. Have you ever been visited or helped by an angel? Do you think it's a necessary experience in the life of a Christian?

10. In the video it says, "Over the last few weeks we've seen how the works of God give us direction for our lives. From Jesus raising the widow's son from the dead, to God's work in eternity, to the actions of angels, God gives us the means to also go out into the world and do His work." Do you think God expects us to do His work every day? How could we possibly have time for that? Are there ways to do His work and your everyday activities at the same time?

11. What does the phrase, living on purpose for God, mean to you?
