

LESSON 24: Acts of God

AIM

To help learners understand that God is present in all that happens, and that suffering does not contradict God's providence (2.2.18)

OUTCOME

Learners understand that God is present in all that happens.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

In biblical times, floods were considered punishments from God. Consider, for instance the story of Noah and the Ark in Genesis. Nowadays with our scientific knowledge we can explain these events better, but people still question God's providence and ask, "Why me, why us, how could God do this to us?"

David Hume in the 18th century put the question this way: Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then God is impotent. Is God able to prevent evil, but not willing? Then God is malevolent. Is God both willing and able to prevent evil? Then why is there any evil in the world?



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Story (1) ⇒
- * Newspaper or magazine articles (3)
- * ♪ *Job/Where is Your Mercy?* or words (5) ⇒
- * Bibles (5)(6)(8)(9)
- * ♪ *He's Got the Whole World* (7)
- * Materials for collage (10)

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Tell the story of the **man caught in a flood**. As the water rose higher and higher he climbed onto the roof of his house. There he sat and prayed to God to help him. A rowing boat came by and offered to help but the man turned the offer down, saying God would rescue him. The water rose even higher and a motor boat came by and offered help. Again the man refused. When the waters had risen so high that the man was sitting on the very top of his roof a helicopter came by, but again the man refused. The waters rose over the top of his house and he drowned. When he was met at the gates of heaven he said to God, "Where were you when I needed you. I trusted you would save me." God replied, "I sent you two boats and a helicopter didn't I, but you chose to drown."
- 2 **Acts of God:** While we acknowledge the man in the story's foolishness, we all know there are many occasions of suffering we cannot avoid. They often come upon us without notice. Discuss and explain what we mean by an Act of God and why we use such a word? Acts of God are events such as a natural disaster, an earthquake, a flood, or a lightning strike. God is creator, and ultimate master of creation, but we believe that God created a natural order, which runs its course and that God does not interfere or cause particular disasters for just any reason, especially to punish us. The term Act of God is actually misleading. It comes from pre-scientific days, when God was used as an explanation of anything we could not understand. At the same time, however, we believe that God cares for us. This is what Providence means.
- 3 Study **articles and stories** about a current event such as a flood or an earthquake. Gather different accounts and stories together, with natural explanations, and people's perceptions - some might have thought it witchcraft. What were different people's reactions? Helplessness, fear, courage, and generosity arise in such situations.

Ask any learners that have been in a disaster situation how did it feel? Did you trust God or lose hope? Through discussion lead the learners to see that God works in these situations, especially through other people, empowering some, challenging others and helping those in need.

- 4 **The Problem of Evil:** Why are there disasters in the world? Doesn't God look after us? This is a question which has puzzled human beings for thousands of years. We can understand punishment for wrongdoing, and we can understand that our bad choices lead to bad consequences for ourselves and others, but we do not understand why so many people suffer what they do not seem to deserve.
 - 5 **Job:** The biblical Book of Job concentrates on this problem. If you have access to the song *Job/Where is Your Mercy?* From Marty Haugen's *Tales of Wonder*, play it for the learners. The words are given below. They serve as a simplified version of the story. ⇒ After playing the song or telling the story, ask the learners to read the following passages from the Book of Job: 42:2-6, 10-16. Or you might have it read by a single voice.
 - 6 **Jesus:** What we are dealing with in this lesson is a deep mystery. Does God give an answer to Job's question? The answer lies in the person of Jesus who shares our humanity. He shows us how to face suffering, trusting in God, though not understanding why. See Matthew 26:36-46.
 - 7 **Sing:** *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.*
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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 8 Pray one of the **Psalms** that speaks of God's care and our trust in him - [Psalm 102, 121, 123, 130].
- 9 Read the story of **Noah's Ark** [Genesis 6:5-8:22], and compare it to other accounts, such as the Sumerian Gilgamesh Epic.
- 10 Have learners in groups make a **collage** showing an Act of God, its effects and its outcome.
- 11 Discuss such events as a **solar or lunar eclipse** in the context of superstition. Do people believe such an event is caused by evil spirits and how do people react to such a phenomenon?

MATERIALS

JOB/WHERE IS YOUR MERCY?

Once there was a man named Job,
so rich in children, land and flocks,
the greatest of all people in the East.
Yet Job was humble, kind and good,
and only sought to walk with God,
to follow in the ways of truth and peace.
And then disaster struck him down,
his children and his servants died, his cattle slain, his body
racked with sores;
and Job cried out to God in anger
from deep within his pain:

“You who have formed and given me breath,
taught me to treasure this life;
Why must I wander the shadow of death:
Where is your mercy now?

Is there no comfort, no end to my grief,
no one to answer my cries?
If you are present, come be my relief:
Where is your mercy now?
Look to my aching heart, speak to my empty heart,
You are the only hope I cling to;
Where is your loving face, where is your saving grace,
where is your mercy now?”

(Marty Haugen. Tales of Wonder)

LESSON 25: Eternal Life

AIM

To consider the meaning of death and eternal life (2.3.4)

OUTCOME

Learners understand the Christian view of death and eternal life.


LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Gently and with reverence allow the learners to share their experience and understanding of **funerals**. Have they been to any, what happens, and why? Try to bring out the following points:

We celebrate the life that has been lived.

We thank God for the gift of life of the person.

We mourn their loss, express our grief and pain and allow ourselves to be comforted.

- 2 **What is Death?** Prepare four pairs of learners to read the Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim dialogues about death on the worksheet.  ⇨ After some discussion, ask the learners to formulate a sentence beginning, "Death is..."

- 3 **Life is changed:** Present the following as input. At Catholic funerals there is often a Mass for the Dead. In the Preface of this Mass we read,

"For your faithful people life is changed not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven."

Many different religions and cultures share a similar belief about life and death. According to a Christian understanding of God's plan, once people are created they will never stop existing. Our earthly life is a time of growing, of development and of discovery. It is a time when we learn about good and evil and about God's plan. It is the time of our growing into persons who, by loving God, share in God's eternal life. However, eternal life is a gift freely offered to us: God does not force us to love, and so the kind of life we enjoy after death depends on the choice we make here on earth. We can refuse God's offer and live apart from God, but that will be a very unhappy choice, because, by our very nature, we are made for God. To be with God is the fulfilment of our every desire.


- 4 **I am the Resurrection:** Read [John 11:17-27, 20:1-18]
 - 5 **The Lord is My Shepherd** [Psalm 23]: The class reads the psalm, and learners consider what it says about eternal life and write their thoughts and understanding in their books. All could say or sing the psalm in conclusion.
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ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 6 Explore further the beliefs and stories of **different religious traditions** about death.
- 7 Study various relevant **Scripture passages** and summarise their message. For example: Praying for the dead [2 Maccabees 12: 38-46]



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Pictures or newspaper articles of funerals (1)
- *  Copies of the worksheet (2) ⇨
- * Bible (4)(5)(7)(8)(9)(10)
- * Question box, slips of paper (11)

GRADE 7

The final judgement [Matthew 25: 31-46]

Martha, Mary and Lazarus [John 11: 1-45]

- 8 Read 2 Maccabees 12:38-46 and invite the learners to **make up prayers** for those who have died, those personally known to them as well as others.
- 9 Write out, **decorate and frame** the text of Psalm 23.
- 10 **What is heaven like?** Invite the learners to write their own short descriptions. Read [1 Corinthians 13:12]. While it is good to use our imaginations, we must realise that life and death are essentially a mystery [1 Corinthians 15: 35-44].
- 11 **Question box:** Invite learners to write their questions about death and life after death on slips of paper. You could deal with these questions one at a time for a few minutes each day over a week or two.

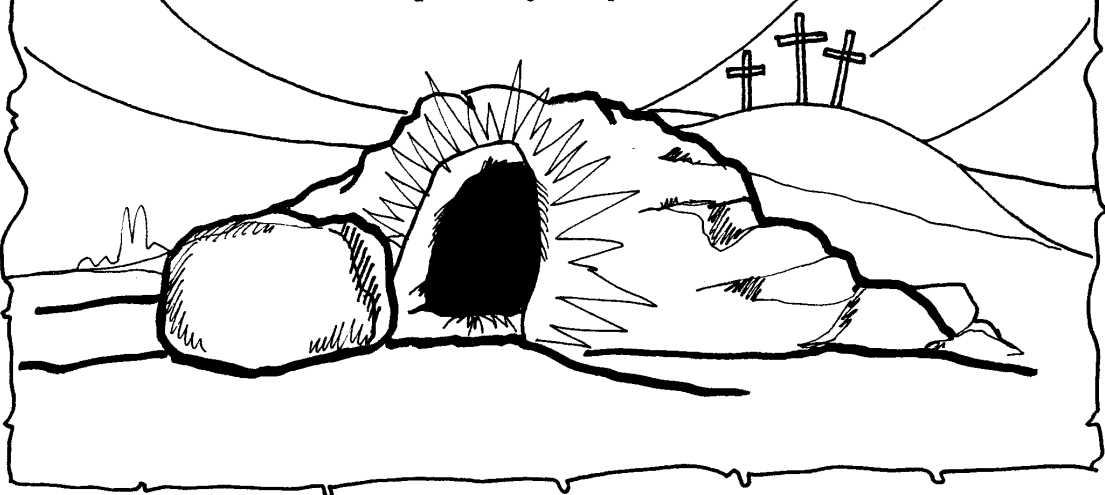
Life After Death

Hindus

Sandi: Why are the bodies of Hindus burnt?
 Shamin: We believe that a person's soul passes into another body when he dies.
 Sandi: Isn't he a different person then?
 Shamin: It is the same spirit living in a different body.
 Sandi: Why is that?
 Shamin: We believe that we must learn to live better and better lives until we reach a perfect state called "Moksha".
 Sandi: What happens then?
 Shamin: Then we are united with God and there is no need to come back to this earth again.
 Sandi: What happens to the body of someone who has reached this perfect state when he dies?
 Shamin: The body of such a person does not need to be burnt. He is the holiest of holy men and his body is dropped into the river. As the body sinks his followers blow a conch shell and sing hymns to celebrate the joyful occasion of another human soul being united with God.

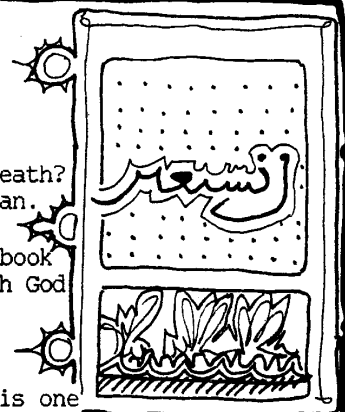
Christians

Joe: Why is Easter such a happy feast?
 Zomzi: That is the time when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 Joe: What does that mean?
 Zomzi: It means that Jesus passed through death and lives a new life with God his father. He promised that if we believe in him and live according to the law of love, we too will rise with him after we die.
 Joe: Then death is really not the end of everything?
 Mark: No. It is only the beginning.



Moslems

- Funeka: Do Moslems believe there's life after death?
 Joe: Yes, that is what we learn from the Koran.
 Funeka: What is the Koran?
 Joe: It is the holy book of Islam. In this book we learn about the teaching of God which God revealed to his prophet Mohammed.
 Funeka: Who is Allah
 Joe: Allah is the Holy Name of God.
 The question, Who is your God? (Allah) is one of the questions asked at a funeral service.
 Funeka: What are the other questions?
 Joe: What is your religion? (Islam) and Who is its prophet? (Mohammed)
 Funeka: Why are these questions asked?
 Joe: To prepare the dead person to be ready for questioning by the angels in the afterlife.



Jews

- Zomzi: Do the Jews believe they will live after death?
 Paul: There are many symbols in our holy book, the Torah, that teach us of life after death.
 Zomzi: Can you give an example?
 Paul: Light is a symbol of life, while death is compared to darkness. We believe that we will pass through the darkness of death and see the light of God. This light will never go out and we ourselves will shine "as lights of heaven".
 Zomzi: Does everyone share in this eternal light?
 Paul: Only people who know the true and everlasting God will enjoy a life of happiness with God.

