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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart! We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or teaching lesson. I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau, here with Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger. They're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. You can hear all about us in our introductory episode, but trust me, they're pretty good preachers. All right, let's get started.

Peter: Peter, where are we in the church year? This coming week is Trinity Sunday. Right in the beginning of the season of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday is a, well, frankly it's kind of a strange Sunday in the church year, but I think we're going to maybe talk about some of that. But we're still at the beginning of the season of Pentecost.

Jessica: And what's the text for this week, David?

David: The three readings come from the books of Genesis, Acts, and Matthew. We have links to the specific passages on our website.

Peter: Today we're going to talk about these texts, but before we get to the texts, you know, there's certain times in the church year where the calendar looms larger than the texts. Or at least it might, it could. And so we're going to talk a little bit about preaching on Trinity Sunday before we get to these texts, because if you look at these texts, they all treat the Trinity, or at least invite different ways of talking about the Trinity.

David: And so you look at the texts, and I mean, part of me is kind of like, would it be nice to have a text for the Father, a text for the Son, and a text for the Holy Spirit, right? So there you've got the Trinity in the three texts. But instead, we've got the creation story from Genesis. We've got Peter's preaching and offering kind of the narrative of the death and resurrection of Christ. And then you've got the Great Commission, which has the tagline of the Trinity in it for the baptismal formula. So we've got very different ways of thinking about the Trinity.

Peter: Yeah, and just even back up just a little bit more with the Trinity Sunday. When I was a pastor, I felt like some of the hardest Sundays to preach the gospel were Trinity Sunday and Reformation Sunday.

David: Oh, yeah. Because those are two Sundays when the temptation for the preacher, I think, is to feel like I need to talk about the Reformation, or I need to talk about the Trinity. It's really hard to make that connection to the everyday lives of your hearers.

And so you find yourself on this Sunday thinking, at least I always find myself thinking, do I even really want to make this about the Trinity?

David: Well, and in addition, we already have hearers who are feeling, you know, if you go with Taylor in the secular age, who are feeling that God is distant from their life anyway. Right? I mean, you know, God is not connected to my everyday life in the world.
I go to church on Sunday and then everything else happens the rest of the week and I come back on Sunday.
And so if they're already feeling disconnected, and then you offer this teaching that seems abstract or completely rational and cognitive, God seems even further away.

Jessica: Oh, but don't skip out on us.
We need to know what the Trinity is.
Of course it's going to apply to our lives.
Otherwise, who is God? Right?

Peter: Yeah, that's who is God.
Now that gets to a question that's broader than the way sometimes we talk about the Trinity.
Because sometimes we talk about the Trinity with who is God, how is the Father related to the Son, related to the Spirit. These are kind of specific, kind of inner Trinitarian, imminent Trinity things that we talk about.
And that's important.
But the question you just raised, Jessica, I think, you know, who is God and who is God for me in my life and how do I fit into God's story?
Those are really important questions, but that probably is going to lead you now to talk about the Trinity as kind of the relationships between the Father, Son, and Spirit, as much as it will lead you to proclaim who God is for these particular years on this particular Sunday.
I'm basically suggesting that you don't want to talk about the Trinity in terms of trying to understand the mystery that is the Trinity,
as much as you want to proclaim who God is for your hearers, and in doing so, helping them understand the Father, Son, and the Spirit in their lives.

Jessica: If I was listening to a sermon on Trinity Sunday, I think it would impact my life because I can't read scripture outside of that context.
Wow, I can't. How would I understand scripture if I don't have an idea of what the Trinity might be?
I mean, we can't fully understand it, right? But how am I supposed to read the Old Testament if it's a different God than in the New Testament?
How am I supposed to... I mean, it is abstract and it's a big idea, but don't skip out on us.
It's just one Sunday a year. No, we need it. How can I understand scripture if I don't have an idea?

David: Right, yeah.

Peter: Yeah, so I mean, we could look at these texts. Each one of them does something different with respect, or would invite

you to do something different with respect to reflect on who God is for your years.

In this first reading, we get God as described as the Creator, what God is doing with respect to His creation. And as you do so, you've got some allusions to Trinitarian ideas. You know, the Spirit is hovering over the waters.

David: And there's a word that's being spoken.

Peter: And you've got, you know, let us make mankind in our image, these kinds of things.

That's not really a Trinitarian exploration of the inner Trinitarian relationships as much as it is this God who's creating is complex than just a single figure.

David: Yeah, so I mean, so for me, when I read the text, I think of, you know, we normally say the Father is the Creator, right? And we see the Son's work in the Word, the Spirit hovering over the water, but we see creation.

We associate that with the Father.

And but when I read the text, I kind of think to myself, you have this beautiful, manifold, mysterious creation that God has made.

It's wondrous and it's beyond our deepest understanding. And yet even behind that creation is a God who is also just as beautiful, just as mysterious, just as beyond our understanding.

And so for me, it's kind of it's not trying to explain the inner workings of the Trinity as much as it is to trust in this God who being Trinitarian and beyond my understanding is able to create me and connect with me in this world that He's created, place

Peter: But it's, yeah, I mean, this is so sticking with the Genesis text, this God who is, you know, triune in Himself, Father, Son, Spirit, in the act of creating is sharing His triune life, His relational life in Himself.

He's sharing it with His creation.

And so to me, the key to this text, I'd skip over most of the verses and jump down to the creation of mankind and God is then sharing Himself, His own breath, His own image with His human creatures as the crown of His creation.

So this mysterious creator God who is triune in Himself doesn't want to stay just in Himself.

David: He's generative.

Peter: He's generative.

Yeah, He brings forth people and puts Himself in there.

David: A giver of life.

Peter: Right.

David: Yeah.

David: Right.

Then you get to the second text in Acts and now God is not just a giver of life.

God is the one who gives His life.

Right.

And so here you begin to see the Spirit obviously is working with Peter preaching.

And so we see the connection of the Spirit with this proclamation of the gospel. And in the gospel itself, the Father-Son relationship is kind of articulated in light of the dying of the Son and being raised by the Father.

Right.

Peter: Yeah.

It's interesting in this Acts 2 text that so if the Genesis 1 text just kind of just mentions that God is triune.

This one actually names God and Jesus and the Spirit.

Now, of course, God in this text, like we said earlier, is really kind of the Father.

And that's how Jesus normally talks about when He refers to God.

He's talking about His Father usually.

I remember it reminds me of one time Chuck Arand suggested, I think this was when I was a student here,

and he said we really ought to talk about never use the word God, but just try using the word Father, Son, or Spirit.

And see how that shapes our prayers, our thinking, our talking.

And so in this case, the God in verse 22 and 23, that's really the Father.

So what the Father did through Him, Peter says in his sermon, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by the Father to you by miracles, wonders, and signs.

And so you get this Father-Son relationship like you mentioned.

And then you go down to verse 33, exalted to the right hand of the Father.

He is seen and heard from the Father, the promised Holy Spirit who is poured out.

And so you get this work of the Spirit.

So you get a little bit more, in dogmatic terms we call this the economic trinity, right?

Not the imminent trinity, not how they're related to each other, but the work they're doing.

And you've got the Father working through the Son who sends the Spirit.

So you've got more of the action of the triune God.

David: Yeah, I remember Chuck Arand, since you mentioned him, I remember him once talking about how the Father sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit, and the Spirit brings people to the Son who then brings the people to the Father.

And I like that imagery of the working of the Trinity, right?

Peter: See now, I like that as a, you know, you could think about that as a movement for your sermon on this text, if you're going to preach on this text.

Now notice again what you're doing with the Trinity there, you're not exploring the inner Trinitarian relationships.

You're talking about the movement of God, the Father through the Son to the Spirit back to the Son, back to God.

David: And all for the purpose of bringing us into the kingdom.

Peter: His creation, His human creatures into His, well ultimately His new creation.
But yeah, that's a way you could talk about who God is, Jessica, you raised that question earlier.
Who is God? Well this is a God who works according to these persons in a kind of a narrative way.
That kind of outlines the narrative there.

David: I'm not sure the Trinity is to be understood as much as it is to be believed, right?
And it's the understanding of the Trinity that, you know, you can go wrong,
so the Trinity is not to be misunderstood.
But I don't know if we ever really understand the Trinity.
I would use the Matthew reading.
So Jessica, could you read the reading from Matthew?
28.

Jessica: Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

David: Okay, so you see, I like this passage.
Number one, because it names the Trinity, right?
So you've got the name, singular, the name singular of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
So you've named the Trinity in the passage.
But what I appreciate is the dialectic, the tension between some doubted and Jesus sends them anyway.
And that's what I like, because Trinity Sunday is a day when I wonder if I'm getting it all right.
And it makes me nervous.
It makes me wonder, you know, am I going to say this incorrectly?
And so not that I have doubts about the Trinity, but that I'm less sure, I'm less certain.
And to find that Jesus comes to disciples, among whom are some who are doubting,
were not told that Jesus separated them like sheep and goats and took the ones who didn't doubt and said,
okay, I'm going to send you to do this and the other ones you got.
All authority has been given to him.
And so because he has all authority, he can do what he wants.
And he can use people who are not necessarily certain, right?
People who are questioning, people who are struggling, people who don't think they've got it all, right?
He can still use them.
He uses people like that, right?

Jessica: What a relief. I'm so glad, because what if God didn't? Then what would I do?

David: Right, right. No, I mean, this is the beauty of it. So for me, the text, you know, we're not told what they doubted. And, you know, I don't know. I guess I would study and see if there's some indication there about what it was that they might have doubted? The doubt is held in tension with they worshiped him. They worshiped him, but some doubted. But it's just remarkable to me that Christ does not get rid of the doubting. And he does not even address the doubting. He simply acts and sends, because he's got the authority and he's going to work through the words of these people. And so all of the sudden, you know, in the very first reading, we've got God speaking and a world being created. And in the second reading, we've got God sending the Spirit to speak so that this message of the Gospel is heard. And now in the third one, we've got God causing humans to speak in this worldwide mission, which is just beautiful for me.

Peter: Yeah, and I like what you're saying there, David, because it doesn't make more of the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit in this text than it seems that Jesus is making of it. Jesus is not giving a treatise on the Trinity here. He's, according to the authority that's been given him by the Father, he's sending his people. And he's sending them with, in some ways, a very simple mission to go make disciples, baptize and teach. And he will be with them to the end of the age. And there's a nice promise there that would be something you could proclaim, this God who is beyond our imagination and understanding, has promised to be with us to the very end. And I think that's the kind of thing, and Jessica, maybe you could reflect on this, is that we all kind of need to hear and need to be encouraged by that he does promise to be with us.

Jessica: And with us even if we don't get it all. That's the relief for me, like David was saying. I don't need to understand it all to have faith in it. Well, good thing, because otherwise I'm in trouble. Right? How could I understand all of it? And if I'm waiting to understand all of it and get all of it before I feel like I have a place in the church, then I'm going to feel like I don't have a place in the church. And I think that there are people who feel that way. Like if I can't swallow all of this perfectly, if I can't understand all of this, well maybe I shouldn't be serving, maybe I shouldn't be in the church, maybe I, you know, I think it's good to know that it's okay to not get it all.

David: Well, I mean, it is interesting, right?

I mean, Trinity Sunday does force us to recognize that there is a mystery to what it is that we believe. Something that cannot be fully explained.

Peter: Yeah, I think it's something my dad used to say when I was growing up.

He would, we'd be talking about God's incomprehensible nature,

or usually not his nature, but usually his actions.

He doesn't understand how God operates and how it all fits together.

And my dad used to say, you know, I don't think I want a God who I could understand completely.

David: Isn't that the truth? Right.

Peter: Because if I could understand him, then presumably I would be able to understand how to make things right.

And that's just not, I don't know, all of us live in these situations where who knows what the heck we should be doing. But we worship a God who is beyond our understanding, and there's a comfort in that.

That what we do understand, that he is for us, that in Christ he is with us, and in his Spirit he is in us.

That's enough. I don't need to understand everything else.

Jessica: Reminds me of airplanes. Please don't judge me.

I don't understand everything about airplanes, but I believe it enough that I risk my life on it every time I get in a plane.

I don't understand it, but I have faith in it enough that I'm willing to die for it.

Peter: Yeah, that's not a bad analogy because, you know, the promise when you get on a plane is that you'll be safe, even if you don't understand it.

And in a sermon on Trinity Sunday, the promise is even if you don't understand the Trinity,

God promises to be with us and to be gracious to us.

And that's all we really need.

You just trust in your Father, and you cling to Jesus, and you live in the Spirit.

Jessica: Now you've talked about the Genesis passage a little bit, and you said that you would probably focus on the Matthew passage.

What do you think about the Acts passage? How do you think that plays into it?

David: Yeah, it was the spirit as seen in the very work of Peter preaching.

And then you have kind of the retelling of the Passion event, which is beginning to lay the groundwork for the Father

raising the son from the dead and placing him in all power.

And then that's where you actually get kind of the clearest Trinitarian references on line 33, verse 33.

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

And so you've got this moment in the middle of this bizarre event where all of the sudden we see the Son exalted at the right hand of God,
right hand of the Father, sending forth the Spirit.
And so the Trinity is kind of at work here.

And so again, it's the Trinity proclaiming what the Trinity is doing rather than focusing on the Trinity.

Peter: Right. And this is where I'm reminded as you were just talking, David, that this is the Sunday after Pentecost Sunday.

And so Acts 2 is the sermon on Pentecost, parts that we didn't read last week.

David: Right.

Peter: And so, you know, if you're going to go with the Acts 2 passage, and you can't, depending on when people listen to this,

you can't undo what you did last week.

But if you were going to preach kind of a couple of sermons in a row on Pentecost and have a Pentecost emphasis on the kind of propulsion to the mission of God by the power of the Spirit,

and then kind of like a pause and let's reflect on who this God is on Trinity Sunday, then those would be two texts that you could kind of treat together.

But that would, you know, that would be just another way of getting at what God is doing, what God the Father through the Son and the Spirit is doing.

David: And so for me, it's that it's the, but some doubted, then Jesus came to them and said, all authority has been given to me.

And that juxtaposition of Jesus condescending, mercifully, still working with, speaking to, using people who doubt, because it isn't dependent upon you, it's dependent upon Him and He has all authority.

And so He's including in His kingdom and in this missional sending people that if I were doing it, I might leave out. And I like that. I think that's there's a lot of comfort for me to be found in that.

Jessica: That's all for today. You can find more free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org. I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau. Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts for next Sunday.