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Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart. We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or teaching lesson.

Jessica: I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau. This is our introductory episode.

So if you are new to the show, this is the episode to start with before you listen to the lectionary discussions.

Because every week you can join us for a focused discussion on the lectionary text for the coming Sunday.

Except for this episode, which is all about getting to know our preachers, Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger.

They're both professors of homiletics here at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

David, I want to start. Tell me about your ministry experience.

David: Well, I served at a small church on the south side of Chicago. It was called St. John the Divine.

It was a grand name for a beautiful, beautiful church. And it was a very small church.

Beautiful people, mostly elderly congregation. When I got there, I think the average age was 76.

Yeah. So it just was I fell in love with the ministry, fell in love with the people there.

And that's where I did a lot of my work. Yeah.

Jessica: What about you, Peter?

Tell us about your ministry experience.

Peter: My first call at a seminary was to Hugo, Minnesota.

I had never lived in Minnesota. I hardly even visited there. Didn't know anything about it. But Hugo is a small town.

It was just outside the outer rim suburbs of St. Paul, Minnesota, the Twin Cities.

And I served a congregation called New Life Church Lutheran, which was kind of a mission restart.

They'd had some troubles in the past and had been served for a couple of years by a retired pastor.

And then I was their first full time pastor in a number of years. And it was it was a great congregation.

It was people who understood why they were there, what they were doing, understood the Lord and loved him.

And it was a pleasure to serve as a pastor. So you both started out in pastoral ministry.

Jessica: Yes. But now you're both professors and have your doctorate. So how did that go?

David: Well, let's see. I went to I went to the seminary here.

And when I graduated from the seminary, unlike Peter, I didn't go and immediately receive a call.

I went to University of Illinois, got a master's in English there.

And I served as a I worked at a church there.

So I did some preaching, leading worship and so forth, like a vicar would do. But I wasn't a vicar at St. John's in in Champaign.

And then after that was up in Chicago and they called me to come teach.

And after I was here for six years, I began doctoral studies at Washington University.

So I got my doctorate in English literature at Washington University in 2005, I think it was.

Jessica: What about you, Peter?

Peter: So I when I finished my MDiv here at the seminary, I stayed on and did some more doctoral studies right away.

So I was actually here for for quite a while, for eight years. And then I took really I didn't know that.

Yeah, I came in 1999 and then had spent a year over in Germany as an exchange student and then finished the MDiv in 04 and just did some doctoral work before I took my first call.

And then so I was up in Minnesota for nine years. The first couple of years I finished my dissertation and then and then served as a as a parish pastor for those nine years.

And then got the call to come back here and teach homiletics. And so I've been here now for this is my seventh year teaching.

David: I remember when we called you too.

Peter: Oh, yeah. Against your vote.

David: I know. No, no, I was we knew that you were struggling with with wanting to stay in the parish and not wanting to come here to teach.

And and, you know, there were some people were like, you know, he really he really loves the parish and wants to stay there.

I'm like, that's the reason he should be here. We don't want professors who don't love parish ministry.

I mean, you know, you it's kind of like you you you want to be in the ministry. So come teach.

Peter: Yeah. And it really was true. It was a it was a I mean, not a perfect congregation, but it was a wonderful they were like family and they were healthy.

And they I was able to be a pastor and they appreciated it and they loved our family.

That was hard.

David: And you go into the church and nobody's saying hi, Pastor.

Peter: Right. You don't have that relationship.

David: Yeah, you don't. And you're like, oh, that's what I'm missing. I'm no longer the pastor of this church.

Peter: Yeah. And you get some of that relationship with students, but they come and go. So it's not the same as in the parish.

Jessica: You are relational people where I could see you as a pastor caring for people and trying to make sermons,

something that they can understand and taking all the amazing theology that you've learned and be able to say it in a way that people can understand it and learn from it.

As someone sitting in the pew listening to sermons, it seems to me that a very relational pastor preaches a sermon that can hit your heart because he's thinking about us.

He's thinking about the listeners when he's planning his sermon. So good job.

Both of you.

Peter: Well, that's what I love about preaching. I was trained well because Dave was my homiletics professor way back in the spring of 2000.

I had you for homiletics. And I remember I really enjoyed the close and I really enjoyed preaching because it brings together the theology that you study, the scriptures that you study so closely, the good news of the gospel.

But you bring it to specific people. And that's where kind of the joy of helping students who already love theology and love people in theory, prepare to preach to real life people.

David: And the thing is that I always tell the students, preaching only gets better because here you're preaching to the class and then you're preaching to your fieldwork congregation, but you're not really preaching to your parishioners.

And once that happens, it's just it's beautiful. It's not as it's I think it's hard, harder to write sermons here than when you're out in the parish.

Peter: Definitely. And it's because you have a relationship with the people to whom you're preaching in the parish. And that relationship informs their listening and it informs your speaking.

David: Yeah, and it actually it informs your speaking in a way where they're in your mind. So you're not looking at a text as if it's completely you know, you've got this completely blank mind.

And, you know, what could I preach about from this text? You're actually thinking of people.

And there are certain things on your heart that shape the way you read and what you're hearing. And it makes it a it makes it a conversation.

Peter: You know, and that actually I know we're going to get to this, Jessica, but it comes to mind right now.

That's what makes I think what you and what we're trying to do in this podcast, both a challenge and to recognize how the listeners, whoever's listening to this right now, is really contributing to what we're saying, because you know your people.

You're thinking about what they need to hear. You're thinking about their situation. And Dave and I are sitting here thinking about, well, in theory, we preach maybe this.

But it really requires that the people who listen to this participate in the thought process, at least of who they're preaching to.

Jessica: And that's one of the reasons that I'm here on the show. That was something that Peter had said when we were planning the show.

He's like, I've listened to other lectionary podcasts and none of them have a parishioner on the show, you know, so that I can ask questions so that when you guys are writing your sermons, you know what questions I might have sitting in the pew.

David: Yeah, but now now so you're not just a blank slate generic parishioner. Tell us a little bit about your life experiences.

Jessica: So I started out working with children and education and quickly went to youth ministry. I love junior high and high schoolers.

David: And so what do you love about them?

Jessica: Oh, they're at the age where they want to learn more theology, but they're still so moldable.

You know that this is for the first time they're thinking that Sunday school isn't just about the same stories that we've heard all these times, but that there's something connecting this Old Testament story to Jesus.

And you see the light bulb go off. It's so exciting and so fun.

But really, the actual true reason that I wanted to work with youth is because junior high and high school were awful. I hated it.

David: Everyone else should do. It was miserable. And so I want to help them.

Jessica: Like I wanted I wanted to be like the person that would that I wish that I would have had.

Well, and even working with children, I liked junior high and high school because you could go deeper.

But it seemed like the younger the kids I was teaching in Sunday school, the more theology I needed to understand if I was going to say it in a way that they would get.

So that's why I came to Concordia Seminary and got my master's in systematic theology, because it was just going to help me be a better teacher.

So if I could understand it more than I could, I could help the I could help the second graders understand a little bit better.

And because I loved it. And it was such a great experience to come here and get to learn those things.

And I'm excited to be here because I feel like I can be the voice of people listening to your sermons and help remind pastors of the 12 year old sitting in the pew as well.

You know, or the high school is there, too, because sermons shouldn't just be for the grown up sitting there. It's for everybody.

Peter: Yeah, because they are listening. Oh, yeah. Even the the youngest ones are listening. So you've got to be aware of that.

Jessica: Now, I want to know more about your family life, your interests and your hobbies. Your first Peter, what's your favorite thing to do on a Saturday?

Peter: When I have a Saturday free, I really enjoy the outdoors. I love spending time out in creation.

If we lived in someplace other than St. Louis, I would love to go hiking or kayaking or fly fishing. I really love my brothers both live in the northwest.

And when I get to fly fish with them, that's that's great. But something we started a couple of years ago that I really began to enjoy is rock climbing.

When the pandemic hit and all youth sports were canceled, our kids didn't do anything really active for a year.

And we had some friends get us into rock climbing. And so we've started doing that in a gym here in town.

And then there's a number of places, surprisingly, there's a number of really neat places outdoors, even not too far from St. Louis.

But we we get out and we rock climb and we tie in the ropes properly to our to our harnesses.

And I put my life in the hands of my daughter and my 16 year old son, which is always an exercise in trust.

Jessica: How old is your daughter?

Peter: Our oldest is 18. She's getting ready for college. And then we've got a 16 year old son and then a 14 year old son and a 12 year old daughter.

So when you mentioned youth earlier, I thought about how youth youth will be honest with you and they are interested in thinking theologically in a way that's that's new and that's very interesting to them.

David: Yeah, I went you took me rock climbing.

Peter: Yeah, that was fun. It was a lot of fun.

David: I just I barely made it to the top of this wall.

Peter: You did great, Dave. You did great.

David: I didn't know when you were up there. You're supposed to just let go. And I'm like, you should have told me when I was on the bottom.

I would have climbed so high.

Peter: It was really entertaining for us.

David: I'm glad I could entertain you.

Jessica: OK, David, what do you do on a perfect Saturday?

David: Oh, I don't know. I don't know.

I mean, it's funny because the things you mentioned, I love kayaking. I love hiking. So I like those.

I keep the bees. So whenever I get a chance to do something with my bees, I enjoy doing that.

Peter: So what do you do with your bees?

David: The bees are able to survive without my help.

So the hard part is surviving.

Peter: Are you keeping the bees or are the bees keeping you?

David: The hard part is for them to survive with my help.

But it's so fun because you take out, you know, you've got like 30,000, 40,000 bees.

And if you are quiet and you move slowly, they will just keep doing what they're doing.

And you're just like you're pulling out the frames and they're just doing their stuff. It is so relaxing.

Peter: Have you ever gotten stung by them?

David: I have not gotten stung.

Jessica: Oh, wow.

Peter: That's impressive. I know.

David: I know. It's probably going to happen now that you asked me.

Peter: See, right now I'm picturing you with this big hazmat suit.

David: I am. I've got that suit on.

I've got the suit and the smoker and all of that stuff. It's my neighbor and I. We do it together.

She's got bees and I've got bees. And yeah, it's fun.

Peter: We talked about what we're doing. What do you do on your Saturday, Jessica?

Jessica: What I do on a Saturday and what I would love to do on a Saturday might be two different things.

If I could pick anything, I would go hiking with my three kids and my husband.

David: Oh, wow.

Jessica: Yeah, be out in the woods and hike around. And then in the evening I would watch classic films with my husband.

Peter: Classic films.

Jessica: Yes, I love old movies.

David: I like old movies, too.

It is so nice to, for a moment, live in a world where people are not carrying cell phones.

But then you see them all smoking. And you're like, well, okay, some good things, some bad things.

Jessica: So here at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, there's all kinds of classes that our deaconesses and our future pastors are taking.

And I know you guys are both homiletic professors, but what other classes do you teach?

David: Well, I teach courses in Christianity and literature.

So I have a course on Flannery O'Connor that I love teaching. And then I want to do Milton.

I'd like to do Milton's Paradise Lost. I have done that in the past, but I'd like to do that again.

And now I'm going to be doing faith, film and fiction with David Lewis.

Oh, cool. We're going to be looking at science fiction.

So I'll be taking Philip K. Dick and his science fiction and things been turned into films and talking about that.

Peter: So that's cool.

David: Yep. Do that.

And then I have that devotional life class and then I have a theology and culture class that I like to teach.

And that's at the grad level. So I'll teach. And then, you know, some preaching classes at the graduate level.

I do a narrative preaching course for the graduates. What about you, Peter?

Peter: I teach. So my my degree was in systematic theology when I came through here.

Shout out to Jessica.

Jessica: It's my favorite kind of theology.

Peter: As I like to poke people sometimes. We're all systematicians. Some of us are just willing to admit it.

So at any rate, I teach a couple of classes, intro to systematic theology.

And I teach a graduate course on the theology of preaching, kind of preaching from a systematic perspective,

what we're doing and what we believe God's doing, all that. I teach intro to pastoral ministry here,

which is a fun class because that's the first year guys get here. And that's a fun time to draw on my pastoral experience

and think about those years and kind of relive that time.

But for the sake of helping orient the students toward, you know, we're kind of trying to start from the beginning here to help them.

Their goals have become, most of them, pastors. Yeah, that's a really it's a fun class.

It's a fourth year elective and it looks at the history of confirmation, which is a really convoluted history.

It's really fascinating to see how we got to what we do today. But then it looks at the current state of our culture,

especially as it impacts young people, and then to look forward to try to think of ways we could be more effective in confirmation

and Christian formation in an increasingly post-Christian culture and what are some unique opportunities we have,

what are some challenges we have. And so this is usually students take this who are just about to go take their calls.

And so it's very real. They're very engaged. We had a great conversation just yesterday on pedagogy.

The students led, they researched aspects of pedagogy they thought would be helpful for confirmation.

Then we had a whole class period discussion of pedagogy and especially with respect to special needs students.

So that's a lot of fun.

Jessica: I know you take mentoring the students very seriously.

Peter, you live on campus, right? Just to form those relationships because your wife is also mentoring the seminary wives and women here.

I got to do a women's ministry thing with her a couple of weeks ago and she had everybody over to your backyard and made coffee.

She was great.

David: So their house is so welcoming. It is so cool.

Peter: I'm on campus. We have students in our backyard all the time. My wife works. She's the family in transition coordinator.

So she works with wives and families that come with their husbands who come to study.

And then we just, it's fun because our kids are here on campus and they know the seminarians and their wives like their neighbors and friends sometimes.

So it's a neat place to kind of have life in community.

Jessica: David, what's your favorite part of teaching students?

David: Well, you know, I love the ham classes because it's the, for me, it's the closest thing I can get to what I loved about the ministry.

Peter: Yeah.

David: Is that the students, when they're preaching, we teach them to preach as a witness, that is to preach what you believe and to preach it authentically, to embody what you're preaching and let it be real.

You know, the preaching tasks, like you said, it's bringing all a lot of the theological disciplines all together into one moment.

But it's also bringing a lot of the students life experience right into that moment.

And so to be there, walking with them, helping them think about what they're saying and how they're saying it and to whom they're speaking and why they're speaking this way and what they hope to accomplish, it's just, that is really fun.

Jessica: All right. So you both have experience preaching and teaching people to preach.

How do you think this show will help pastors write sermons and teachers write Sunday school lessons?

David: Well, it's called Kickstart, right?

Jessica: Lectionary Kickstart, that's it.

David: Right, Lectionary Kickstart. So it really is the very first thing that happens.

So when you're preaching, you look at what are the possible texts that are going to be read and what do I think about them?

And I think that's, it's a step that some people overlook and some people actually fight against it.

So the big fear about this particular step is it's called initial impressions. That's what we call it.

We call it initial impressions.

And the fear of the initial impressions text is that you're going to read into the scriptural text things that are not true,

they're not historically accurate, they're not well researched, and it's just going off of your impressions.

And so, you know, when you get into the pulpit, you actually want to preach that which has arisen out of scholarly study,

prayer, meditation and all of that. And you want that to be in the sermon.

But that's not where the sermon begins. The sermon begins in an entire life that the Holy Spirit has invested in you since you were baptized

and the experiences you have had in that life and the things that are evoked when you read certain words in a text

and that come to your mind from those life experiences and from the experiences of your people.

And, you know, we can't pretend that we're blank slates just kind of reading a text and we're going to define what it truly means.

Peter: Yeah, and our hearers haven't called us to be blank slates.

David: No.

Peter: You know, when you're a pastor, you're called to do word and sacraments in a specific place for a specific people.

And that means they've asked you and called you every Sunday to go to the scriptures on their behalf.

David: Right.

Peter: And to take their hopes and dreams and idols and fears and the things that are important to them

for you to go on their behalf to the scriptures, to this other world in the Bible and learn from that world

so that you can speak back to your people in appropriate ways.

And so you always go there with an agenda in that sense.

You're reading these scriptures so that you may preach the commands and promises of God from them to these people.

David: And this is what I like about it, is that it's very inductive, right?

Peter: Mm hmm.

I mean, it's this experience of, oh, this is what I thought of when I read this text, or this is what I know my parishioners are going to think of when they read this text, because we just had a teen suicide in the congregation.

You come across this text and, you know, rejoice in the Lord always.

And you're thinking, how can we rejoice in the midst of a teen suicide?

I mean, I just you know, that's what comes to my mind in the text.

Now, those first impressions, they're first impressions.

And so the rest of the study, the rest of the journey can either confirm them.

Peter: Right.

David: Or reshape them or correct them.

And regardless of what happens, I can use that in a sermon.

So if my first impression was corrected, I can say something like, you know, when I first read this text, it makes you think about this.

And then later on in the sermon, I can reveal how deeper study and reflection is going to correct that idea.

Or it might be that I'm right on target.

And so, I mean, that's how I kind of look at it.

Peter: Yeah, I think you're looking at the fact that the sermon is a weaving together, and this is, you know, how we teach it here.

The sermon is a weaving together of a number of threads of discourse.

You've got the scriptures that you study.

You've got our theological confession, our doctrine, our understanding of God and the world.
We've got the need to proclaim the promises of God in Christ, an evangelical proclamation.
And you've got these hearers.

And the hearers are an important part of the sermon as well.

And so when I was a parish pastor, I remember, you know, I preached every Sunday for nine years.

And oftentimes it was me in my study alone trying to decide what I'm going to preach on.

And when I think about this podcast, I think about inviting a couple of people to think with you with this initial impression,

what strikes you and why, and what are some angles you might take that might be corrected, they might be deepened.

They're certainly just initial.

David: Right, they're just initial.

And they're also kind of, they create trajectories of things you might study.

Right, so you have a question and you're like, oh, so if I'm going to try to answer this question, where might I go in the rest of my work this week?

Peter: Yeah, and that's really, that's a good way to put it because you study certain things in the text when you study it,

and you don't study other things.

David: Right.

Peter: And so this gives you some direction.

David: And if you study everything in the text, you won't have enough time to have a sermon ready for Sunday.

There's just too much there.

Peter: Right.

David: And so it's kind of a way of just beginning to say, yeah, I'm probably going to devote a lot of time this week

to that title that's given to Jesus in this text, or a wonderful counselor.

Peter: Or it really does too.

You're preaching on a text from Paul, for instance, and he's talking about the law, and you realize maybe I need to do a little refreshing on Paul's understanding of the law.

And so that's going to guide a little bit of your study, and even if you were going to maybe have your first impression

go that direction for a sermon, you might, after some study, realize this needs to be a Bible study,

I'll save it for something later.

David: Right, yeah.

Jessica: We planned this podcast, we developed this podcast in response to requests for it.

You know, when I would survey seminary students or pastors that would come in for symposiums or anything on campus,

what kind of podcast would be helpful in your ministry?

Hands down, something to help me with sermons on Sunday, something that would talk about lectionary.

This was in response to what people asked for.

This is what the guys needed.

And I think for anyone who is planning a lesson plan for a Sunday school class, this can help you look at the text,

get some context from these experts in the room about what this text is about and how it fits in, and even personally, if I were just listening to this, it would get my heart ready for Sunday.

I would think about the text that my pastor is going to be reading to me ahead of time

and start to get in the mindset and just kind of prepare myself.

Peter: Well, and I think, you know, every time we do this kind of thing, you're aware of how much you don't know.

You know, you take your first impression and you look at it and you say,

wow, that's something I haven't thought about, I need to go study that.

And that's where a lot of the conversations I imagine we'll be having will be helping us refine what we need to study more,

what we don't know, because neither Dave or I are exegetes.

We haven't spent time in these texts like commentary writers have.

David: But we're approaching them the way parishioners approach them.

On Sunday morning, you come to church and you hear this text read and you have initial impressions of it.

Peter: That's right.

David: You know, there might be an image that sticks in your mind.

There might be something that was said that you have a question about.

You don't understand this or that.

And you just kind of, you start there and kind of sift through.

You take a moment to think about, one, what it is that I'm thinking about, and two, why, why am I thinking about that?

Why is that important to me?

And then three, if it is important, then how would we go about fleshing it out?

You know, what would the week ahead look like?

Where would I go?

What would I look at?

How would I kind of see it?

It's not giving you the results of research.

Peter: Right.

David: It's giving you just the first glance.

Here's some things that I think I might look into.

Peter: Yeah, that's a good way to put it.

Well, I've got to say one more thing, too, about this podcast.

One thing I tell every class that I teach, every homiletics class, is I tell them, this gets back to my pastoral ministry,

that when I took a call here to the seminary, I traded in a ministry that I loved, people that I loved,

so that I could come be helpful to other people who will go and preach the word to other people.

And I tell students, if it's not for what they're doing and what they will do in their ministries, then what I'm doing here is a waste of time.

And so anything that we can do to be helpful to preachers, to the ministry of the Word, throughout the church,

we're just simply trying to be helpful as other people do the really important work of proclaiming the Word of God week in, week out.

David: I guess what I like about it, from the ones we have done, is just getting to know both of you around our conversation around the Word.

I mean, so you're drawn into God's Word and you're drawn closer to one another.

And that's kind of how the Word works.

Peter: That's preaching, right?

David: Yeah, and that's preaching.

That's what you hope it does when you're preaching it to your people.

Jessica: Well, I'm thankful that pastors like you are training pastors to be pastors for me.

Well, there you go. Now you've gotten to know us a bit.

You are invited to tune in every week to episodes of Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger

take a look at next week's lectionary text and spark your thoughts for Sunday.