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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart, where we're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or teaching lesson.

I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau, 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.

David, where are we in the church here?

David: We are in the tenth week after Pentecost.

And Pentecost is the season where we celebrate the working of the Holy Spirit and the lives of God's people.

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

The readings come from Isaiah 55, Romans 9, and Matthew 14.

I was tempted when I looked at the text, because I like to look a couple weeks out and see what's coming,

to do a couple sermons in a row on Matthew 14, because this week and next week are a continuation of the same part of the narrative,

with the feeding of the 5,000 and then Jesus going out on the lake to the disciples.

So I was tempted to do that, but I decided not to because I read Isaiah 55, and that's just such a compelling...

David: It's beautiful.

Peter: ...compelling image and beautiful text and promises.

And so I think, at least my first thought is, I think I might preach on Isaiah 55 this coming week.

And actually, the place I'd like to start, Jessica, if you wouldn't mind reading, is in verse 2.

Jessica: Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourself in rich food.

Peter: All right.

I wanted to start with verse 2, because this is a beautiful text, this Isaiah 55, 1 to 5.

But verse 2 is a...especially the first half of verse 2, is a very...is a saddening verse, a saddening couple of lines.

So there's...in the midst of this invitation to come and to eat and to drink and to come to this great feast, there's this question, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

David: Sounds like a consumerist culture.

Peter: Yeah, I mean...

I mean, you know...

Well, yeah, it's people who spend their...not just their money, but their lives.

David: I mean, why do I do that?

Peter: Well, because I think it will satisfy.

Yeah, so there's a lot that doesn't satisfy.  
I think about our culture of work, how much we work to accumulate and to find meaning and satisfaction.  
And there's a lot of labor that does not satisfy.  
And so I think that reality that I think a lot of people can relate to in our culture would be something that I would want to note that that's a problem.  
Nailing down what specific aspect or what effect of sin or what kind of sin...

David: And even if you don't talk about it as a problem, you know, what longing is present here?

Peter: Right.

David: You know?

Peter: Yeah, and I think there's a lot...I think that actually you might...for some people, you may have to uncover that just a little bit,  
because we're so accustomed to seeking after certain things a never-ending search for satisfaction that you're never going to find that satisfaction.

And anything that you do in this life.

So there's, on that happy note, there's this...

David: You start out saying this is a beautiful text full of promises.

Where do you take us?

Peter: Well, and this is where, you know, again, this is first look at the text.

One thing that I'm going to want to do when I study this text a little more carefully is specifically get into who is being talked to.

This is spoken to the people of Israel who are laboring for things that does not satisfy.

And so I want to do a little bit of research on that.

David: And God did tell them, didn't...

I mean, God did tell them when they go to that land to labor there, to work there, to build homes there, right?

Peter: Build homes and plant gardens.

David: Yeah.

And so they've...

So it kind of makes you wonder, do you think that they're aware of this problem for themselves or they're not?

Have they so bought into this culture in the exile that they're not longing for going back home?

And they're kind of establishing things and God's awakening to the fact that, you know,

yeah, you're building a home here, but it's not going to satisfy in the end.

Or are they, you know, by the waters of Babylon, we laid down our harps and wept and they're, you know,

God's just kind of naming what they're experiencing.

I mean, kind of...

Peter: Yeah, and I don't know if your study of the text will answer that question a whole lot. It might.

I mean, I can look at it.

David: Doesn't that get so frustrating when you have a question like that and you're like, oh, I can't figure it out. But then you just let people know, you know, I'm not exactly sure what's going on, but here's how I would think about it.

Peter: Right. Right.  
If you can... I think anytime you preach in the Old Testament,  
I think you've got to give a little bit of context for what we're dealing with,  
because the eighth century BCE is a very different time and place than today.  
And so you have to do something to get your ears back into that context without going so long that you lose them for today.  
But so we've got that question that just saddens me, at least.  
I think saddens anyone who takes it seriously.

David: And saddens God.

Peter: And saddens God.  
There's almost a... there's a longing even in the question that why do you... why do you do this?  
Don't you know who I am?

David: I mean, if you think of the original curse, right, that man would labor, and by the sweat of his brow, he would eat his food. Right.  
So here you've got even a worse situation where by the sweat of your brow, you're laboring to eat things that aren't going to satisfy you.  
I mean, at least in the original one, the food we ate was helpful for us.  
But here it's kind of even worse now.

Peter: Right. Right. The hunger always returns.  
So in the midst of that problem, then the promise, I think, becomes even fuller and more beautiful.  
And so I'd kind of bracket verse two and read verse one and verse three then around it.  
Could you read verse one and three, Jessica?

Jessica: Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk, without money, without price.  
Incline your ear and come to me.  
Hear that your soul may live, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

Peter: All right. So here's the promise, and here's what makes it beautiful.  
There's this gracious invitation.  
Come, everyone, everyone who thirsts, everyone who is longing to be satisfied.  
Come to the waters. If you have no money, come.  
I don't know how you buy without any money, but

David: I think that's kind of the idea, right?  
I know. It's interesting. I like that. Yeah.

Peter: Come with no money and buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk, without money, without price.

It's such a foreign idea of this just generous welcome for everybody, and nothing is required.  
No money is required.  
And then the verse three, incline your ear and come to me that your soul may live.  
So now we're going not just from kind of this feast imagery, but to kind of this deep longing, that the longing for life that is very deep in our soul.  
And so I want to, what I want to, what I'd like to do in a sermon, I think, at least what I'm thinking about is, to help people recognize both that which does not satisfy and then the promise of God, which alone satisfies.

Jessica: You know, David, what you said about where the people were when Isaiah wrote this, that they were in exile.  
I had thanks for explaining that because I think, well, we know don't store up for yourself treasures on earth.  
God satisfies. We need to be reminded of that all the time.  
But specifically in this text to show us like the living analogy at that time that they weren't in their home.  
They were in some other country.  
They got carried off there. And how do you build a house like you're going to be here for a while?

David: Right.

Jessica: But no, this isn't your home.  
This is not the land that God promised you.

David: Yeah. How do you live in the meantime?

Jessica: What a telling analogy.

David: So we've got this promise we're going to go back.  
But we're supposed to live in the meantime.  
And how do we live in the meantime and hold on, have two lives at the same time, which I think is where a lot of parishioners are.  
Right. We come to church and then we go out into the world and it's kind of like, how do we, how do we do this?  
How do I work and labor for that which does not satisfy?  
You know, because I still have to work.

Peter: Right. And work itself is not the problem.

David: Right.

Peter: That's kind of something that you don't want to cast that as you shouldn't work for things that are that are bread or labor.  
But they won't satisfy.  
That's the satisfaction is kind of the thing I think you want to you want to work with.  
Well, and that's the connection between your hearers that we're in exile in a different sense.  
We're not in Babylon, of course, but we are in exile.  
This is the whole idea of being a foreign people who are never really at home here.  
I think one thing you're going to want to do when you if you preach on this text is take a close look at my steadfast, sure love for David.  
Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and a commander.

So I assume that's talking about David there.  
But I'm wondering how much you'd want to make a connection to the son of David or if that's appropriate there.

David: Yeah, I mean, well, I mean, I think that's beautiful in five. If you're again, once again, thinking about the exile, right? You, Israel, or Israel reduced to one, shall call a nation that you do not know and a nation that did not know you shall run to you.  
So suddenly the exile becomes a mission field.

Peter: Right.

David: And there's some place rather than some place we're going to escape.  
It's a place where our lives are a witness and will bring people from the exile with us home when we go back.

Peter: So we've been invited to this different kind of economy. Come and eat and drink without money and find life for your soul.  
And then we invite those to come to come with us, the nations that they may run to us.

David: So it opens up with God inviting.  
And then in the end, there's a larger invitation. I mean, it's all of a sudden this invitation is not just to us, but to others through us, I guess.

Peter: Right.  
And that's one way the church, at least, having been invited, then addresses the search for satisfaction that so often goes unmet by inviting to this different kind of life.

Jessica: What about you, David? What would you preach on?

David: I would preach on Romans 9.

Jessica: The big switch!  
Well, here we go.  
Peter's been doing Romans 9.

David: I know, but you see, it's one of those things sometimes when I'm looking at texts,  
I'm going to lean into a text that I love, and then sometimes there's texts that I don't love  
and I would run away from, and I'm like, maybe you should lean into that.  
So Romans 9.

Peter: I won't ask which kind.

David: I know, I know. This is the point, because all is great in Romans 8.

Peter: That's right.

David: Not so fine in Romans 9.

Peter: Oh, there you go.

Jessica: Ooh, nice, nice.

David: It is not so fine anymore when we get to Romans 9.  
And so it's, you know, it's a hard text.

Peter: It is, it is.

David: It's a very hard text, and it's a text that gets into a lot of argument about the very last line.  
So line 12 of our verse 12 and 13, if you could read that.

Jessica: As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.

David: Okay, so that's the verse.

Jessica: Poor Esau. What's up with that?

David: I know, I know, and everybody takes this verse out of context.  
They use it to argue for double predestination.  
And it's, it frustrates me, because you have this verse, and it's a verse taken from Malachi to begin with, and Paul's quoting the scriptures as if everyone knows. And now you get this, and it hits you hard.  
And I think what happens is your, your mind is taken away from what Paul is actually talking about in the passage, and you're just kind of thrown into this debate about double predestination with Jacob and Esau.

Peter: Which is sometimes what you, what's tempting to do in a sermon.  
You know, if you're not careful just to take it, that's why you got to read it in context and exactly what you're talking about.

David: Right, and so yeah, so like two approaches, right?  
So one approach is to do that to people, because it's going to happen anyway.  
And so you kind of really kind of shock people, allow the shocking nature of the text to be heard, and then kind of work inductively around it.  
That, and so for a while I was thinking in my mind, I was thinking this would be a good question answered sermon. What does it mean? Jacob, I love Esau, I hate it. Does it mean double predestination? And that would be the first false answer.  
And then you kind of show why that would not be the case, and you move on.

Jessica: Please do, please do, because I never understand this verse and I would like you to explain it to me.

David: I know, I know. Well, so but then the other option would be to force people to listen to the rest of the text.  
So basically two things are happening in Romans 9, which I think, I actually think are important for us today.  
The first thing that's happening is in verse 2.  
And if you could read 1 and 2 where Paul just kind of opens his heart.

Jessica: I'm speaking the truth in Christ. I'm not lying.  
My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

David: Okay, so the text begins with Paul's sorrow.  
Now this is the Paul who everything was great in Romans 8. This is the Paul who has just celebrated that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.  
And I mean the massive shift in emotional energy that happens between 8 and 9 is just startling.  
And Paul is in deep sorrow. And the question is, what is he so sorrowful about?  
Well, he's sorrowful that not all of Israel who have received the promises, the covenant, the blessings of God, that not all of Israel is at this time believing in Jesus Christ.

And Paul is mourning, is mourning the way in which the promises of Scripture do not seem to be coming true.

Peter: Or that they're not believing the promises.

David: Right, right, not believing the promises.

Peter: That they're kind of spurning God's promises and the personal grief that causes them.

David: And the thing that amazes me here is that the response is sorrow.  
And this is why I think it's helpful for people in the church today.  
After COVID, they talk about the great resignation, right? That everybody has kind of, anybody who can has resigned from work.  
And they've just kind of, they've decided to retire, right? And I think the church is going through the great resignation.  
We're having a lot of people who are moving from the category of weekly churchgoers to once a month.  
You've got people who are, you know, the nuns, the duns, the people who are kind of walking away from the church, the prodigals, the exiles, the nomads.  
And so many people are walking away.  
And when I talk with fellow Christians about it, I don't hear sorrow.  
I hear anger.  
I hear frustration.

Peter: I hear fear sometimes.

David: Fear, defense.  
I mean...

Jessica: Sometimes a big shrug.  
I've heard people say, well, they probably weren't Christian anyway.  
They're just, they probably weren't part of the church anyway.  
They were just sitting here.

David: Right.  
So indifference.  
That's not, yeah.  
So there could be indifference.

Jessica: Paul was so upset.  
He said, I wish that I myself would be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my life.  
That is some deep sorrow.

David: I know, imagine that.  
That's like, that's like most...

Peter: That's too much for me.

David: Yeah, I know.  
I know.

Peter: That's the kind of love and a kind of compassion that is almost unbelievable.

David: Is almost unbelievable.  
I agree.  
And, you know, when you look at how we're responding to the massive exodus from the

church, our love for the people who are leaving is not near that at all.

Peter: Well, see, but I think, I do think, David, that, you know, when I think about these things we're talking about, I think about my pastoral heart.

David: Yeah.

Peter: When I was the pastor of this congregation and there were people who were, who had left the church, who were wandering off, I felt sometimes one of the burdens I felt as a pastor that I cared about them more than they cared about themselves.

And so I think...

David: See, now that's beautiful. That's what you want.

That's what we're looking for.

Peter: Well, and I think there's a lot of pastors and probably a lot of you out there listening to this who feel that way, who can empathize with Paul, that you've been called to care for these people and when they do wander...

David: But how does the church, how does the church deal with this, right?

I mean, I'm thinking of congregations where it's, can we clean up the rolls?

Yeah.

We got all these names on our rolls that aren't coming.

Do we still have to print envelopes for them?

I mean, that's a lot of money to print those envelopes and send them out and they never come here.

So, you know, let's, could the elder, could you just call them and just let them know?

And if you give them three calls and they don't respond, then we can take them off the rolls, right?

Right.

So there's this kind of administrative cleaning up that happens that is so different from the type of pastoral heart and response that the Apostle Paul voices, right?

Peter: Right.

Right.

So in a way you're trying to give your congregation a pastoral heart.

David: A model, right.

Yeah.

Right.

To help them cry out with Paul and, you know, I mean, what is the proper response to the mass exodus?

You know, sometimes it's defense.

Well, they don't like this and, you know, but we got to keep doing this for ages and



ages and ages or, you know, let's not capitulate to their interests, you know.

So it's defensiveness, it's fear, it's, you know, as you were saying, indifference.

And what is the response that a text like this invites us to step into?

I mean, you know, when all's not fine in chapter nine, how do you respond?

Well, you respond with this prayerful, sorrowful, lamenting love.

Peter: So the question is how do you evoke the experience?

David: How do you evoke the experience of sorrow?

You evoke the experience.

You tell the stories that invite sorrow.

It's just like you don't tell people hope.

Peter: Right.

David: You give them the vision that makes them hope.

Peter: Right.

David: Right?

You don't tell them.

Peter: So how do you go about, thinking about a sermon, how do you go about doing that?

Because I think that's really the key because we're good at telling people things.

David: Right.

And you've got, in your mind, you knew, I would think of the stories of the people who are no longer here and invite people to actually mourn that. You want to evoke experiences of Christian community, what it felt like, what it is like, so that we miss the people who aren't here. So if you're a family and a child has walked away from the home, you still set a place for them.

Jessica: Now that's...

David: And so every time you sit down to eat, there's an empty plate and a chair.

Jessica: That's a relationship that would evoke the response of love that would cause sorrow.

David: Right.

And that's what I'm saying.

Because you're talking about a kid that you love that left. Right.

Right.

And so the text begins with this sorrow that Paul has over the situation of this great resignation.

Right?

And it moves into certainty.

So we go from sorrow to certainty.

And that, if Jessica, if you could read verse six.

Jessica: But it is not as though the word of God has failed.

David: Okay.

So that's really, that's the point is that Paul, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish that people are leaving, but I don't doubt God's work through his word.

It's not like God's word has failed.

And so you kind of have your people in this space of tension where there's sorrow that people are leaving, but there's not distrust of the Word that's being proclaimed.

The Word that's still at work.

And so that we're still holding on to the things that we're certain of, which is that Word.

And we're still practicing and living in the sorrow of the people that are not listening to the Word and walking out.

Peter: And ultimately you're preaching that word to your people.

David: Correct.

Peter: Because I think you'd want to guard against preaching to the people who aren't here.

David: Correct.

Peter: And that's sometimes where that passage about Jacob and Esau maybe gets in trouble.

David: Well, and that's the thing, right?

So the whole thing with the Jacob and Esau thing, it's not about salvation.

It's about the role of that person in this salvation history that the seed, the seed of Abraham, which is going to become the blessing for all nations is going to come through one person.

And it has nothing to do with them.

This happened when they were in the womb.

They're in the womb, the same mother, same father, two children born at the same time.

There's nothing you can point to about what they did or didn't do that would make one be chosen and the other not.

But I have chosen to love Jacob and have the seed come through Jacob's line rather than Esau.

And so it's not about being elected to salvation.

It's about the role in this salvation history.

Peter: So why did God love Jacob and not Esau in this text?

Well, God hasn't told us that.

Then we end up trying to explain God instead of proclaiming his promises.

David: Right.

And so we've got this great resignation.

And we could play the blame game and we could talk about, well, why these people laughed.

Well, did you see the way their kids acted in church?

If you don't raise your kids right, no wonder you're going to be leaving the church.

I mean, you have all these.  
We have to play the blame game as to why they left.  
That's not what Paul does.  
Paul instead expresses sorrow for the people who are gone and  
certainty in God who's in  
charge of all of this mess.

Peter: And where does he go from here?  
I think it's next week is to the proclamation of the gospel.  
How are they going to believe without hearing?  
So it's not as though he's giving up.

David: Right.  
You have to read this all as one piece.  
You can't just take these little pieces like they are given  
to us.  
The response to that hard truth is beautiful.  
It's a deep, deep Christian sorrow for those who are not  
here.  
And it's also a deep, deep, unmovable certainty that God is  
at work through His word.  
And it's, I will bow before that mystery.

Jessica: Thanks guys.  
That's all for today.  
You can find free resources to guide your next step in  
planning at [ConcordiaTheology.org](http://ConcordiaTheology.org).  
Check it out.  
I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau.  
Join us next week here on Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David  
Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger  
spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: Because all is not fine in Romans 9.

David: But it's good again in Romans 10.  
Yes.

Peter: It's good.

Jessica: Oh wow.