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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. Alright, let's get started. David, where are we in the church here?

David: We are at the 19th week after Pentecost, a time when the church is celebrating the life of the Spirit among God's people.

Jessica: And Peter, what are the texts for this week?

Peter: The readings are from Isaiah 5, Philippians 3, Matthew 21, and the psalm is from Psalm 80.

Jessica: As always, I'll ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach on.

This week, David, will you go first?

David: Sure. I'm going to go with Matthew 21, the parable of the tenants and the vineyard.

Peter: That's a happy parable.

David: That is a really unhappy parable. I know, and you know, sometimes I run away as fast as I can from texts like this. And then other times I'm like, OK, Dave, you've got to deal with what you don't like about this, you know, and try to try to work through it and hope it works.

Peter: And to me, that's a helpful way to choose a text sometimes because it's tempting just to go with the ones that are familiar.

And sometimes it's the ones that are hard that expose something that we need to address.

Jessica: Thank you. Will you always do that? There's nothing worse. I mean, you sit in church and you hear the readings and that one that doesn't make sense just stays in your mind. And you keep thinking about it like, what does that mean? What did God mean by that?

And then you get to the sermon and you're like, you never answer the question.

And sometimes I don't always hear all of the sermon because I'm still thinking about, you know, fear and trembling.

What does that mean? You know, so thank you for doing that.

David: Now, in this case, it's actually it's not so much that you don't know what the text means.

Jessica: Well, you might not.

David: It's that you do. Even you don't know. Even you will know. But you do know what it means and you're just kind of angry about it. So like read verse 45.

Jessica: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.

David: OK, so so it's one of these parables where it's pretty obvious what Jesus is saying. And he's speaking about the chief priests. This is the end of Jesus's ministry. There are plans to kill him. He's been involved in temple activities where he's debating with people. They're challenging him. They're asking him questions. He's fighting back with answers. And so you've got this kind of this dark cloud of of what is happening as the religious leaders are rejecting Jesus. And so then Jesus tells them the story of this vineyard owner who goes away and he sends people to collect his the fruit from his vineyard. And they kill him and they kill him. And he sends his son and they kill the son and say, oh, let's kill the son and we can be the heirs. I mean, it's just it's it's so ludicrous, so ludicrous in the imagined realm of what these tenants are doing, that it's it's just shameful. And the Pharisees, they know that he's talking about them. It's obvious to them. And so and that, I think, is this parable often comes up in Lent. Right. Right at Holy Week or right before Holy Week. It's in Lent that you...

Peter: Because it leads up to the passion.

David: Leads up to the passion. And I think the thing that I struggle with is I ask myself, where am I? Who am I? Who am I identifying with in the story? And I often hear people who preach on this parable asking me to identify with the Pharisees. Right. To identify with somebody who is intentionally coming here to kill Jesus.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, and that's that that's the thing is to identify with the people who've come to kill Jesus. And I'm not saying that by nature, by nature, I wouldn't do that. Right. You know, by nature, yes, that is what I would do.

Peter: By your sinful nature.

David: By my sinful nature, I would reject Christ. I, you know, I would participate in that. I would cry out, crucify him by my sinful nature. But I'm speaking to the children of Christ. I'm speaking to the people that God has redeemed. I'm speaking to people who have come. They have confessed their sins. They're about to receive the Lord's Supper.

Peter: They've been given a new nature.

David: They've been given a new nature. Right. And so so it's kind of I thought to myself. So that's my struggle with this parable is that when you hear it, I think a natural reaction is to think of yourself as the Pharisees. And, you know, you're the ones who would kill Jesus.

And and I'm thinking, well, what would happen if we would identify with the disciples who are standing on the side, listening to Jesus and overhearing him talk with the Pharisees in in a parable that is less and less parabolic, because it really seems to be speaking the truth.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, and if you see it through the eyes of the disciples, it might be that you see things differently.

Peter: Yeah, I think that's that's really helpful because it is it is tempting to put ourselves right in the middle of the parable, usually identify with a character. And sometimes, you know, depending on who Jesus is talking to, sometimes that's appropriate. But this is really one of those parables that's telling it's I mean, you can't miss. This is telling the story of the history of Israel, of prophets being sent, prophet after prophet. And of course, Jesus, the son being sent and they kill him. This is one of those big picture parables that hasn't gotten yet to the point where the Gentiles are brought in and the people we got exist today. So they're not part of this parable.

David: So I think the interesting thing is, is if we look at this through the eyes of being a disciple, what do we see?

Peter: Well, you see, you see, I mean, you see people you feel bad for in a way.

David: Right.

Peter: I mean, these people are verse 43 and 44, the one who falls on the stone, we broke into pieces. When it falls on him, it will crush him.

David: Right.

Peter: And this is language of judgment.

David: Yes.

Peter: And destruction. And, you know, verse 43, the king of God will be taken away from you. I mean, in a sense, I suppose if I'm a disciple, I kind of have a little bit of schadenfreude.

Jessica: Ok, translate. What did you what was that?

Peter: Schadenfreude, you've heard that word, have you? It's one of these German words that gets just used in English.

Jessica: Maybe in your house it does. You've lived in Germany. What does it mean?

Peter: It's joy over someone else's grief. Grief, joy.

Jessica: Say it again.

Peter: Schadenfreude.

Jessica: Schadenfreude?

Peter: So you have joy over someone else's grief.

Jessica: I want to teach that word to my kids.

Peter: It's a good word.

So either the disciples could be in a position where they're kind of, yes, to get to him, Jesus.

David: Right.  
Peter: Or they could be in a position of, oh, man, that's awful.  
David: Right.  
Peter: And so you could maybe play with that a little bit.  
David: Yeah. Yeah. I'm thinking I'm thinking that what the disciples are seeing is, in a bizarre way, they're seeing the love of Jesus. It's kind of like remember when there was that guy who loved his wealth, a rich young ruler, and who came to Jesus and said, I've obeyed everything. What do I need to do? And then it says Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Peter: Right.  
David: And said, not I love you, said, go so everything you have. Come follow me. And the guy's like, no way. And he walks away. Right.  
And it's, there's a, this is a word of judgment. But the question is, what's the purpose of the judgment?  
Right. What is, what's Jesus' game plan? What's his end goal? What does he want to have happen?  
And my belief is that this is their last chance. He's, for one last time, he's trying to stop them from doing what they're going to do.

Peter: Trying to lead them to a moment like on Pentecost when they say, what should we do?

David: Right. Right.  
Peter: And Peter says repent and believe.  
David: Right. Yeah. And just trying to reach out in a, in a way that is, as you said, it's harsh.  
It's rough. It's, it's obvious to everyone what he's talking about.  
And he's, he's bringing in the whole history of Israel and God's relationship with his people.  
And he's just laying all of that burden on these men who are plotting for his own death.  
And he's doing it because, not because he wants to defeat them. Right?  
Not because he wants to defeat them, but because he wants them to follow him.

Peter: And it's almost like the tone of voice that you'd read, verse 43 and 44, you know, is Jesus saying, it's going to be taken away from you.

David: Right.  
Or is he saying, it's going to be taken away from you.

David: Right.  
Peter: And he'll crush you. Do you not get this?  
David: I know. I know. And that's why this oral, the oral reading of Scripture is so important.  
Right. Because you convey so much by how you read it.  
So even when you read the lesson on Sunday, I would be careful with how I read that portion.  
Because I would want people to hear the frustrated compassion of Jesus

that's causing the parabolic to kind of ramp up to a point where it's almost not a parable anymore.

It's kind of pretty clear what you're saying, because that's how much he wants to bring these people in.

Peter: I've got this idea for a structure here, Dave. It's not in your list of structures, but it's one that I've thought could be used, and this is exactly the kind of time it could be used. I'm thinking about a multiple tone structure. Oh, where you read a text in one tone. Yeah. And you read it. So one way to read this text would be to reflect on this Jesus, this angry Jesus, this I'm going to get you Jesus. Read it in that sense. And then, but you could make a transition in the sermon and say, what if we heard this text differently? And now hear it in this tone.

David: And what I like about that is that's how the church is heard in the world. Right. When the church is saying things that are direct and rough in terms of judgment, there are people who say it out of anger, but Jesus would say it out of love.

Peter: Right.

David: He's trying to turn. He's trying to gather you into a life that is better and more beautiful for you. He doesn't want you to be left behind. Right. In that sense, he doesn't want you to die. He doesn't want you to be broken to pieces and stumble on the stone. Yeah.

Peter: You know, I think sometimes about every once in a while, my kids will say that something like this to me, not very often because it's incredibly rare in our household, but they'll say something like, well, you didn't have to yell. I didn't yell. Now I'm yelling.

Jessica: If I ever heard you yell, I'd be terrified. You're not a yeller. That would be really intense.

Peter: But what's funny is sometimes my kids will, they'll hear me yell when I'm not intending it to sound like a yell. And then I then you have to you do have to be a little bit reflective about how did this come across.

David: Right.

Peter: And sometimes we in the church maybe could pay a little bit more attention to how our language comes across.

David: Right. Yeah. And even in the in the earlier portion of the parable where he's talking about the owner sending the son, because surely they'll listen to my son. I mean, even how you tell that and then the pause that you have before you hear kind of the hard heartedness of the people who are, you know, saying, well, let's kill the son and and and inherit it ourselves. I mean, you've got this.

You've got this longing. There is, you know, they will respect my son.  
There's this longing of God to have all people at the table. He wants all people at the table and the disciples who have been witnessing the Pharisees fighting against Jesus for a whole week now in the temple area, asking him trick questions, Jesus getting out of the questions.  
You know, you've got all that going on. And now's the moment when Jesus speaks to them for one last time. And he's speaking in a way that's trying, still trying to bring him in.

Peter: Well, it makes you think of Jesus saying, oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how long to gather you.

David: Right. How often have I wanted to gather you under my wings as I had to gather chicks under her wings.  
It's this Jesus that you're inviting them to imagine preaching this parable.

David: Right. Yeah. And so so standing as a disciple, it, you know, it changes me, but it doesn't change me in this.  
You know, so if I identify with the Pharisees, the changes, I recognize how sometimes I'm controlling and I try to make God's kingdom my kingdom and, you know, I grow distant from God and all of that.  
And then this parable awakens me to that sin and I confess and I come to Jesus.  
So that's kind of the change if you take the viewpoint that we're the Pharisees, Jesus is talking to you.

Peter: But you still have to be careful if you take that route because your people are not Pharisees.  
They're the baptized people of God who have their same time sinner and saint nature that you've got to honor that.  
And to treat people like Pharisees, you've got to be really careful if you're going to go that route.

David: Right. Yes. So thank you very much. And he didn't yell, but he's going to yell if I, if I, so you've got that.  
But then the other change is going to be this change of of the person who is in a world that just seems to be struggling with Christian witness.  
And, you know, is kind of wondering, how is this done? How is Jesus going to be approaching this world that is constantly, you know, fighting against him or questioning against him?  
And then lo and behold, Jesus offers a way, a way of approaching that world, which is a way of reaching out in it and trying to get their attention because he still wants them in the kingdom.  
He doesn't write anybody off.

Peter: Well, it's a way of love instead of fear.

David: Right.

Peter: And I think our posture before the world is often our posture before the opponents of the gospel is often fear.  
But Jesus, even even here, right before his suffering and death, is still loving.

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

Peter: All right. I'm looking at the Philippians passage from Philippians three. And I wonder if you could get us started by reading verses 12 through 14.

Jessica: Not that I have already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Peter: Have you guys ever read the book Endurance by Alfred Lansing?

Jessica: Nope.

Peter: OK. This is a great book. It's history.

David: It's history.

Peter: It's the story of the Endurance. A boat of 1914 sailed from England. It was a crew that they had an expedition. Ernest Shackleton, Sir Ernest Shackleton, was the leader of this expedition. And so it's this this attempt to cross Antarctica. And these these 28 people sail down, you know, like 12000 miles from England and they are getting close to Antarctica. And as they kind of were afraid, their ship got stuck in the ice and they were something like 100 miles away from shore. And before too long, they could tell this expedition was going to be a failure. The boat would be crushed and it ended up sinking. But the story I'll get to my point here in just a minute. The book is called Endurance. And it's about this the story of these people who endured incredible, incredible difficulty. I mean, after their boat sank, they had three little lifeboats to sail across the Drake Passage, which is one of the stormiest seas on the planet. And they finally go 100 miles to this uninhabited rock and they finally get to this South Georgia island where there's a whaling station. But they get there and they have to cross 22 miles of on mapped glacial mountains to get to this whaling station. And then finally they get there and they have it takes them three attempts to get back to the people they left on Elephant Island, who it was it's an incredible story of endurance and and dealing with adversity and persevering. And so I was looking at that book not long ago and I read these verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians and I he talks about I'm pressing on. I've not obtained this. I consider I forget what lies behind. I'm straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal and I'm thinking about this story of endurance and how first of all, how compelling that story is.

But also then how the Christian story, the Christian life, Paul's life is one of endurance, pressing on, struggling. One of the details about this story, the Shackleton story that is really compelling to me and there's a nice connection to text here, I think.

When they when the big boat gets crushed and sinks and they can only take what they can fit on these tiny little lifeboats.

Shackleton says each man only gets two pounds worth of stuff. And to demonstrate what he means by that, he took his Bible that the Queen of England had given him and he rips out Psalm 23 and a page from Job and drops the rest of the Bible in the ocean.

But so I this this text, I read this text and I think of this book, Endurance, in this incredible story.

Jessica: How did it end? What happened in the end?

Peter: Well, incredibly, they get back to the island and not a soul was lost.

They all survived.

David: It kind of raises issues.

How do you bring the story into the sermon? How much of the story do you tell?

Peter: Right? Right.

So there's a couple there's a couple of things. I'll make a couple of comments and connections.

And I'll make a couple of suggestions for how you maybe could organize it.

David: OK, great.

Peter: So first of all, however, however much of the story you tell, you could kind of have that in your own mind.

But there's a couple of specific verses in this readings from Philipians that I'd want to highlight.

One of them would be verse seven. Would you read that one, Jessica?

Jessica: But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Peter: The story of Endurance makes me think of this because they lost so much.

They were on this mission to gain notoriety and accomplishment and success.

David: Oh, that's nice.

Peter: They lost it.

David: Because of that listing that Paul offers is all things that people would take pride in.

Peter: Right.

David: You've got that nice dynamic.

Peter: Right.

David: Of an expedition that had one purpose that is reconceived.

Peter: Right.

Then in verse 13, he talks about one thing I do, Paul says, forgetting what lies behind, straining forward till it lies ahead.



That whole Endurance story is one of we have to forget, you know, we have to let go a lot of the stuff we can't take with us.

The only chance of survival is straining on toward safety, toward survival, that kind of thing.

Verse 11 kind of highlights why he considers all these things loss.

That by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

And so there's a couple of things here.

One is the valuing of the resurrection, that our resurrection, of course,

when the Lord returns is of such greater value than any anything we might accomplish or experience here on Earth.

But it also gives you an opportunity, I think, when you think about resurrection language, to proclaim the resurrection.

Not only that, I mean, that's what leads people to long for it is the proclamation of the promise of their resurrection because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

So that's an idea that I think stands out to me.

And then the third idea that stands out is the second half of verse 12.

I press on to make my own because Christ has made me his own.

And so I think about the promise that I belong to Jesus.

And the good news that that would help you proclaim.

I think you could do a multiple story sermon.

David: Oh yeah, I think so.

Peter: You could spend the first rhetorical unit just telling this story.

Now you have to manage a little bit how long, how many details you do because at some point people might be wondering, why are you telling us this story?

David: Right, that would happen.

Peter: So you've got the Shackleton story, which is one of endurance with a happy ending.

They all make it alive.

You've got Paul's story, which is one of, especially after his Damascus experience, was marked by great suffering.

I mean, you could list off the shipwreck, the beatings, all the things Paul experienced and he endured.

And then a third story would be the story of the church maybe, maybe a story of your congregation, maybe a story of the individual Christian.

And then you could kind of help them.

David: Yeah, and you can divide them up individually like that.

But I'm thinking of making the Shackleton story, dividing it into three sections.

And then after each section, looking at Paul, looking at us.

Peter: So kind of like a part to part to part.

David: Right, right.

Peter: Instead of hole to hole to hole.

David: Right.

David: The big first thing would be that there's a catastrophe that causes you to value everything differently.

Okay, and so you've got this and so you tell that how that happened for him, you go into Paul, conversion experience, how this is an example of him valuing everything differently. And then you talk about the church being a people who value things differently.

Peter: And then baptism is kind of the change in value system.

David: Right.

And then you go back to the story and you talk about either you're going to be talking about how he knows that he is Christ's, or you're going to talk about how he looks toward the future.

He forgets the past, looks toward the future.

Peter: Or he's a figure of kind of one who cares for others.

David: Right, right.

Peter: As he did for his crew.

David: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the sections for me would definitely be that moment when he tears out of the Bible Psalm 23 and Job.

And I would use that, I would probably use that as an image to talk about how he knows he's Christ's.

That the Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd and I am his and he's going to lead me through and I've got this horrible tale of Job that cannot force me to get rid of Psalm 23.

Peter: Right.

David: Psalm 23, I'm going to hold on.

So that tension and knowing that I am Christ's and then I would move to Paul and then to us.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Jessica: That's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

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Peter: I'm like, I didn't yell. Now I'm yelling.

Jessica: If I ever heard you yell, I'd be terrified.