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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart. We are sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or tea. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau, talking 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 are pretty good preachers. Okay, guys, let's get started. David, where are we in the church year?

David: We are at the Second Sunday after Epiphany, a time when the church celebrates the ongoing mission of God and the light of Christ reaching out to the world.

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

Peter: The texts are taken from 1 Samuel chapter 3, 1 Corinthians 6, John 1, and Psalm 139.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about. This week, since we just got back from Peter's house because he got a new puppy.

David: Oh, and we've got puppy love!

Jessica: And we had to see it.

Jessica: I think in honor of showing the puppy to us, you have the privilege of going first, Peter.

Peter: Well, it was a joy to share Hugo with you. He is a cute little puppy, and I have to eat crow because my kids all said I would love him, and I actually really love him. So, this week, I think I would like to preach on Psalm 139.

David: I love that psalm.

Peter: It has always been one of my favorite Psalms. When I think of Psalms that I really love.

David: Mm-hmm.

Peter: You know, 23, of course, is there. 46 is there. Psalm 1. But 139 is one of those that has always been important to me. I'm just actually curious, is 139 kind of like on your... is it familiar when you read it?

Jessica: I love Psalm 139 because it has always comforted me to know that God really does know what I'm thinking.

Peter: Hmm.

Jessica: Sometimes when you just think prayers instead of saying them out loud, you're like, really, am I just thinking? Is this just going on in my own brain?

Peter: Mm-hmm.

Jessica: You know, can God hear me? And in Psalm 139, he says he can. He knows my thoughts from afar. He knows when I'm laying down, when I'm standing. I always found that so comforting.

David: It's so all-encompassing.

Jessica: Yeah, he really knows me.

Peter: Yeah, and it's interesting that you think about that in the context of prayer, that God knows your prayers, you know. Yeah, I think this, to me, this has always been a really important Psalm, and I think maybe one of the reasons I found it important is it captures and it promises something missing in our culture. Something that is kind of not obvious anymore, and that is that God is intimately knowledgeable and intimately and personally involved in our lives. So I've been thinking about Charles Taylor's secular age recently. I've had to read it for a couple different things.

And

one of the things that Taylor says about our social conception of everything, our social imaginary, he calls it, is that we live in a time where the default perception or conception of humanity is that we are exclusively human, which is to say there is no transcendent, there is no God who's involved in our lives.

That's just kind of the air we breathe, the world in which we live, where God is not connected. And this Psalm, I think, directly

speaks in a whole different world. You've got a God who is intimately knowledgeable and so personally close to us.

And so I think, I wonder if one of the reasons I really like Psalm 139 is that it works against the grain of our culture that where God is, you know, maybe present on Sunday morning, maybe when I call out to him, but not really involved in my life.

David: Well, you know, I always used Psalm 139 at hospital visits.

It just was, it was what I went to all the time because I thought to myself, this is a time in your life when it would be

easy to think God doesn't know, God doesn't care, God doesn't see. And this Psalm, as you said, is just so strong on the intimacy that God has in his knowledge of everything.

And so, you know, I always, I just always would use this with hospital visits.

Peter: So what I want to do is I want to think about, and I don't know how much I'd say this in a sermon, maybe a little bit, but

talk about the the world in which we live, where God is perceived to be distant, detached, maybe only present when we make ourselves present to him in worship. And in that context, I want to take seriously these verses. So maybe, Jessica, would you read, just start with just verses one through three.

Jessica: Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up.

You discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all

Peter: All right, there's two things that come up in those first couple verses that then play out on a bigger scale in the verses at least.

First of all, there is

intimate knowledge that God has of us. You have searched me and known me.

God knows us inside and out, knows us better than we know ourselves.

Even so much verse four, even before words on my tongue, you know it all together.

You hem me in behind before you lay your hand upon me. God is knowledgeable of where we are

kind of externally. He's knowledgeable of what's even our thoughts before we articulate them. You mention

You know, even before we pray, God knows the words that are on our tongues.

So this first, the first

six verses or so, there's a little bit about

kind of where we are, but it's mostly verse one through six is about God's knowledge.

David: Do you hear this as the psalmist being celebratory?

Peter: Well, this is what I want to play with in the sermon.

David: Okay. Yeah, okay. I'm wondering.

Peter: Because you know it is, so verse six,
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it.
Wonderful is a weird word there. I actually looked that up in the Hebrew and the word there is more like
distinct,
unusual,
extraordinary. Well, you know, wonderful to me has a
meaning of just bliss and good.
So you say is this psalmist talking about this is good or is it just this is weird or this is extraordinary?
I can't understand how God could have this kind of knowledge.
I think that I would maybe at least invite that as an option for reading this. It's not so much good news
necessarily.
But this is a God who knows everything.
You can highlight the good news of the knowledge and the intimacy that the interest you can even say, I think
I mean, I think you could say that God's interested in us.
But you could also
highlight the, it's a little bit
disturbing in a sense because we know ourselves and we know that we're not who God calls us to be.
So this first half of this reading at least is focused really on knowledge.
But then things shift a little bit in verses 7 to 9. Would you read 7 to 9, Jessica?

Jessica: Where shall I go from your spirit or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven
you are there. If I make my bed and Sheol you are there. Even there your hand shall lead me and your right

Peter: I kind of like where the lectionary people stopped this psalm even though there's some great verses 11, 12,
That gets to kind of how God fashioned us and made us and that's the intimacy there is strong too.
But I kind of like ending it at verse 10 because the open question about whether this is good news or bad news
addressed and kind of solved in verse 10 because here we have
even there his hand is leading us. Okay, that's good. But the next half even better.
Your right hand shall hold me.
And you get this picture of God holding us. He knows us. He searched us. He's with us everywhere.
But he's more than just with us. He's holding us. I picture holding my little puppy, right?
We just played with my dog and he's such a little 3.8 pounds and I'm holding him in my hand and I'm
caring for him and I'm taking him where he needs to go and I'm keeping him from where he shouldn't be.
This image of God the Father holding us close.

David: And with your puppy, your puppy is so frenetic, active.
I mean just running, running, running everywhere.

Jessica: Joe, bet you wouldn't give you little puppy bites.

David: I know! I mean rolling over and running around and so the psalm is very frenetic.

Peter: Yeah.

David: In terms of the opening, you know, where I'm sitting, I'm rising, I'm thinking, I'm walking,
you know, and then we've got going to the heavens, going to Sheol, going to the east, the west.
You got all of this movement and what's true about all of that movement is God is holding you.

Peter: Yeah.

David: It's amazing.

Peter: And in all that movement there's the steadiness and the security.
That's what I love about the hand image there. I picture the, if you don't want to go with a puppy,
you go with a father or a mother holding an infant, a little tiny.

David: Pastor holding a baby's head in baptism.

Peter: So this image of the hand, and this is where it's with the hand that I would make sure I preach Christ from the
And I wouldn't turn to kind of the nails in the hands.
You could do that too.
But I think about some of the people in the gospel where Jesus took them by the hand.
And I think about the little girl, a city arrives, he takes her by the hand.
And I think about the, that was Jairus' daughter, I think.
Then you think about the demon possessed boy.
This was in Mark 9, or after casting the demon out, Jesus takes him by the hand.
And I think I would look at even Jesus, you know, Irenaeus used to talk about the Spirit and the Son as the Father
And so I look at Jesus as the hand of God who is coming down to care and support and secure and forgive us
I think that image could be a nice gospel handle there.

David: That is nice.
I like that.
Such a beautiful psalm and so comforting.

Peter: Yeah.

David: And I mean, that's the beauty of some of the psalms is they're so, they're dislocated from historical events,
which means that they can be meditated on and apply all the time.

Peter: And they capture the emotions and the experience of the people of God in really personal terms.
So, yeah, I think this could be a very personal sermon.

Jessica: I'm never going to read this psalm again without thinking of someone holding a tiny puppy in one hand.

David: I know.

Jessica: Thanks, Peter.
What would you preach on, David?

David: Well, I would, I think it was like last week or maybe two weeks ago.

Jessica: I hope you're going to say 1 Samuel, by the way.

David: No, I'm not.

Jessica: No, I love the story where God calls Samuel at night.

David: What do you love about it?
No, hey, you didn't pick that one.
What do you love about it?

Jessica: Because it's a little boy just listening innocently.

David: Right?

Jessica: Okay, what should I do?
You know, here I am.
You called me.
It's very sweet.

David: But it's not easy for the little boy, is it?

Jessica: Not once he heard what God had to say.

David: Well, yeah, but even before that, even discerning that this was God, it took a while.

Jessica: Someone else who had known God's voice had to tell him.

David: Right.

Peter: Right.

David: So at first he thinks it's, you know,
He thinks it's Eli.
Eli, right?

Jessica: Yeah.

David: He thinks it's Eli and it's not.
And it happens again.
I mean, so there's a long period of kind of discovering the voice of this God.
Right?
I mean, and so the, which is important.
A few weeks ago, I think Peter said, I'm going to preach, but I'm not really just
going to focus on one text.
I'm going to kind of weave the text together.
And so that's kind of what I'm doing this time.
So, so 1 Samuel is part of it.

Jessica: Oh good.

I'm glad to hear that.

David: I know.

And what I, if you think of 1 Samuel and you think of the Psalm that we just covered.
So in the Psalm we just covered, we have this transcendent majesty and presence of God over all things.
I mean, it's just all inspiring and amazing.
And then, and it's there.
I mean, it's just, it's just there and the Psalmist knows it.
And then you've got this story with Samuel where it's a mystery.

Peter: Yeah.

David: You know, who is this?
Who's talking to me?
I think it's Eli.

And then, you know, goes back again, goes back.
And it takes him a long time to figure out that it is God.
Right?

And so you've got these two different dynamics, one where it's a lot of time finding God and the other one v
And he knows everything about you and he knows wherever you go and he's always there and he's always g
So those two dynamics, I think, come together in the John reading.
So, so here's the theme that I would have is it would be something like finding that you have been found.

Jessica: The next day, Jesus decided to go to Galilee.

He found Philip and said to him, follow me.

Now, Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophet

David: Okay, so I love this.

Jesus finds Philip.

Right, but what Philip says to Nathanael is we have found him.

Peter: After Philip found Nathanael.

David: After Philip found Nathanael, right?

So this, the whole, and then you get, you know, it uses the language of finding and then uses the language of knowing, and then this is what you're going to see Nathanael.

So you've got this.

It's not exactly a paradox.

So I'm kind of thinking of the paradox maintained design, right?

Peter: Okay.

David: So it's not exactly a paradox, but it is a tension of who found whom, right?

In Nathanael's world, they found, or in Philip's world, they found him of whom Moses has written.

And so Philip is thinking of how do we know who God is?

How do we know who this Messiah is going to be?

We've got the law of Moses and the prophets who are writing about this one.

And there's going to be a lot of study, a lot of work needed to figure out, have I found the one who truly is the Messiah?

And if he is not the one that has promised that I'm going to wait for another one, I'm not going to go with him.

There's a lot of study.

There's a lot of thinking and experience that needs to go into finding Jesus.

And yet the amazing thing is that Jesus has already found you.

Peter: Yeah.

David: And so you've got that tension of, you know, kind of I gave my heart to Jesus, you know, I made Jesus my God.

which we tend to look down on, because we see it as works righteousness, and you didn't save yourself, God.

But it's a real experience that people do have, that they do reach a point in their life where they, you know, they

because of the working of the Holy Spirit in their heart, they do commit themselves.

They do confidently.

I mean, this is what we talk about, confirmation.

I always hate it when people say, you know, oh, you know, were you confirmed?

No, it's not about you being confirmed.

It's about you confirming your faith.

Right?

Yeah.

You know, I reached a point where now I do confirm my faith.

You smile, Jessica, why did you smile?

Jessica: My daughter's being confirmed this year.

So I was thinking about how I can use this to explain to her.

David: Yeah, right.

That she's doing something.

The Spirit has worked in her life to reach a point where she confirms her faith.

Now, you know, we can misinterpret that to be I found Jesus and if I hadn't put in all the effort, nothing would have happened.

Peter: Well, and this is where this sermon could help with this because of the language of finding and found that you

You know, it helps.

You could talk a little bit about the work of God and our work in following and in discovering and obeying,

because that's one of these things that it is unfortunate if all we do is say, no, you didn't find or you didn't d

David: No, it's not.
No, I actually did struggle.
I actually did wonder if I should go to that church or not.
And I actually did sit through the class and think through what you're teaching and finally agree with it.
And so don't tell me that that's worthless.
Right.

Peter: You did the work and then as you did the work, you realized that God had done the work first.

David: I know and already found you.
That's the thing.
The theme is finding that you have already been found.
Right.
So, like with the paradox maintained, you have this problem if you only emphasize one truth and not the ot
And so if we only emphasize finding God, then things are off kilter.

Peter: Well, so say more about how you're going to tie Samuel and the Psalmist to this.
Have you thought that far?

David: Well, yeah, no, but that's the whole thing.
Yeah, that's the point.
Right.
So, the Samuel story is about finding, is about, you know, struggling to discern and hear the voice.
And, you know, and then, you know, so just as Samuel took a while for him to discover that this was God an
was calling him.
Right.
But, you know, it took him a while.
So, too, we have experiences where, you know, we don't all come into the faith the same way.
And we do all come into the faith the same way through baptism and the working of God's Holy Spirit.
But our lived experience of that journey is different.

Peter: Right.
You've got some who've been baptized as a child, some who, you know, came in high school when they wen

David: believe in God at all.
You've got all of these different journeys.
And we don't want to just dismiss them.
We want to honor them.
But we want to honor them in a way that recognizes that, yeah, you did find, but what you found is God alre

Peter: Yeah.
Something you said earlier, Jessica, that I think is, I don't know if it would fit in with this, but, you know, it w
talking to him.
And Philip and Nathaniel, they were helping each other.
Philip went and he found Nathaniel.
And so there's the working with and being led by others there.
And in a way, I don't know if you would actually say this in a sermon, make that connection, but you can ima
helping people find that they have been found.

David: Right.

Peter: And by how you imagine your job this week.

David: Then we can have a conversation where we pursue the ways in which people struggle to know God and to do his will.

Peter: You know, this reminds me of a time when my son, my older son, out of the blue, it was just me and him, he said, Dad, I think I want to invite Jesus into my heart. And he said, kind of out of the blue, Dad, I think I want to invite Jesus into my heart. And I tell students in my class here, what should I have done? Should I have stopped the car and spanked him? You don't do that. Fortunately, I didn't do that. I'm not a perfect dad, but this time I didn't do that. And instead I said, Johan, you know what the great news is? He's already there.

David: Right.

Peter: He's like, oh, okay.

David: He's already there now.

Jessica: As a person in the pew, I'm so glad that you were talking about it from that perspective. Because I know of brothers and sisters in Christ who are not interested in hearing what Lutherans have to say about their relationship with Christ has been discounted.

David: Right.

Jessica: And if this is the way that they have, that they think that they have first encountered Jesus, and for you to say that that doesn't count. They're like, well, I have faith, I know he's my Savior, you must be wrong. And the other things that maybe you say in your church might be wrong too. I'd hate for them to discount Lutheran theology because of a misunderstanding like that. Your approach is so much more of a way to teach people instead of just to give them the right answer and say amen.

David: Right.

Jessica: Yeah.

David: Yeah.

Jessica: It's about that conversation that helps you hold the balance, that it's been experienced, it's been lived, but it's not just a theoretical conversation.

Peter: And that's what's so cool about these verses in John 1. That interplay is right there. We found him, he found Philip.

David: I know, I love it.

Jessica: Yeah.

Jessica: That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at [ConcordiaTheology.org](https://www.concordiaTheology.org). You can find more episodes of this show on Spotify, Google, Apple. If you'd like to see the show continue, please subscribe, share, leave a review. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau. Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts on the text.

David: Oh, and we've got puppy love.