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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 and producer, 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. Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We're second Sunday in Easter right now, a second Sunday of Easter right now.

Jessica: And David, where are the readings from this week?

David: Oh, the first reading is Acts 4:32 through 35, then we have Psalm 148, 1 John and John 20.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me what you would preach on, and this week, David, will you go first?

David: Sure. I am gonna go with the gospel reading.

Peter: Well, there's a lot you can do with this reading.

David: There is so much. There is so much. It's such a beautiful reading. It's Easter, Jesus is coming among the disciples, and there's so much in there for preaching. And so you kind of have to to limit yourself.

Peter: Right.

David: And focus in on one thing so that you can really unpack how beautiful it is.

Peter: Right.

Jessica: I'm looking forward to this because in the last few years this has become one of my favorite biblical narratives. So I'm excited to see what you're gonna do. This is great.

David: Okay, yeah. So I'm thinking that I might go with an image-based structure in this sermon. So, you know, they have that painting by Caravaggio. I think it's called the Incredulity of Thomas or something.

Peter: That one always gives me the willies.

David: Oh, I know. Why? It's like the flap of Jesus' side. I know. And the finger. I know. It is so... It's this painting that, where Thomas is placing his finger in the side of Jesus, the flesh is so realistic-looking.

Peter: Yes.

David: And the, just the intimacy of that moment. You've got all of their heads are kind of gathered together. You've got Thomas and two apostles behind him, and they're all kind of staring down at Jesus' side. And when you look at his side, there's this flap of skin.

Peter: Yeah.

David: I mean, it is so realistic, this flap of skin. And Jesus' face is tender.

Peter: Yes.

David: And gracious. It's not stern, like, who are you, Thomas, to ask to stick your finger in my side? Don't be doubting but believing. It's not that at all. It's Jesus is tenderly looking at Thomas, and he's actually using his hand to gently guide Thomas' hand into his side.

Jessica: Okay, I've got to see this picture. I'm looking it up right now.

David: Okay.

Jessica: Who painted it?
Caravaggio put the incredulity of St. Thomas.

Jessica: Okay, I have the picture here. Yeah. Oh, wow.

David: Isn't that, isn't that amazing?

Jessica: Yeah, that's...

David: It's gorgeous.

Peter: Your face right now is, too.

David: Your face is not saying it's gorgeous. You're recognizing the intimacy.

Peter: Yeah, right.

Jessica: Well, it's, a lot of older paintings, you just kind of see a red spot. But you can see what's going on in that slash, Jesus' side. That's very human looking. It is. And the look on Thomas' face.

David: I know, I know when he's got like this rip on his, on his garment, on his shoulder, his clothing is ripped. I mean, this guy's been through it.

Jessica: There's two other disciples leaning over his shoulder trying to see as well. And Thomas is like, I can't believe it.

David: I know, he's struck in wonder, and it makes you wonder, is he... So like if you were doing within the image, is Thomas wondering at the side of Jesus? Or is Thomas wondering at the graciousness of Jesus, of actually doing this?

Peter: Yeah.

David: Which is kind of, I mean, I kind of picture his comment to the disciples about, you know, unless I stick my finger in his side as being, I don't know, kind of snorky or sarcastic or you know, like, you know, this is, this is how much it would take to get me to believe this stuff.

Peter: Right.

David: This is how much it would take. And now all of a sudden, Jesus is opening that up to him. And, and permitting him to kind of, to do that. I mean, so, so it, so for me, like the big picture, the big picture for the sermon would be what kind of a Jesus now lives and reigns. So we're, we're the second Sunday of Easter, we're going to meet Jesus. We're going to actually see him. And what kind of a Lord is he? And, and in this one small moment in the text, he's a very tender, a very gracious Lord who kind of puts up with a lot and is willing to, is willing to open himself up to the demands we're making in order that we might believe in Him.

Peter: And we might know Him.

David: And we might know Him. Right. And it makes me think of, you know, like other passages in Scripture, where, where God accommodates Himself to the foolishness of people. So like Gideon. You know,

Gideon, he's got that fleece and he's like, well, you know, first... One more day. I know, I know. Make the ground wet and the fleece dry. And then he's like, okay, well, maybe, maybe that would just naturally happen. Okay, so make the fleece wet and the ground dry. And God's like, okay. He does it. And you know, that other one was at Hezekiah where he's like, you know, do you want the shadow to go up the stairs or down the stairs? Well, you know, it'd be, you know, they'd be natural to go down. So make it go back. These weird things are like the paralytic. When Jesus heals the paralytic and, you know, he says, you know, in order that you might know, or he forgives the sins of the paralytic, in order that you might know that I have the power to forgive sins, rise up and walk. And so there's this, this strange humility to God that He will come down to our level, to that level of, you know, these, these things that we're doing all for the sake of bringing us in conversation with Him.

Peter: What I love about that partially is we talk in systems about the direction of fit, about God doesn't require that we go up to His level, but he comes down to our level.

David: Right.

Peter: And of course you get that in the incarnation, but here in this, God comes down to Thomas's level.

David: Right.

Peter: But he doesn't leave him there.
Yeah.

Peter: He comes down and he meets him and he shows him who He really is.

David: And He reveals,
and so you, you're kind of met by this gracious God wherever you're starting. It's like wherever you start, that's where I'm going to be. And so we see on Easter, the risen Lord, the first thing we see about Him, or the thing that we see this day, is His willingness to meet us where we're at in order to bring us closer to Him.

Peter: So this is, this is inviting the hearers to identify with Thomas.

David: Correct.

Peter: And to kind of recognize where they, where God meets us.

Jessica: It's so relevant,
I think, to current worldview of people who have come from a patchwork theology, from different superstitions or religions or ideas, and they want to believe in the God of the Bible, but there's something that's holding them back and they just can't quite do it. They want to, and they're like, well, I can't go to church because I'm not sure that I believe in all of that. But they didn't kick Thomas out. God didn't kick him out because he wasn't sure yet. You know, he's like, okay, then I will, I will even let you do this. I don't know. I think this is so comforting.
Well, don't, you know, it was kind of, I was remembering, now this is like, going to date me so much. Does anybody remember a person by the name of Kurt Warner? Kurt Warner played football.

Peter: For the St. Louis Rams.

David: Oh my gosh, yeah. After the St. Louis Rams brought us

to the Super Bowl, you know, all that stuff. And after that, you know, after, during that whole celebration, there was this, because Kurt Warner was a Christian, and there was this sports rally that was going to be a Christian sports rally. And I had a friend who was going to go to that, right? And I kind of rolled my eyes. I kind of said, you know, are you really going to do, you know, take your son to that? And he's like, yeah, what's wrong? And I'm like, well, I said, it's going to have like this theology of glory that, you know, if you believe in God, then, you know, your football team's going to win. And he's like, you know, whatever. And I said, well, what do you mean whatever? I said, you know, that's, he says, I don't want to talk theology. He said, he said, my son likes football. And I'm taking him there because maybe he'll meet Jesus. And it was just kind of this, you know, this weird thing, you know, that whatever works, I'm going to try it. You've got Paul saying, I become all things to all people in order that I might save some. And there's this, this just this, I don't know, this compassionate willingness to start where people are at, rather than say, you have to make it to this line before I'll start. Right? I'm just going to start where you're at.

Peter: What's interesting too is, so one way to do it is to have people identify with Thomas. I'm kind of intrigued by the other two apostles who are kind of looking over the shoulder and thinking about a God who does that for him.

David: Right.
You know, I think you could almost.

David: And that's where we could be.

Peter: Yeah, we could be the ones looking over the shoulder. Because I don't, certainly don't want to stick my finger in there.

Jessica: I wonder who the two men are. I'm looking at the painting right now to see if anything identifies them as a specific.

David: Well, I would assume they're probably John and Peter, because in John's Gospel, John and Peter are the ones who went to the tomb.

Peter: Yeah.

David: Right.

Peter: So maybe, but I would probably play up, I would almost hope they weren't identified. Because then that would make it easier to any disciple.

Jessica: Well, if the two other men in the painting were disciples that had seen Jesus, the looks on their faces in this painting, they still look pretty surprised. They're looking with the same intensity that I can't believe what I'm saying.

David: Right. And that's what I would do kind of at the end of the sermon would be explore how there's two beautiful things that are surprising. Number one, you know, obviously the most important, the risen Lord, which Thomas is encountering in a very real way here. But then second, the other surprising thing is the willingness of this risen Lord to start where Thomas is at.

Peter: Yeah.

David: You know?

Peter: Yeah. Yeah.

And I'm just thinking about this is the second week after, or the Sunday after Easter. And, you know, on Easter Sunday, there's a lot of people who are there for all sorts of reasons, right? It's one of the big, high, holy days. And I always found it really, I always wanted to give people a good reason to come back the following week. And I think some people, I mean, you do trust that when you preach the Gospel on Easter Sunday, it's going to do what God wants it to do. And there may be some people who are coming back, and who are still pretty new to the whole thing.

David: Right.

Peter: And so you'd kind of want to hope for that and then have that in mind as you preach.

David: Well, and that's the thing, I mean, that's the thing, the beautiful thing about the season of Easter, right? Is that you have the ability to kind of use each Sunday as a way of unfolding what kind of a God has risen for us and now rules over all things. And what we see here is we've got a God who is willing to start with us where we're at in order to bring us closer to Him. Right. Now, that would be kind of my picture for this.

Peter: And that applies to all of us.

David: Right. Right. Yeah. And so then, you know, come back next Sunday and we'll see more of what kind of a God rules for you. What kind of a God has risen and come and now rules for you. And so we could build something out of this.

Peter: Right. Yeah.

Jessica: Oh, and give people permission to come back even though they're not sure they believe it yet.

David: Right. Yeah. And each time they get a different picture of the kind of Jesus that has risen.

Jessica: They're still welcome.

David: Right.

Jessica: They don't have to wait until they understand God perfectly.

David: Right. Yeah.

Jessica: That's wonderful. Peter, what would you preach on?

Peter: Well, kind of building on what we were just talking about, when I was a pastor, I always felt like it was really maybe helpful and important to give people an explicit reason to come back after the highest festivals. And I would always plan ahead for the season of Easter what I was going to be doing. I'd always start a sermon series the Sunday after Easter.

David: Oh, there you go.

Peter: Yeah. And then I'd publicize it on the Easter Sunday bulletin.

David: Right.

Peter: So that people who were so inclined would say, oh, there's something worth...

David: And something starting.

Peter: Something starting.

Peter: So they don't feel like they're behind. It's an easy on-ramp.

David: Right.

Peter: And it's defined by the season of Easter. So it's not like we're starting this 27 weeks on whatever.

David: Right. Yeah.

Peter: But you've got six weeks, basically.

David: Right.

Peter: And it's self-contained. So this to me was always important. And I think you could do that with the Gospel. You could do with any readings. You could do a thematic series. You could also do kind of an exegetical series or follow a book of the Bible. And I always paid attention especially to the epistle readings in the season of Easter, because each year there's a different epistle that we focus on. And so I think what I might do is spend this season of Easter focusing on 1 John.

David: Okay.

Peter: And the nice thing about 1 John is it's a short letter. It's compact. You can dig into it for a whole season, for a month and a half. I would probably try to pair it with some Bible study or a reading plan for the congregation.

David: Well, you had mentioned that before, right, about asking the people to just read it several times.

Peter: Yeah. And just spend the season of Easter focusing on the Gospel according to 1 John. And so what I'd want to do if I go this route is, I do this also for selfish reasons. It's nice whenever... Sometimes I get tired of bouncing around from one text to another each week and you feel like you have to relearn the whole context and get back into the 8th century and now we're in the 1st century and now... But I could spend six straight weeks just chewing on 1 John and maybe get a couple of commentaries or do some further study and get to know this book really well. So I'm thinking about some... I would encourage a pastor who's going to do this to do that, spend a little time just getting into the context of 1 John. This is a letter, of course, that John wrote at the end of his life, probably 90, 100 AD or so. It was written in a very polemical context. Franzmann talks about how there were heresies and temptations and John old man John kind of goes after it. He's very protective of the church. He's the last of the apostles probably and he is very concerned about deceivers, those who are probably twisting the Gospel. And so it's like any old man, you're just kind of unfiltered and tired of beating around the bush, I'm just gonna give it to you straight. And so I think I would want to in some way cast this series as a series of old man John unfiltered, kind of straight from the old man, something like... Or you could go more just kind of what you're going to be talking about and some of the themes in 1 John which are themes like life and truth and love. Tell people on Easter Sunday we're gonna focus on some of these big themes, life, truth, love. But so as I'm thinking about this sermon now, of course, you have to spend a little bit of time introduction, but the sermon itself for this, I thought of that game, you've played that game, Jessica, Two Truths and a Lie.

Jessica: Oh yes.

Peter: Right? It's always kind of fun to...

Jessica: We should have started the show playing that, that would have been great.

David: I've never played it.

Jessica: You've never played it? Oh, it's a great icebreaker if you're leading a high school Bible study, get people talking, get people laughing.

Peter: How does it go?

Jessica: Everybody has to think of two true things about themselves and a lie. And they tell those three statements and people have to guess which is which. So you have to pick a lie that sounds real and truths that could be...

David: Right.

Jessica: Yes. So fun because you find out these shocking things about people. Yeah, it's very fun.

Peter: Yeah. So I'm thinking not so much about playing Two Truths and a Lie in the sermon, but the structure of Two Truths and a Lie that could be... I mean, you could have a little bit of fun introducing it. But when I read this text, I see two truths and a lie. And I think maybe I'd organize a sermon along those lines. And so maybe we could start, Jessica, would you read verses one through three?

Jessica: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest and we've seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you so that you may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Peter: He doesn't use the word truth in those verses, but he's saying, we're speaking the truth here. And so this could be an entree into what truth are you speaking. This idea that God is light. In verse five, you've got God is light, in Him is no darkness at all. But I think what made me think of it was the connections here to John chapter one, the Gospel of John, are really strong. Light and life. I'd wanna go back and reread John chapter one from the Gospel. In Him was light, the darkness did not overcome Him. And you've got very similar language here to start John's letter, which itself is kind of an interesting. You can kind of pull the Gospel of John all the way into this letter. But of course, we're Easter, we're second Sunday in Easter right now, second Sunday of Easter right now. And so I'd wanna have some connections to maybe even the morning, the light. One of the Gospel writers explicitly says, while it was still dark, they went to the tomb. But so this light darkness theme, the first truth that I wanna highlight and I wanna do with an Easter accent is that God is light and tie that maybe to the Gospel of John, he is the light of the world that not even darkness can overcome. So truth number one, God is light. Truth number two, we have fellowship in the light. We have fellowship in Christ. The Easter is not just for individuals, but it brings us into this community. Verse seven, would you read verse seven, Jessica?

Jessica: But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Peter: He doesn't go straight to our cleansing from sin. He first starts with fellowship with one another. That we have this community and that we are together in this. But here, so the first two truths, God is light, Jesus, the light of the world, and there's fellowship in the light. We have a genuine concern, a common sharing. I do love that in Acts 4. The people of God they shared, they cared for one another, they didn't consider any of the things that belong to them as their own, everything in common. We talk about being one body, we talk about being

church, but this is a real substantive, thorough fellowship where we're sharing and we're really in life together. And that's a really important truth that comes out of Easter. Well, and then go on a little bit further in verse three, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. So the fellowship that God has with, God the Father has with Jesus, as with John and the apostles, also has with all of us who are in Christ. So the fellowship is the second truth, and that comes to the lie then. So two truths and a lie. The lie, it just is interesting to me looking at, several lies are mentioned in this text. And then the second truth is the lie, which is the lie that God has with Jesus Christ. In verse six, if we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie. Now this kind of calls out Christians for walking in ways that are dark and deceitful, and we're lying if we do this. Would you read verse eight, Jessica?

Jessica: ourselves and the truth is not in us

Peter: If we say we have no sin, we deceive whom? Well, not our neighbors.

Jessica: They already know.

Peter: God certainly already knows, but we deceive ourselves.

And so the lie, you could pick either one of these, the lie in verse eight is a lie we tell ourselves. Kind of that we somehow, it may be, you know, I have no blame here, I have no guilt here, or we lie to ourselves if we're saying we have no sin.

David: And then look at the lie in verse 10, right?

Peter: Yeah, verse 10, we have made Him a liar.

David: If we say we have not sinned, we have made Him a liar, right?

So you've got a good...

Peter: You've actually got two truths and three lies.

David: I know, three lies, and you've got the opportunity to choose the one that best fits your context, right?

Peter: Yeah, so I mean this is, this really does allow you to think about who you're talking to and which deceptions, which lies are prominent. I think about, so the old man John is writing this letter, and he's writing to Christians of his day and the lies they've been deceived by. And now your job, in some ways, is not so much to talk about John in his context, but to speak kind of in the same way that you do. You speak kind of in the same line as John did to his people, you speak to your people.

David: So now, what's the reasoning of putting the lie last?

Peter: I would not want to end it with deception and lies and proclaim the promise that even when we deceive ourselves, we have a God who is faithful.

David: The whole lie thing may be kind of an encouraging word, an exhortation to prevent us from falling off, rather than kind of revealing what our sin is.

Peter: Yeah.

David: Right, so that you're actually, you know, you're speaking to Christians who know these things, but you're just encouraging them, you know, let's not act like we don't have sin. Right.

Peter: Well, and this is where you could, you wouldn't necessarily have to be bound by the three lies in the text.

David: Right, yeah.

Peter: There could be the lie that there's no forgiveness for me.

David: Right.

Peter: And then you could emphasize verse 9,

Peter: He will forgive us and He will cleanse us. And so that could be, you know, the good news slash bad news is that there's plenty of lies.

David: Right, there are.

Peter: And there's plenty of deception.

David: Well, there's plenty of truths in this text to choose from.

Peter: Right. Right.

David: Yeah.

Peter: Yeah, so I think you've got some variety, but I think that would, especially if I were going to go with a theme of kind of John, old man John is giving us a kind of an unfiltered message through this season. And today he's going to speak very clearly about a couple of truths and a really dangerous lie.

David: So, is this, so like the sermon, the theme is like John unfiltered.

Peter: Maybe the series would be something like that. John unfiltered.

David: Right, yeah. And so kind of, this is, you know, we all have those, we all have those older relatives who say exactly what they're thinking.

Peter: And you love to hear them, right?

David: Yeah, you do.

Peter: Because you know you're going to get something that's really strong.

David: Exactly how it was. So John unfiltered.

Peter: John unfiltered, there you go.

David: Oh man, it's good.

Jessica: That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org. 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 for next Sunday.