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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 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. All right, let's get started. Peter, where are we in the church year?

Peter: We are in the third Sunday of Easter. We continue to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and what that means for us as Christians.

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

David: The texts are Acts 3, 1st John 3, and Luke 24, with Psalm 4 being the Psalm.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about. So it's April, it's beautiful outside, everything's growing. I want to know your favorite spring flower, and if it matches mine, you get to go first.

David: Oh my gosh, that's hard.

Peter: I don't really have favorite flowers.

Jessica: Don't you garden?

Peter: I like fruit trees and raspberries, although those come out later.

Peter: The spring raspberries, they're especially good.

Jessica: All right, well you lose by default here. So David, you win. What would you preach on?

David: I would preach on the reading from Acts. I like this reading, and I particularly like, for me, the way in which you move from the kind of the wonder and amazement that people have at this miracle that Peter performed to something that's even more wonderful, and that is the forgiveness that God is going to offer his people. And so, Jessica, there's this portion here that Peter, when Peter speaks, so he's, you know, he's healed this lame man, and everyone's gathering together wondering how this happened, and then Peter kind of explains what's going on. And if you could read particularly verses 17 through 20.

Jessica: And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.

David: Okay, I just, I love that, because Peter is talking to people who, in his mind, unknowingly acting in ignorance, have killed the Lord. And he's not calling for vengeance. He's not calling for restitution. He's not calling for an explanation of why you did this. He's simply saying, repent that you can be forgiven. And he's kind of living in this beautiful moment of repentance. And I think this kind of lays out for us this beautiful gift of forgiveness that, that we have been given by God, and we have the opportunity to live in and share. You have people who have a limit, you know, you sin against me once, that's all you get. And then we

have that other saying, right, that fool me once, shame on me, fool me twice, shame on you. So that gives you a two-time limit. If somebody forgives, you know, does it three times, three times you're out. I mean, we have all these sayings that we use that put limits on when we can forgive. And Peter himself was like that, remember? How many times, Lord, should we forgive somebody? Is seven enough? And now, after the resurrection of Jesus, suddenly Peter is like, you know, hey everybody, turn and repent, because there's forgiveness, and there's a time of refreshing that's going to come. So I just think that's, I think that's an amazing gift that we see celebrated here.

Peter: I often think with the preaching and acts, I would love to hear tones of voice as to how did they speak these words, because I look at verse 17, and now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. You know, sometimes we think of this, you know, you killed him, kind of a snarling, angry, you killed him, but here you get this sense that's like, I know you acted in ignorance.

David: Right.
I mean, who could have known?
I mean, that type of thing, you know, and of all people who could have known, I'm kind of one of them, because I was told three times this would happen, and I was told I was gonna deny him, but I did it anyway. Right? So he's got like this life experience. I mean, just you, if I was preaching this, it would be kind of interesting to preach it by thinking much more fully about the character of Peter.

Peter: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I'm thinking about the breakfast on the beach. Yeah. And what that, you know, there's often people make connections backwards to his denials.

David: Three times.

Peter: But this one, you kind of make the connection forwards. Where does he go from that? What does it look like to feed my sheep, tend my lambs?

David: And this is what it looks like. Yeah. Calling them all back. Mm-hmm. Calling them all back because you know, you know that when you hear the voice of forgiveness, you're hearing a voice calling you home. Right? That's, yeah, I like that. I just think that's fun.

Peter: I wonder how much, I mean, the reading starts at verse 11, while they clung to Peter and John, all the people, of course that begs the question, well who's he and why is he clinging?

David: Mm-hmm.

Jessica: That's what I thought when I was reading it ahead of time. And I was hoping that if you chose to go with that narrative part of the text, that you would, in your sermon, maybe read that part.

David: Yeah, flesh it out. Yeah. So you understand what's going on.

Peter: And maybe even read it, you know, just extend the reading backwards a little bit and give that context. Because I'm wondering how much that healing context would shape the sermon that you just described. If there'd be a, I don't know if there's a connection, I'd have to think about it, but to draw on what had just happened there. Because Peter's preaching came out of that reaction to this act of love that he showed to this person who had been...

David: Well, and you know, the, I don't know, the interesting thing is that everybody is utterly astounded. I mean, that's what it says right there, right? All the people utterly astounded. And so you've got this amazement at this miracle of healing. And Peter now is going to ask them to participate in something even more amazing, which is the act of forgiveness. And you know, and I like the metaphor at the end of verse 19. Repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out. I'd have to look, I'd have to go and kind of look at that and see what that says. But just because I've done, been doing watercolor painting, I've been doing a really, really bad job at it. There's this, this interesting thing where, like, when you have a mistake that just happens. It's not like anybody made it. It just happens.

Jessica: Happy accidents.

David: I know. Well, no, but you take, if you take a dry brush, if you take a dry brush and lay it on top of that, it absorbs the water, the excess water, and it pulls the pigment off. And it, so it lightens it. And it kind of erases it by blotting it out. And it's kind of, it just kind of makes me think, you know, some people, I've known people who, who when they have sinned, feel like it's all over. There's, you know, that has so shaped who I am, that has so, that there's nothing. I'll never be beautiful. I'll never be pure. I'll never be lovely again.

Jessica: I can't come to church. I can't serve God because I've done that. Absolutely. I know people dealing with that.

David: Right. And then this image of God and Christ taking our sins upon himself, blotting out our sin, lifting it off so that what's there is now beautiful. It's just, it's a, it's a, it's a really, it's a really nice image.

Peter: Yeah, it gets more concrete than just forgiveness, kind of in abstract.

David: Right.

David: But that image of drawing it out.

David: Yeah, and taking it upon himself, you know. And I think there's like that passage, and I think it's in Matthew's Gospel, where the healings are, are read as Jesus taking these sicknesses upon himself. So it's not like he's eradicating sickness as much as he's pulling it into himself, you know, and leaving you with healing. It's just, you know, so that, that, that would be kind of how I would go. I would, I would turn toward the, toward the discussion on forgiveness, maybe talk about how we, we all have limits that we have, and sometimes our limits are based on, you know, they always say that you're, you're least liable to forgive somebody

for something that you can't forgive yourself for. You know, if, if I do certain things, and I can't forgive myself for it, and then somebody else does it, there ain't no way I'm giving them any, you know, any. Totally. Right, right. And so there's, you know, we and then Peter is kind of inviting us to see what it's like to live in a, in a limitless world of forgiveness, as he's calling everybody to come, even if you acted in ignorance.

Peter: And then in verse 20, right after the sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come.

David: Yeah.

Peter: From the presence of the Lord. That, that idea of refreshment, of rejuvenation, that, and we're in Easter, right? And so, talking about the restoration, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and our resurrection life, that, by which God refreshes us.

David: And it's from the presence of the Lord.

Peter: Right.

David: I mean that, you know, this is how you truly know who the Lord is. He's the one who forgives sins.

Peter: Mm-hmm.

David: And so when you come before him, repenting of your sin, you discover who he really is. He's the one that forgives.

Peter: Yeah.

Jessica: Peter, what about you? Which text would you preach on?

Peter: Well, during this season of Easter, I just noticed that we're in 1st John throughout the season. And so what I'd kind of like to do is just dwell in 1st John for the whole season. And so we talked about that last week a little bit with light and darkness, that metaphor. And what's interesting about John, 1st John especially, is that the whole letter is kind of cyclical, and it kind of revolves around a number of kind of key fundamental themes. It's not, the letter doesn't unfold in like a linear fashion, but it recurs around things like love and life and light and God's commands. And then on the other side, there's the world and there's deception. And so these different themes, it's kind of interesting. I've just been reading 1st John a little bit more in preparation for this. And John just keeps coming back to certain themes from different angles. And so it's just an interesting, it makes for a series that wouldn't be so linear and wouldn't necessarily follow, I mean the texts that are pointed intersect with so many other texts. And so there's a lot of freedom there.

David: How do you go about reading it?

Peter: Well, I think you, at least as I read through it, you see these different themes that come up over and over again. And each time it comes up, it's like an entree into an aspect of the Christian world, the Christian life, and especially in the season of Easter, it kind of gives you all sorts of entry

points into what does it mean to live in the light of the resurrection. And so I think what you got to do, at least what I would do, is take from any one text kind of a phrase or a theme and then let that be, Mark Seifrid calls text sometimes a keyhole to the whole scriptures. And so I would take a phrase or a theme or a half verse or something to look at as a keyhole to the whole letter. So in a way, each week you're preaching kind of on the whole letter with different themes that come up, but you'd have that text provide the angle. I'm gonna ask Jessica, would you read verses 1 and 2?

Jessica: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. Isn't that great? I love that. That's so exciting. We don't know what we will be, but we'll be like Jesus. I think that's exciting.

Peter: Yeah, and that's actually kind of what I think I'd want to focus on in this sermon. To me it's striking, verse 1, let's see, the Father's, see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are. And then verse 2, beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared. So notice the time, the tense is there. There's the now, we are children of God. What we will be, well, we don't know yet. And so there's this life in between, is maybe a theme I would have for the sermon, where we live in these in-between times. And when you think about it, there's all sorts of in-between times in which we live. And you think about an engaged couple who is, they've taken that step and they're getting ready to get married, but they're not there yet, and so they're in this in-between stage. You think about someone who's taken on a new job, and they haven't yet started, they haven't yet figured everything out, and so they're in this in-between stage. I think about, every summer I think about this with our kids. There's this in-between, are you now a fourth grader or are you a fifth grader? And then I think about, of course, if you're a parent, you have children who are, well, little ones, especially infants, they're certainly people. But you don't know what they're gonna be. You know, you see kind of, you can always look back in hindsight and say, oh yeah, you were always like this when you were young. But there's this, I just think we live a lot of our life in this in-between time, where we're waiting to move into a new house or to move into a retirement or waiting for retirement or something like that. John is inviting us to recognize that we are God's children now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. And so of course I think about as a Lutheran, this distinction we like to use, the now but not yet, right? This paradox where now we are children, but we're not sure exactly what we're gonna be just yet. And so I'm thinking kind of like a paradox maintained type of sermon approach, a sermon structure, where I want to spend some time dwelling in the, well, the now. So who are we now? We are children of God. And I think about how children especially treat one another. When you're

part of a family, you think about as a parent, one of the parents great joys is when your kids are getting along and when they're playing nicely and when they're treating each other as they as their siblings. But specifically that the children of God, I think John invites us, I mean John, he's an old man now, right? Kind of John unfiltered is talking to the Christians toward the end of the first century and he's referring to them, you guys are children of God. We are we are part of the same family. And I don't think it's a huge stretch to emphasize the communal nature of the Christian life here, that we are siblings, we are brothers and sisters, and you're part of this family and all that goes with that home security support. In this part of the sermon you've of course got opportunity to proclaim both law and gospel.

David: Well now yeah, in the paradox maintained, usually the law is forgetting the other side of the paradox. So we'd be living in the now as if there is not a not yet. Okay. Right, so what or it could be overemphasizing the present state, so overemphasizing the now to the point where you lose the not yet. Can you, what would we possibly say, how could this go wrong, I guess?

Peter: Yeah well I mean it shouldn't be too hard to think of how it goes wrong in families or even in church. You know it's the children of God aren't, we kind of grow comfortable with dysfunction in our homes and even in the church. A little bit later on the text John talks about sin as lawlessness and those who abide in sin. And so sometimes I think we kind of grow comfortable with a church that's not like a family. And this is just kind of you know the way it is. And it's not surprising when we have a lot of homes that are kind of dysfunctional in that struggle. And so what would you expect of course?

Jessica: Aren't they all dysfunctional? I don't know that I've met a family that was always functional. And maybe the problem in the church is that we do act like a family, right? Brothers and sisters always fighting or being distant or it just seems you have to be comfortable with it. What else could you do?

Peter: Well I mean and that's part of the challenge is that we are sinful and sometimes even as Lutherans maybe we get a little bit. I had a member of my congregation who had used to you know we'd be talking about living the Christian life and she'd always raise her hand in Bible class and say, but I'm a poor miserable sinner I can't do that. Well I know that but John and John knows that but he's saying that's not okay. You know don't be content with this with this dysfunction in the family and this dysfunction in the church. And so you can take the now as kind of the family that's not right and the way we're not treating each other well and just say well that's just the way it is. And but then the not yet in verse 2 John says, Beloved, we're God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him. Okay and so there will come a time what we will be we don't know exactly what that'll look like of course but we do know that he is well verse 5, in him

there is no sin. He appeared in order to take away sins and in him there is no sin. So there will come this time when there will be pure function in the family and the church will be whole and united and so this I think John is encouraging his readers he's encouraging us to embody what we will be as we wait in this in-between time. And so he's saying you know everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness, sin is lawlessness, you know that he appeared in order to take away sins and in him there is no sin. So you can't abide in sin you can't abide in Christ and keep sinning that's staying in the now, the brokenness, the dysfunction and John I think is calling us to to live in in view of in light of in anticipation of that day when He returns and we will be like Him without sin. So this life in the tension between the here the now and the not yet would there be two things I would kind of draw from this. One is the the brokenness and the dysfunction it shouldn't surprise us because we're still in the now but neither should we be content with that because of what what will be. So I don't know if that gets at your question Dave about the overemphasizing one and maybe the paradox maintained is this maybe isn't the right way to organize it or structure at least imagine what you're doing.

David: What is the what is the the value of the not yet for us? What value is it of me knowing that I'm not yet what I'm going to be?

Jessica: I can tell you what it is for me.

David: Okay.

Whatever it is for me, I'm glad I'm not gonna always be this way. You know I don't want to be a hot mess for all eternity. Yes or if you're in a congregation that seems so dysfunctional you're like well maybe I need to leave because this this is a messed up community I'm gonna get out instead of thinking well this is a family I need to work it out. You know I don't know I think that's a comfort to know that things will get better and a comfort to know that yes it's gonna be hard right now and that's kind of like the understood. It doesn't mean I leave my family or I leave my church right?

Peter: Yeah.

Jessica: So that's comforting to know because then it's like okay if this is what we expect on earth and this is what God has called me to work through I'm gonna stick it out and keep working through it but oh thank goodness it won't always be like this.

Peter: Yeah so don't be surprised that it's hard now but also don't be content yeah because it's not gonna always be this way and and in the meantime John is pretty clear let's leave behind the the lawlessness the sin. I just keep picturing family.

David: Okay.

Peter: I think it's because of the children language and John that everybody knows what it's like to have a family that's kind of got trouble mm-hmm just go home for Thanksgiving right? Also everyone

knows what their view of is as a healthy joyful functional family gathering we always kind of have that ideal in mind and it's that it's that ideal that's promised and it's the reality that we experience now where they're both and and again maybe paradox isn't the best way to put it because they're both they're both true the reality now is brokenness and the reality that will be is is wholeness and so maybe it's a movement from one to the other.

David: Well there's a broken wholeness.

Peter: Okay.

David: If you wanted to work that way.

Peter: All right.

David: Our families are a broken wholeness.

Peter: And the church. The church is a broken wholeness.

David: Right, yeah.

We live in a broken wholeness.

Peter: Yeah that's not a bad way to put it the the unity of the church and the divisions in the church.

David: Right.

And if we lean too much into the brokenness we we are not honoring and being honest about the wholeness that is given and if we lean too much in the wholeness we're ignoring our trying to wipe away or you know not do anything about the brokenness and right that's always this now and now yet of a broken wholeness that we're living in right now.

Peter: Okay yeah I like that.

David: Okay.

Peter: Yeah that's good.

Jessica: Yeah that sounds good I'm gonna take that one home with me. That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org. While you're there you'll also find episodes of our other podcast, Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived. Twice a month I get to host conversations with the faculty members here at Concordia Seminary. We talk about ways in which their understanding of God and faith is real in their everyday lives. The show is for anyone who wants to deepen their theology through engaging conversation. You can find more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart and Tangible on any of the major podcast apps. If you'd like to see this show continue it would be great if you would subscribe, share and 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 will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: I don't really have favorite flowers. I like fruit trees and