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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, 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.

All right, guys, let's get started.

Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We are at the sixth Sunday of Easter as we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead and our life in Him.

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

David: Well, the first reading is Acts 10, and then we have 1 John 5, John 15, and Psalm 98.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about. So this Sunday marks the beginning of May, and do either of you celebrate May Day? Because if you do, you get to go first.

David: I cry out, May Day, May Day.

I don't often celebrate it, though.

Peter: We celebrate it at the Nafzger House.

Jessica: How do you celebrate it?

Peter:

We get, so when we lived in Germany, they have these tutas, they call them, these containers where they wrap up candies and sometimes flowers and such.

And so we kind of started that tradition with our kids.

I am still in 1 John 5.

I've been suggesting throughout Easter that you preach on a series through 1 John.

Again, I just want to reflect, so 1 John is written by the Apostle, the last living Apostle probably as far as we can tell, toward the end of his life.

It's kind of this old man John reflecting on the entire first century, essentially.

And he's seen the Gospel, he's seen Jesus, he was there with him, he was on the Mount of Transfiguration, he's praying with him in the garden, he's there with him at the cross, and then he lives through all the turmoil of the first century and he's writing this letter at the end of his life to Christians to encourage them and to guide them.

And if you've read 1 John or studied it much, you know it's kind of cyclical, it has these themes that it returns to, love and the commandments and testimony and faith.

And one of the themes that comes up throughout 1 John is the world, the Christian's relationship to the world.

23 times, I counted them Dave, 23 times in five chapters, John in this letter talks about the world, which is not just, I mean most scholars believe that John wrote the Gospel

and the first three letters.

If you look at John's use of the word world, cosmos in Greek, in John's Gospel, well let me put it like this, in Mark, Mark uses that word four times, Luke uses it seven times, Matthew uses it 12 times, in John's Gospel he uses it 80 times.

David: Wow.

Peter: Now, I'm not a big fan of just counting words, I don't think that usually gets you very far.

David: It'd be kind of interesting to do a word cloud though.

Peter: Yeah.

David:

To put, you know, if you had your own bulletin, you made your own bulletin cover to do a word cloud of 1 John and see if world is kind of a big term in there.

Peter: Yeah, I mean it kind of, you read throughout a number of the prickpeas that we've had and the ones that we haven't emphasize the world.

And I actually think that's something that we could use some help with.

I think we could help our hearers understand what it means to be a Christian in this world and what is our posture with respect to the world.

How do we view our relationship as Christians to the world?

And I think in this reading, kind of as I mentioned before, I think a couple weeks ago, you can look at sometimes a single verse as a keyhole to see more in the scriptures.

And so I would look at this text as a keyhole to see what John says throughout this letter about the world.

And when I see that, when I do that, I see three different postures that the old man John is encouraging us to take toward the world.

David: Okay.

Peter: And the first one, it's not as explicit in this text, but it's all over the letter, is a posture of caution.

A posture of caution.

So I think about, I just went back and looked at 1 John 2, 15 to 17.

Okay, I'll just read that for you.

Do not love the world or the things of the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of eyes, and pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires.

You've got this, the world is not good.

The world don't love the world.

The world is not in the Father.

And then a little bit later in chapter 3 verse 13, do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

And so you've got this unmistakable note and emphasis of caution with respect to the world.

And I think that can be overdone, certainly, and sometimes it is.

But I think it's not bad to notice that we do need to be cautious about our engagement

with the world.

There are things, the desires of the flesh, the desires of eyes and pride of life, these things that are so strong in our world, we need to be on guard against that as Christians. And so I'd want to affirm that and acknowledge that and share the old man John's concern with the Christians.

I'd want to share that with my congregation.

David: I like that last reference you had about the world passing away.

Because it's not just a matter of pleasures, but it's a matter of loving that which will not last.

Peter: Right, right.

The temptation is to love things that not only are maybe not good for us, but even if they were, they're not going to last.

David: Right, right.

And so you're setting yourself up for a painful life in the end.

Peter: Right.

Right.

And part of that is, you know, part of my thinking as a parent, you know, I want my kids to be cautious in the world.

The world is a dark and sinful and broken place.

David: But we have to live in it.

Peter: Well, this is where we're going to go next.

David: Yeah, it's kind of like, you know, they put that little thing outside over the hallway that's, you know, they've just washed the hallway and there's a little caution thing. You still have to walk on it.

Just be careful.

Peter: Right.

David: As you walk.

It's not like you don't, you can't walk down the hallway.

You have to, but I just want you to be cautious because we just mopped it.

Peter: Well, that's where the word caution, I thought about that.

I kind of choose that carefully because it's not a runaway.

It's not a hide.

It's not an attack the world.

But it's caution.

David: Just be careful.

Be careful.

Peter: Well, the temptation is to hide from the world.

To run away from the world.

David: Separate yourself.

Peter: Separate yourself.

David: Close it off.

Peter: Shelter in place after the pandemic.

And so these are things that were tempted because of the caution.

But that's where the text for this week speaks right.

So if John as a whole, 1 John as a whole is generally, and most of those 23 times that John uses the word cosmos world, it's in these kind of cautionary, careful, don't get too close language.

But then in our text, would you read verses four and five, Jessica?

Jessica: For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Peter: Do you notice three times in these verses the phrase overcome the world is used?

Now I read that as you've still got kind of a cautionary kind of view of the world there that's not positive.

But there's the overcoming of the world.

God has overcome the world.

And so this caution that we rightly experience is met by a confidence that God in Christ has overcome the world.

I looked in John's gospel.

David: Oh, I love that.

That's one of my favorite passages.

Right.

In the world you will have trouble, but fear not for I have overcome the world.

Peter: Right.

It's the exact same phrase that John uses here.

David: Wow.

Peter: In John 16:33, exact same phrase, fear not, I have overcome the world.

And so in the midst of this letter that's telling us to be careful about the world, John says this toward the end in chapter five, three times in a row, God has overcome the world.

You have overcome the world.

So there's no need to be afraid, no need for hiding or sheltering in place.

You have this promise that Christ in His resurrection has overcome sin, death, the devil, all that's bad in the world.

And He shares that victory with His people.

David: Yeah, so courage, being courageous as a Christian has an appropriate caution of the world.

You understand it and you recognize the dangers it poses, but you're not afraid of it.

You don't run away from it.

You're courageous because you also know the one who's overcome the world.

Peter: Right.

And so the Christian life is not a life of fear.

I mean, that's always the temptation, right?

To be afraid, to look at how bad and ugly the world is and to cower in fear.

But that's not the message that old man John is giving to his Christians in the end of

the first century.

He's saying, no, we have overcome, God has overcome, you have overcome the world.

And so that's a great message of hope and certainty and confidence.

Again, a transition, I wouldn't want to leave a sermon here because you almost get kind of a triumphalism kind of we've overcome.

And I don't, I have flashbacks to like the Crusades, this kind of thing that I'm not sure I want to leave people with.

And so that would lead, and so my transition to a third idea in the sermon, the language for the transition I find actually in the field house down here at the seminary is on the wall they've got a saying painted that everyone who's ever played basketball or has been in the field house knows.

It says modest in victory, gracious in defeat.

Modest in victory.

There's victory in this text.

Not just, I mean, the word victory is in there, but even the overcome, the word overcome is the Greek word where we get Nike, nikao.

And so you've got victory all over this text.

But that wall down the field house says modest in victory.

And I would even if I were going to take some paint down there and maybe add to it, modest and merciful in victory.

David: Oh, that's nice.

Peter: And so we've got this.

Now I'm working with some letters here.

So I've got caution, courage or confidence.

And the last one would be compassion.

David: So in each case, it's a matter of pushing it too far.

If you push caution too far, you withdraw from the world completely.

If you push courage or confidence too far, then you're prideful in victory.

And then so now we've got the compassion.

Peter: Yeah.

And this compassion is all over.

Interestingly in, again, in 1 John and chapter 2, verse 2, one of the times John mentions the world is when he talks about Jesus came for the sins of the world.

And in chapter 4, verse 14, Jesus is the savior of the world.

And so even as God has overcome the world in Christ, he is saving the world.

Jessica: Like John 3 16.

Peter: For God so loved the world, the whole world.

And so you can even pick up in the Acts reading for this week is on from Acts chapter 10 about how God shows no partiality for Jew and Greek and Gentiles.

So I want to emphasize, I want to lead the hearers through caution, to have courage and to be compassionate.

And that's a Christian posture to the world.

David: Yeah, that's nice.

Jessica: That's great.

So I think a lot of times as Christians, we feel like all of the world is our enemy.

And so we have to fight them.

And then the people are our enemies too, not just the ideas or the evil behind what's going on, but they are our enemies.

We need to fight them.

And I think that creates an attitude of hostility when we interact.

Oh, that's beautiful.

What about you, David?

What would you preach about?

David: I will preach on John 15.

This is one of those beautiful but difficult texts.

It's part of a larger discourse of Jesus.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

And it's just filled with one-liners that you could meditate on.

And so that's the problem when you get a text like this, you have all of these beautiful ideas and they just keep pouring out.

And for me, if I try to cover them all, I'm going to be covering them all too shallow in too shallow of a manner.

So what I tend to do is I tend to choose one and I just lean into that one.

And sometimes I even let the idea itself become the structure of the sermon.

So like we were talking earlier about how you make transition.

Sometimes if you just read a sentence and you stop along the way as you're reading, the sentence itself can be your structure.

And that's kind of what I would do with this one.

So the one idea that I would focus in on would be verse 16.

Jessica, could you read verse 16?

Jessica: You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you.

David: Okay, so what I'm going to focus on is I chose you and appointed you that you should bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

So we have Jesus who chooses us and appoints us to bear fruit and the fruit we bear abides. Those are kind of the three things that I would focus on.

And the overall vision would be, I guess if I had to have like a theme statement, it would be that Jesus is building for eternity in a throwaway world so that we live in a throwaway world and Jesus is building for eternity.

And how does he build for eternity in a throwaway world?

Well he chooses you, he appoints you to bear fruit and the fruit you bear will abide, will last, will remain.

And so those would be kind of the three things.

And so I'd start with some idea of a throwaway world.

I just took my mom's microwave, which was not working, she wanted it repaired because it was a gift that we gave her perhaps 30 years ago.

Peter: The first microwave.

David: I know, I think it is.

I mean this thing is huge.

It's huge and it's like the size of a dishwasher, right?

So I'm like picking this thing up, I carry it to the store that repairs microwaves and you know, the guy just looks at me like I'm crazy.

He's like, you know, you could buy one for the amount you're going to pay getting this fixed.

And that it's a throwaway world, right?

I mean there are so many things that we rather than fix them, we just throw them away and get something new.

And it's, and you know, that's how we treat the material goods in the world around us.

I think sometimes that's how we treat people, that there's people who are throwaway people, right?

I mean you're, you know, you retire from work and there's a whole group of people you never have contact with again and you don't care, you don't want to.

They're just throwaway people.

They're there for the moment, they're there for that time, but after that they're gone.

And you know, there's, I think our world can be filled with people who are throwaway people.

And so the first point would be that God chooses you, that Jesus chooses people that everyone else has thrown away.

And I think, you know, I'm just working with John's gospel, right?

The Samaritan woman at the well.

Jesus chooses a person that everyone else has thrown away.

You've got the blind man in John that, you know, he's a throwaway character, the disciples see him and they're like, oh, let's make this into a theological problem.

Who sinned that this man is born blind?

It's like not talking to the man, but talking about him, right?

So he's a throwaway person.

You've got the guy at the pool that Bethsaida, that's been there for years.

Nobody has been around to carry him into the water.

And by the time he gets there, you know, the water being stirred, somebody else has been healed.

You've got the woman caught in committing adultery.

I mean, there's so many examples of people that are throwaway people.

And what Jesus does is he goes in and he chooses them.

It's not like, you know, the kids on the playground choosing you because you're, you know, you're a great one for the team.

You have all the skills.

You're going to help us win.

And then you've got some poor kid that gets chosen last, right?

Jessica: It's not like that at all.

David: It's not that.

Jesus finds throwaway people and he chooses them.

And he chooses them because he himself became a throwaway person.

He himself was placed on the cross and left there to die.

And yet he knows the power that can be brought into that situation and the life that can arise out of it.

I mean, it's Easter after all, right?

So you've got Jesus who chooses people that are throwaway people.

And what does He do with them?

Well, He appoints them to bear fruit.

Peter: So back up just for a second.

Jesus chooses people.

So you're thinking of, in this idea to communicate to your hearers, those who feel like they've been discarded more than those who have discarded others.

So it's not like you're pointing out the sin of discarding others.

Discarding others.

David: No, rather I'm working with the people who feel they've been discarded.

And I think, you know, a lot of the frustration, a lot of the anger that the church has today about the changes in the world are really an anger that comes out of feeling like they've been thrown away.

Peter: Like the church has been kind of discarded.

David: Yeah, the church used to be, you know, you used to have a clergy person say a prayer before, you know, the community picnic.

You used to have a bacculaureate service.

You used to, you know, people used to turn to the church.

Peter: They used to take Wednesdays and Sunday mornings off for youth sports.

And now, nonstop.

David: And now that's stopped.

And I think a lot of people in the church feel thrown away.

And I think their anger, really what lies behind the anger is sorrow.

Sorrow at, you know, how things have changed and how we've been thrown away.

And I, you know, and I think there's a lot of people that, you know, I mean, you know,

there are times in congregations where congregations kind of in their minds target the kind of people that they want.

You know, we got to bring in families with kids, you know, we need that.
And, you know, and instead the Lord brings in another widower.
And you're like, well, that's the Lord's doing because he chooses people.
And so the work that we see Jesus doing in his ministry, and he's not going to stop after
He's been raised from the dead.
He's just going to amp it up, right?
The work that Jesus does in his ministry is he chooses people that the world is thrown away.
And so, and then what he does with them is he appoints them to bear fruit.
And so once again, I think in this sermon, I might, in each case, kind of look at these
characters in Scripture and see the fruit that they bore.
So the Samaritan woman at the well, we obviously have fruit.
Jessica, do you remember what she did?

Jessica: Oh, she ran back to her town and told everybody.

David: I know.

Jessica: And many people were saved on account of her.

David: I know, right?

And she goes back and says, you know, I want you to meet this man who told me everything
I ever did.

And so, you know, so she brings the whole town then comes to meet Jesus because of that
fruit that she's bearing in the town.

The man who was born blind, he ends up getting in an argument with his parents, with the
religious leaders, and yet he's the one who slowly comes to see Jesus and begins to move
toward confessing him as Lord.

So, you know, you just think about, you know, different individuals in Scripture whose lives

were of little worth to the world around them, but God chooses them and God appoints them
to bear fruit.

And so you have fishermen preaching in the middle of the temple.

You have...

Peter: And not just fishermen, but I mean, this was, Jesus said these things in the night he was
betrayed.

David: Right.

Peter: People who were about to turn their backs on him.

And you have to remember, they're remembering what Jesus said about, I chose you.

David: Right.

Peter: It doesn't depend on your faithfulness to me.

David: And that's how the gospel begins, right?

You know, John has that line in the beginning of the gospel that, you know, your children
born of God, not of human will, not of decision, not of blood, but of God.

And so God is the one who brings life to people that others would have thrown away.

God works in their life so that they bear fruit.

And then the other last piece is that this is fruit that abides.

And you know, that's the problem with the throwaway culture is that we're constantly

throwing things away because they don't last.

And yet the work that the Spirit produces through God's people has a way of lasting in this world.

It's building a kingdom for eternity.

Peter: Even when you don't see it.

David: Even when you don't see it.

Why do you say that?

Peter: Well, I just think, you know, I was a member of a family we tried to reach out when I was up in Minnesota over and over again, and we could not get them to come back.

The elders and I, I don't know how many times we tried.

And you know, for nine years, never, never anything.

And then it was a couple years later, I still get the congregation's newsletter.

And I saw a list of kind of new members.

David: And there's their name.

Peter: I could not believe that name that we saw because we'd worked so hard.

And the fruit just came later.

And I think in parish ministry, it's so hard when stuff doesn't happen right away.

And so, but this fruit, the works that we do, slowly plants grow, slowly God makes the fruit come to bear.

And so sometimes you just have to wait a while.

David: Right.

Right.

It's not always going to be like the Samaritan woman at the well, where the whole town comes out and then they say, now we believe not because of what you said, but because of what he said, right?

It's not always going to be that way.

But there's this beauty that the Lord is doing something.

And you know, that whole idea that of all people, God would have had the most reason to throw away this world, you know, with what we have all done with this world.

He would have the most reason to throw it away, but instead He chose to save it.

And He chose to save it by coming into it in Jesus Christ, becoming cast off from the world, thrown away and rising to life.

And now gathering people who will follow Him.

People whose story is that I was once thrown away.

I've been chosen.

I've been appointed to bear fruit.

And this fruit will last in this kingdom that Jesus is bringing.

Jessica: Thanks guys.

That's all for today.

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Both Peter and David have been on episodes of that show.

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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.

David: You know you could by one.