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Jesscia: 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, 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.

David, where are we in the church here?  
David: It is the second Sunday after Pentecost, and so we are starting a long season where we celebrate the Spirit's work in the lives of God's people, and we're going to find that the readings tend to, at least the gospel and epistle readings, they tend to be extended readings from books opening up for meditation.

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

Peter: The texts are from Deuteronomy chapter 5, 2 Corinthians 4, Mark 2, and maybe parts of 3, and then Psalm 81.  
So each week when I ask each of you to tell me which text you'd preach on, I usually ask a question to determine who would go first.  
So here's the question.

At your church during the long season of Pentecost during the summer, is there a change in your Bible study time or schedule?

Because a lot of people are gone on summer, they're on vacation different weeks.  
Does your church do something differently during Pentecost?

David: We did not.  
We just kind of kept it the way it always was.

Peter: Yeah, we tend to bring our youth into adult Bible class.  
Our congregation is a little bit smaller, and so I think it's sometimes hard to have consecutive Sunday school teachers, that kind of thing.  
So we usually have some sort of intergenerational study during the summer.

Jesscia: That's what my church does.  
You win, Peter.

You get to go first.  
Peter: All right.  
Maybe we should start, Jessica, by talking just a little bit about what David mentioned with the season of Pentecost and these consecutive readings.  
Because one of the things that, and I see this primarily I think for younger pastors, because I remember my first couple years, I'm sure I did not listen to my Hom professors very well, because my first couple years I was going week by week, and I kind of would look at the weeks.  
I didn't plan ahead as much.  
And when you look at Pentecost, David, you mentioned some consecutive readings.  
What is the mark?

The mark is for how many weeks do we do mark?  
Jesscia: So you have nine weeks of mark.

David: Each year has a gospel, and that's kind of, when I was a pastor, I would always look for a commentary on that gospel to read for the year, and that helps you. And then you've got all of these sequential readings, and I think sometimes if you're not aware of that, you're just bouncing all over the place. And I'm not sure, I don't know, I wonder if people, they come to church and one day we got a reading from Habakkuk and another day from Paul and another day from Mark, and they're like, they don't know how it all holds together.

Peter: Right. Yeah, and so I was looking at the 2 Corinthians too. I mean, I think there's six weeks in a row on 2 Corinthians.

And so these are the kinds of times where, I remember it was a big step for me as a preacher, when I started to plan out six to eight weeks in advance what I was going to preach on. So I don't know if I would recommend a 2 Corinthians series or a Mark series right now, but I would recommend that you look ahead at the text and have a plan kind of take you at least through the summer maybe.

David: Yeah, yeah, that's a good idea. That's a good idea. I didn't do it for today, but it's a good idea, Peter.

Peter: Well I'm going to suggest, like I said, I don't know if I'm going to stick with 2 Corinthians for six weeks. I haven't looked that far ahead, but I would preach on the 2 Corinthians passage this week, I think. 2 Corinthians 4:5 to 12. And the verses that captured my attention this week are verses 8 through 10. Would you start by reading those?

Jesscia: We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our bodies.

Peter: All right, Paul's talking here about we. We're afflicted in every way. And it's a reminder to me that 2 Corinthians is such a personal letter for Paul. He really is talking about his own experience. It's probably, I think, one of the most personal of all his letters. And he doesn't sugarcoat the struggles he goes through in this letter. I think even jumping ahead to chapter 11, I don't think it's being read in this particular series.

But in chapter 11, that's where Paul talks about how many times he was beaten and shipwrecked and imprisoned, all these things. And so Paul is facing that kind of struggle. He's also facing questions about his own authority from among the Christians. And so there's challenges to his apostleship. And so Paul is very aware of and not afraid to share his weaknesses and his frailty and

his agony with the Christians in Corinth.

And yet in these verses, I love in these verses because he strikes such a defiant tone. We're afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed.

And I kind of want to think about the Christian life as a defiant life.

In fact, I'd maybe call this sermon Defiant Like Paul.

And think about, well, when you think of defiance, Jessica, what comes to mind?

What's an image of someone who is defiant?

Jesscia: My image might not be as positive as yours because I definitely think of naughty kids. If one of my kids is being defiant, it's not a good thing.

Peter: But describe what defiant looks like.

Jesscia: It looks like being rude and selfish and this is my way and it has to be this way. And it might even be the opposite of yours just because.

Peter:

So someone who is stubborn, someone who will not give in, someone who has a way of doing things and I don't care what you say, I defy you, right?

You ever have a student like that, Dave?

Jesscia: Oh, no.

David: Yes, I have.

Jesscia: No names.

David: And I've been that way too.

Peter: Yeah.

Well, defiance here, I'm not one to highlight and glorify kind of a negative defiance, but that attitude of stubbornness, I will not give in, I am not going to cave.

That Paul speaks that way, I hear that tone as opposed to those things that would crush him, those things that would bring him down, those things that would cause him to despair.

David: Well, in each case, he's naming the danger.

Peter: Yeah.

Right.

David: So this is a very real and present danger that you could be crushed.

You could be driven to despair.

You could be forsaken.

You could be destroyed.

And so he's like, you know, I mean, this is not playful imaginings of bad things.

This is the real thing.

Peter: And that's what I think draws me to it, that people in our congregations are dealing with real, real awful things.

David: Yeah.

Real suffering.

Peter: Real suffering, real challenges.

And I want to help my congregation become defiant like Paul, not like a stubborn little child, but like Paul who will not cave to the pressures and the anxieties and the challenges of this world.

And so this defiance, this godly defiance is something I'd like to have kind of maybe as a theme for this sermon, which made me think of Mark Noll's book, Turning Points.

Are you familiar with that book?

David: No, I'm not.

I'm familiar with Mark.

Jesscia: I have not read it, no.

Peter: So it's a book we use in Intro to Historical Theology class here now.  
And it's about the major turning points in the history of Christianity.  
It tells the history of the last 2,000 years basically by highlighting turning points.  
And the last chapter he brings up, if they were going to write it, he wrote this, I don't know, maybe 15 or 20 years ago.  
If you were going to tell the story of the 20th century, what would be the turning point of the 20th century?

Because we don't have enough historical distance yet to look back and say, really, what would that be?

And he offers three or four different examples.

But one of the examples, the last example he offers as a potential turning point is the survival of the Church under communism.

And it's really fascinating because he shares just in a couple of brief pages the statistics of what happened to the Church under the Soviet Union especially.

He has a stat that the number of functioning Orthodox churches went from 55,000 to just a few hundred in a matter of a decade.

And so he highlights that the Church under tyrannical regimes has defiantly persisted.

It has survived.

It has endured these challenges.

And I think that's something that can be an encouragement to your hearers.

Now as soon as I say that, one of the dangers, I think, Dave, you and I have talked about this before, when you use kind of extreme examples in a sermon.

David: Yeah, it seems too distant from people.

It's like, oh, so that works for them, but what about me working in a cubicle all week?  
Right.

How does it apply to me?

Peter: So, you know, sure, the Church survived under communist regime, but what does that have to do with me?

And so I wouldn't, if I used that kind of example, I'd want to transition pretty quickly

to the idea that helping your hearers identify and name those pressures they face in day-to-day life.

And it's probably going to be a lot less dramatic, but it would be no less perplexing, no less afflicting than the kinds of things that Paul's talking about.

David: And to see them as turning points.

Peter: Yeah.

David: Right?

Peter: Yeah.

Yeah, maybe take the title of that book and imagine you're offering turning points.

David: That any of these afflictions can be a turning point in your life.

Peter: Yeah.

And so of these things that Paul lists, I think maybe the perplexing but not driven

to despair would be the one I would highlight to help my hearers think about what perplexes them, what causes them to doubt, what makes them uncertain.

Just off the top of your head, Jessica, what are the kinds of things that make you uncertain or that create doubt in your mind about God and his goodness?

Jesscia: I think for a lot of us, it's the multiple messages that we're hearing all the time. They're constantly coming at you in podcasts and in articles and in movies and in people you talk to at work. It's like, well, there's all these voices. How do I know which one is the right voice to listen to?

Even if you thought you knew, I think that can bring doubt and confusion.

Peter: Sometimes I think that leads to a little bit of despair that how are we going to break through?

How is the truth going to break through all the false ideas and the voices that are harmful and hurtful?

Jesscia: Think about teens.

Think about your youth group at church.

They're getting so many messages from their teachers, from their coaches, from their after school job employers who come from any kind of a philosophy of life.

How confusing for them.

There's so many voices.

Peter: And Paul's defiance here is, yes, there's lots of voices out there and they are confusing, but we will not despair.

Why not?

Because, well, that's where verse 10, we're always carrying around the body of death of Jesus.

That's kind of the reality of being burdened in a sinful world so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies.

The life of Jesus.

This life of the one who came and made himself known through his ministry, his healings, his teachings, the one who was crucified, the one who was raised from the dead, the one who ascended into heaven, sending the Spirit to his church, his life is manifested in us.

And because of that, we do not despair.

We are not destroyed.

We are not crushed.

But we are defiantly confident that the life that God has given us in Christ will see us through.

Jesscia: What about you, David?

What would you preach on?

David: Well, I would also preach on the 2 Corinthians text.

And I would work with the verse right before the listing that you did.

So Jessica, could you read verse 7?

Jesscia: But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

David: So for me, I just, I love that image of treasure in jars of clay.

And there was a student who gave me a bowl.

He had, he bought a bowl, a ceramic bowl, and then he broke it.

And then he glued it together.

And then he painted the areas where it was glued with gold.

And he told me about this art, this Japanese art of kintsugi.

It's, I think it's gold joinery that when a pot is broken, they have this technique of taking lacquer and joining the parts together, but then inserting the dust of a precious metal, sometimes platinum, silver, or gold.

So you end up having this pot where the cracks are visible, and they're visible because they're brilliantly beautiful with gold.

I know.

Jesscia: That sounds great.

David: We had a Concordia journal where that was on the cover of the Concordia journal.

I remember that picture on the cover.

And he had given that to me.

And it was, I keep it in my office.

And it's the image that comes to mind when I think of this text.

Because it holds together two things that we tend to separate.

And it holds together the, either it would be our weakness and God's power, or you could work with the brokenness and the blessing.

And so for me, this is kind of would be an image-based sermon that tries to unfold that tension of there being blessing and brokenness.

And I think the opening image of this vessel that has the joinery of where it's been fractured is painted in gold to draw attention to it, kind of would be the opening image I would use.

And then I would weave in a refrain about probably either a blessed brokenness or a broken blessing.

And that's going to be the paradoxical tension.

And so with a paradox-maintained sermon, you always try to help people see how overemphasizing

one of the pieces causes you to neglect the other.

And so you're always bringing them back into the tension.

And so with a broken blessing, we can sometimes overemphasize the brokenness.

And I think either overemphasizing the brokenness that God can't do anything in my life, God can't be useful in my life, God won't be able to use me in his kingdom because of these broken aspects of my life and my past, or we take the other method of trying to hide the brokenness.

So you put the pot back together and you try to do it in a way where nobody notices that it's cracked, then you give it to somebody.

Peter: That never works.

David: I know, it never works, right?

Because those cracks, they're going to be...

Peter: They're serious.

David: They're serious.

They damage.

And you can't ignore them, right?

And so the image in the passage invites us to see that these fragile things, these jars

of clay, these moments of brokenness in your life can be moments when the treasure is seen, that the surpassing power of God is seen precisely in those moments of weakness.

And so you pull people from trying to hide these things to recognizing that God has blessed

their brokenness and that those broken moments in their life can be a moment of sharing comfort with others.

And I think that's what we hear from Paul in this letter elsewhere, that the comfort

that I have been comforted with, I share with you so that this brokenness in my life becomes a moment when I can bring that comfort of life to you.

So you kind of got the first part of the sermon where we overemphasize the brokenness, either saying it disqualifies me from service in the kingdom, or I'm going to try to hide it and act as if it has never happened.

And both of those are wrong.

Instead we're brought into this recognition that God works through brokenness, that he has blessed brokenness.

And in the broken body of Christ, we see the blessings of God flowing out to all people.

Then the other side of the equation would be to overemphasize the blessing, right?

To the point where you're no longer empathetic or sympathetic with somebody's brokenness. As if you've gone through this horrible tragedy of a miscarriage or of a son who's turned to drugs or some type of horrible pain in your life.

And yes, it has equipped you and God has blessed you and you're able to minister to others, but there's still real pain there.

There's still a real seriousness about that brokenness and we can't just act as if because God has blessed it, it doesn't matter anymore.

Peter: I think that's so important because I think the temptation is to proclaim the good news of Jesus in such a way where you almost remove permission to still grieve and mourn and acknowledge the brokenness that remains.

Making space for that I think is really important.

David: Right, yes.

So that you, yes, there is brokenness and we need to be able to affirm that.

And like you said, to create a space where you can mourn it, you can grieve it, you can recognize it and share it with others.

But also recognize that there's blessing in this brokenness because of the work of Christ.

And so the sermon would kind of open with that image of this broken vessel and then talk about blessed brokenness and both of those things.

And then we would want to close with an image of kind of a broken vessel.

And for that I might, you know, if I was on campus here, right, I mean, but if I was on campus here, I would work with that image in the stained glass window.

You know, we have in the stained glass window, we have the Lord's Supper and we have the imagery of a chalice that is, you know, kind of the blood of Christ.

And then on the other side, we have the stalks of wheat.

That's the body of Christ.

But with that chalice, you'll notice that there's a crack in it.

And if you look, that chalice is the same cup that Christ is drinking from on the cross.

It's the same broken chalice that Christ has taken the cup of wrath of God and drank it for us.

And now he shares with us the blessing of his blood that saves us from that wrath.

And so we have another kind of a broken chalice that is the means whereby we receive the forgiveness of sins.

Peter: So now I thought you were going to go to that individual in one of the other windows who's gathered around the table and he's got a crutch.

David: Yes, that's a beautiful one.

Peter: And now he's coming to the table broken.

David: Right.

And yet he's being blessed.

And you're receiving blessing.

Peter: Right, receiving blessing.

David: That's another good image.

So you would want to, you know, and I think it's kind of the opening image is going to be of this pot and, you know, talk about pottery and the way it looks.

And then the closing image, you're going to want to try to make it something that's more literal in terms of kind of this broken figure who's at the Lord's table or, you know, the broken chalice that is the means, you know, whereby grace is received.

Peter: You'd have no shortage of people from the scriptures you could point to.

David: Oh my gosh, right.

Peter: Or frankly, people even that the congregation might know sometimes, especially kind of patriarchs or matriarchs of the congregation who struggled and everybody knows, especially if they're even there were a couple of times we talked about that someone who's no longer living but was with us, you could reflect back on their life that everybody knew. And that would be a tangible, literal kind of example of these things.

Jesscia: When you guys do that, do you ask the person before you include them in your sermon?

Peter: If they're still living, I would.

You know, as a pastor, depending on how well you know your congregation, some people you know that's just fine.

David: If there's any question at all, then I would certainly just even run the idea past whoever it was. Yeah, I mean, I think it's a good thing to ask people because you're helping them see how their life is a witness.

And sometimes when I ask them, they're like, you know, you can use the story, but just make sure nobody knows it's me.

And so you change names or this or that to protect their identity.

But what you hope is that you hope that they'll see that their story has value as a witness to others.

And the reason I'm including you in the sermon is not to hide you, but to celebrate how God is working in your life.

And, you know, and the brokenness and the blessing that has come in the midst of it.

That's what I'm hoping to share with others.

And I would love it if you could share it with others.

Jesscia: Because sometimes when I hear pastors sharing a story of someone that they know or that we all know, I'm terrified.

I'm like, oh, I hope he asked her.

What if I, I don't know if I want to talk to pastor about this because what if he uses



me for sermon illustration?

David: And that's why it's a good thing, not just to ask permission, but sometimes to signal it in the sermon.

I was talking with somebody and they said I could share this with you.

And you know, you can go there.

Jesscia: That way I won't lose trust in you.

David: Right.

Right.

And for the next five weeks, we're going to have a sermon series from Jessica's life.

Jesscia: Great.

Yeah.

I'm going to go on vacation those five weeks.

Thanks guys.

That's all for today.

We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at [ConcordiaTheology.org](http://ConcordiaTheology.org).

If you want to see images from the stained glass windows that the guys talked about today, you can find those at [csl.edu](http://csl.edu).

They're actually pretty cool.

Check it out.

You can find more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart at any of the major podcast apps.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

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