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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, let's get started.

Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We're talking about the text for the fifth Sunday after Pentecost, a time where we celebrate and reflect on and consider the work of the Spirit in his church for the sake of the world.

Jesscia: And David, what are the texts?

David: We have Job 38, 2 Corinthians 6, and Mark 4, along with Psalm 124.

Jesscia:

As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about to determine who goes first.

Since summer has just started, the official first day of summer, what are you looking forward to most this summer?

Peter: I am looking forward to going up to northern Wisconsin, where the water is clear and the evenings are cool and it's not hot and humid.

Jesscia: Yes!

David: Wow.

Jesscia: Yes!

David: I am looking forward to gin and tonics.

So, kind of switching this summer to gin and tonics.

I don't need to go to Wisconsin for that.

Jesscia: Both good answers.

But, Peter, you win because Wisconsin is my home state and I'll be there part of the summer too.

So you win.

You get to go first.

Peter: Alright, we'll look for you.

Okay, I'm thinking about preaching on the Psalm.

Psalm 124.

So Jessica, would you read verses 1 and 2?

Jesscia: Let Israel now say, if it had not been the Lord who was on our side when people rose up against us, when they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us.

Peter: Alright, so verse 1 through 3 talks about if it had not been the Lord who was on our side.

Kind of this hypothetical.

And I think about, I was reading this Psalm and I thought about the question, what if.

It's not kind of regret or despair or, you know, what if things had gone differently?

What if I could have a do-over?

It's not this kind of what if.

Instead, it's a what if that is, what if the Lord had not been on our side?

David: That's a nice what if.

Peter: And that leads you to a different kind of...

David: Leads you to Thanksgiving.

Peter: Well, it leads you to a couple of things.

This is kind of what I want to think about in the sermon.

I want to think about what if things had not gone well?

What if we hadn't narrowly escaped?

What if things would have gone worse?

So I read this Psalm and I think about a time when I was a kid in Colorado and we were doing this hike by this waterfall down near Pagosa Springs, Treasure Falls, it's called.

And there was a girl that was from the church that we were going to with my siblings and she wanted to take us up to this waterfall.

We walked up, it was only so we could almost walk behind the waterfall.

David: Those are cool.

Peter: It was really cool, except that it was one of these that was a little bit slanted where you were walking and you could see the waterfall going down.

And I was probably only eight or nine years old, but I remember thinking, I don't know if I want to walk behind this.

But my older sister did and my older brother did and this girl, she was older than all of us and she said, yeah, go ahead, you can do it.

And I started to take a step kind of behind the waterfall and I started to slip.

And I still have, you know, like I think about this and what happened was she grabbed my hand and she kind of helped me kind of go past.

Jesscia: And I'm feeling nauseous right now, just so you know, thinking of my kids doing this and falling.

This is terrible.

Peter: And this is exactly the point that I want to reflect on.

When I think about that time, I am filled with a mix of kind of vulnerability and a little bit of fear and I kind of shudder a little bit and yet I give thanks because of course I didn't fall to my death at Treasure Falls.

I think that's the kind of thing that the psalmist, that David is getting at and this where you think about what if, what if the Lord had not been on our side?

And I think that creates in the reader, in the here, in the prayer, a sense of vulnerability and a little sense of insecurity and yet gratitude.

David: A huge sense of gratitude.

Peter: A huge sense of gratitude.

David: And of appreciation for what you have.

Peter: Right.

David: Right?

Peter: Right.

David: Yeah.

Because you're not looking at what you, you know, what you have that you don't like and you wish you could have done it differently, but instead you're looking at what you have that's wonderful that you just can't get enough of giving thanks for.

Peter: Right.

David: Wow.

Peter: Right.

And for me, every time I replay that experience in my head, it's kind of the same, a little bit of a shudder and yet all gratitude.

And so I think this is a way you could help your hearers appreciate more personally, more intimately, more existentially the goodness that God has been on our side.

So that's kind of the big picture.

I actually think, I think it might be worth in a sermon like this, inviting your hearers and giving them even just a little bit of space to think of their own.

Yeah.

I think everyone can, if they spend a couple of moments thinking about it, can think of times where things could have been really bad or a lot worse or much more traumatic if something had not happened.

And so the Psalmist says, if the Lord was not on our side and it starts this one, I love it.

It starts, if the Lord had not been on our side, what would that have been like?

And then the next number of verses, our enemies would have swallowed us alive.

The flood would have swept us away.

The torrent would have gone over us.

Over us would have gone the raging waters.

This reflection on how bad it would have been for the people of Israel if the Lord had not been on their side.

So the first kind of main idea I would reflect on, I'd invite people to think about what if the Lord was not on our side?

And think about that from David's perspective.

So this one, it would be pretty easy with David.

What if God had not been on his side?

And then I think I would actually turn to the Gospel reading and you could think of it from David's perspective, from the disciples perspective there in the boat.

What if Jesus had not been on our side?

The Gospel reading talks about how they were in the storm.

And then I would think about what if God was not on our side?

What would it be like?

It's kind of a shuddering thought actually to think about the despair, the fear, the loneliness.

If God were not on our side, man, we would be swept away by the flood.

The raging waters would pull us down.

We would be swallowed alive if the Lord were not with us.

So the first idea is just reflect on that for a little while.

What if he were not on our side?

Even in this part of the sermon, I invite people to shudder just a little bit and to think about what that would be like.

But then I want to move toward, but God is on our side.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

He is the one who delivered David.

You can kind of walk through David and then the disciples again.

He's the one who delivered the disciples.

And of course, he is the one who has delivered us from sin, from death, from the devil, however you'd want to cast the problem.

And I would want to emphasize that not only are we saved, I had a friend who talked this way in seminary.

He used to say, not only are we saved, but we're safe.

And because of Jesus, we are safe because of his victory over sin and death and his resurrection.

Jesscia: Because that's present tense?

Safe versus safe?

Peter: Because safe is more present tense.

I'm so picturing the flood and the waters pouring over us.

I'm not picturing an enemy like a person or a people group.

But I think it's probably wise to be cautious about this.

I was thinking about what are the kind of things that threaten to overwhelm us and drag us down.

But it's probably wise to be careful about that because we don't want to perpetuate this kind of triumphalism or something like that.

David: Right, yeah.

I'm just wondering if, I mean, it's not that, it's just, you know, you think about the examples you use, you think about what parts of the sermon you might emphasize more to kind of situate people.

Peter: Yeah.

So I mean, in this second idea that God is on our side, you know, God delivered David from his enemies, the Philistines are maybe in view there.

God delivered the disciples from the storm, from the elements, and then God has delivered us.

And I guess here's where you'd want to be really careful that you're not saying he delivered us from those.

David: I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

Jesscia: You think of anything that you can be on a side of, our side, right?

Any of those things people could misinterpret.

You know, the Packers won, God was on our side.

Peter: That's right.

David: There we go.

Peter: But here's where, in this part of the sermon, you proclaim the gospel.

This is where maybe proclaiming the gospel clearly hears what actually has God delivered us from, not from the Chicago Bears, but he has delivered us from sin and death.

And so this would be, you know, proclaiming the promise that we are safe in Christ from sin, from guilt, from punishment, from the devil.

But then I'd want to come out to one more kind of main idea, one more rhetorical unit.

So after proclaiming that God is on our side, I'd want to return to the what if question, but ask it a little bit differently.

What if we went forward trusting that God was really on our side?

And so what if David did that?

David, well, he would go forward trusting that God had promised that his house would be established forever.

The disciples went forth trusting that this man, Jesus, had authority over all creation.

We go forward.

What would it look like for us to go forward without fear, without uncertainty about God

on our side?

And I would invite hearers then to reflect on what their life would be like, how would it be different if they weren't inhibited in any way by fear or by uncertainty about God's love for them.

The Romans 8 passage, if God is for us, who can be against us?

That kind of confession of faith and that kind of confidence.

And that's where the psalm ends.

That's what I love about Psalm 124 is it starts with this what if experiment, thought experiment, and it ends with our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

So it can lead to this confident invitation to a confident living.

Jesscia: Thanks Peter.

What about you David?

What would you preach on?

David: I would go with the gospel reading.

I thought to myself if I was going to approach this as a narrative and use kind of narrative theory as I think about this, we're going to kind of, we want to think about a narrative arc so we move from what to what and that move from one thing to the other thing goes through something.

So we're moving from what through what to what.

And to me I would think of this as an occasion to recognize that sometimes physical journeys in our life can become spiritual journeys.

You know a drive to and from work is a physical journey in our life but one day we're driving to and from work and we're talking on the phone with a friend of ours who's thinking about a divorce.

Now that physical journey has suddenly been transformed into a spiritual journey.

Or we take our kids to basketball.

We do it once a week.

We're taking them to basketball once a week and then one day in the car our daughter talks about being bullied at school and that physical journey becomes a spiritual journey.

And I think in this text we have one small journey, they're just crossing the lake, that's all they're doing, one small journey in the life of the disciples.

Think of how many miles they traveled with Jesus throughout his ministry.

Three years traveling around going from place to place with Jesus.

This is one small journey.

It's a physical journey but it's also a spiritual journey.

And so I would think about this as a spiritual journey and we're going to kind of just walk through three stages.

You know from where, through what, to what.

So we're going to start with from where.

Jesscia if you could read verse 35 and then the first part of verse 36.

Jesscia: On that day when evening had come he said to them, let us go across the other side.

And leaving the crowd they took him with them in the boat just as he was.

David: Okay, I would say that it starts out at a place of confident control.

I love the line, they took Him with them in the boat.

They took Jesus with them.

Yeah, it's like you're taking Jesus with you in the boat, right?

I mean it's just like, you know, it's not Jesus.

Peter: Don't forget your sunblock.

Grab your sunblock, grab your sunglasses, and do Jesus.

David: We've got it all taken care of, Jesus.

We know what we're doing.

Jesscia: Who's the they in the story?

David: The disciples.

So the disciples take Jesus with them in the boat just as he was.

And I mean I could just see them saying, we got this Lord, you know, we're fishermen, we know the Sea of Galilee, you want to go from here, Capernaum to Gennesaret?

We can do it, right?

And so they take Him with them in the boat and it's a moment of confident control.

And I would just pause for thinking about moments in our life when Jesus is leading, He tells them what he wants done, you know, he wants to take them to the other side, and they kind of step up and say, yep, we can do it.

We'll take it with us in the boat just as you are.

Oh, here we go.

And so those times in our life when everything's going the way we think it should be going,

we're doing what God wants us to do, and we're pretty confident, and we think we've got control.

So it kind of starts in a place of confident control.

And then it moves through a place of what I would call shocked prayer.

Jessica, if you could read verse 37 through 38.

Jesscia:

And a great wind arose and the waves were breaking into the boat so the boat was already filling.

But He was in the stern asleep on the cushion and they woke Him and said, "Teacher do you not care we are perishing?"

David: Okay.

And so there's this huge storm and they lose control, obviously, they're not able to control what's going on, their confidence kind of goes out the window, and they're shocked by what is happening, but what they do is they turn to Jesus.

And I don't know, we'd have to do some study to see what kind of question is that.

Is that a teacher, you don't care that we're perishing, or is it a teacher, you care that we're perishing here, don't you?

Jesscia: Are you on our side?

David: Right.

Yeah, are you on our side?

Right, but yeah, so they're turning to the right place, they're turning to God.

And I'd have to do some study, figure out what kind of intonation you might have with that question, but either one is okay, right?

Because you've got kind of the lament psalms, which turn to God in somewhat a little bit of anger that we're perishing here and you don't care about it, right?

And so you've got that where you're just unburdening that toward God.

So the shock has led you to prayer, or you could have the other one where the shock has led you to turn to the one person who you believe does care about you.

And so they cry out to God in this shock moment and they lead to prayer.

And so then you can spend some time thinking about how do we respond when we lose confidence,

when we lose our confidence and we lose our control.
They're shocked and what happens is they cry out in prayer.

And you know, sometimes I think our, you know, our shock can lead us to praying even though we don't know we're praying, that the Spirit's interceding for us with groans too deep for words, right?

I mean, we've just got lost, but the beautiful thing is that they're brought into a deeper connection with Jesus.

They're trying to rouse him awake.

They're trying to speak to him.

They're trying to communicate to him.

And so the way that they're handling this shock is not, so this is not a time to, you know, blame the disciples for being sinners, but it's a time to say, you know what, they're actually doing the right thing.

So why don't you read that verse 39 and 40.

Jesscia: And He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea peace be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

He said to them, why are you so afraid?

Have you still no faith?

David: So I just, I love the moment that Jesus is awakened.

Suddenly He's...

Jesscia: I kind of hope that he, the disciples answered him and said, because you were sleeping, right?

Doesn't it seem if God is sleeping and he's not talking to you right now, well, of course I'm scared and I'm going to, right?

Peter: It was one of those moments where they look at each other like, uh, you want to tell him or should I tell him?

David: I know, yeah, we're perishing here.

But no, I mean, I just love the fact that when Jesus awakens, He's on it and He's dealing with many different factors.

So He's speaking to the wind and He's speaking to the sea.

And just stop and think about that.

How amazing would it be to have somebody able to talk to the wind and to talk to the sea?

I mean, it just would, it would blow your mind, right?

I was walking through the park the other morning and there was this woman who had this big dog.

It was like a, it was some kind of a Husky and it just started jumping.

And I mean, it was jumping higher than she was and it was jumping in a way that looked playful but perhaps could turn aggressive.

And she's got this leash and she's saying, no, no.

And the dog's just jumping higher and higher and jumping toward her.

And I'm walking, you know, and I'm like...

Peter: And now I'm running.

I know, it's like, should I help her?

So I'm walking, I'm like, is everything okay?

As I'm walking toward her and I'm thinking, I'm going to get eaten here.

You know, is everything okay?

And she's like, he's never done this before.
He's never done this before.
And all of a sudden, so I'm walking toward her and there's a guy coming up behind me
and he yells and the dog immediately stops.
And it was just like, wow, this voice has power, right?
And you know, and then I'm like, great, I can run away now.
I know she's safe and I don't want anything to do with this situation.
But it's this, imagine the amazement, right?

That this one that you raised can speak to the natural elements of this world and they obey him.
There's something about, you know, I said that the journey ends
in what I would call a trembling dependence.
And the trembling is that suddenly you realize that this God is bigger
than the life situation I'm facing.
You know, this is the Lord of all creation.

And so like at the end of the Psalm that you were talking with, Peter, that last line is the Lord
of heaven and earth, who made heaven and earth.
The one we are dealing with here is the one who made the entire creation.
And the whole creation obeys his voice.
And this one who has a voice that can stop the storm, that can still the sea,
has the graciousness to speak to me.
It's a sense of that Jesus has a bigger picture in mind.
That is, you know, the disciples start out on this limited journey from one side of the Sea
of Galilee to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.
And Jesus has their whole lifetime in mind.
This is a journey of faith.

And I'm walking with you and I'm bringing you closer to me through every step of this journey.

And so, you know, Jesus kind of opens their eyes to a much larger journey that they're going on
so that they have what I would say a trembling dependence on Him.
And this one who controls the world is concerned about your growth and faith.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, he's the one who's got you on this journey.

And he's the one who's awakening when you cry out to him in, you know, shocked prayer.

Peter: Right.

David: And he's the one who leads you to a place of trembling dependence on Him.

Peter: Yeah.

And so for me, the whole journey then in the sermon would just be kind of this movement
from a space of confident control to a moment of shocked prayer, to a moment of trembling
dependence on Jesus.

And there are moments in my life when I see it was that way.

I was, you know, I was completely confident and definitely in control.

And then it all, it all just spun out.

And in my shock, I turned to God in prayer.

And God somehow answered me.

And now I'm just kind of trembling and I'm dependent on Him.

Peter: And maybe there's some people in the congregation who for whom it's spinning out of control right now.

David: Right.

Peter: This gives them kind of an encouragement to cry out with a shocked prayer. And to look for the dependence, trembling as it still may be.

David: Right.
Upon Jesus.
Yeah.

Peter: I like it.

Jesscia: Thanks, guys.
That's all for today.
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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.

Jesscia: I'm feeling nauseous right now, just so you know.
Oh, that is so frightening.