

Brought to you by ConcordiaTheology.org, bringing you resources that support the vigorous life of the mind in service of the gospel of Christ.

Jesscia: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart.
We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon and 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 are pretty good preachers.
All right, let's get started.

Peter, where are we in the church year?

Peter: We are in the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, a time when we celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit in his church for the sake of restoring his creation.

Jesscia: And David, what are the texts this week?

David: The texts this week tend to have this theme about shepherds.
So you've got Jeremiah 23, it's the Old Testament reading, Psalm 23, Ephesians 2 and Mark 6.

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 we're in the middle of summer and it's hot outside, popsicles or ice cream, what's your preference?

David: Oh, popsicles.

Peter: I'd say ice cream.

Peter: I don't like the popsicles, they're sticky and just like sugar water and it drips down your hands and ice cream, you can have it in a bowl and then you don't get stuff all over your fingers.

Jesscia: I'm with Peter, sorry.

Peter, you win.

David: I'm with those bomb pops, I love those bomb pops.

Peter: Bomb pops.

David: Yeah, they're like cherry and blueberry.

Jesscia: Yes, my kids love those.

They're pretty good.

They are good, but nothing beats ice cream.

Sorry.

Sorry, Peter, you win.

Peter: All right, I am thinking about preaching on Ephesians 2, the epistle reading.

To get us started, there's a lot in this text.

Jessica, I'll ask if you would read verse 12 and verse 19.

Jesscia: Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Peter: All right.

These two verses tell a story.

And I was just thinking as I was reading through this text how many different storylines there

are in the scriptures.

Just the different ways biblical authors tell the story of sin and the plan of salvation.

And I think about these different storylines, the battle storyline.

It's a battle between God and Satan.

You think about the story of guilt and innocence, guilt against God, offending him and his commands

and being declared innocent.

Okay, so there's all these storylines that you can follow and it is helpful, I think, especially when you're going to preach on a text to try to stick with the storyline that that text emphasizes.

Sometimes that requires making some decisions as to which storyline.

But this one is pretty clear.

It's a story of alienation and reunion.

Jessica, who comes to mind?

Peter: Joseph and his brothers.

Peter: Cain and Abel.

David: Jacob and Esau.

Peter: Jacob and Esau.

Jessica: Any family in the Bible.

Someone is alienated from somebody else.

Peter: Yeah, and then it goes beyond families.

I mean, it extends to the nations of Israel and Edom.

You've got the most basic, the one that Paul's kind of getting at here is the Jew-Gentile alienation and separation.

But you just said families, every family.

And I think about the story of estrangement and alienation is as old as sin.

I used to often think that the proof of sin in this world is families.

A lot of families maybe have given up on the hard work of reconciling their hostile differences.

And so you just kind of drift apart.

So I think this estrangement or alienation story is something that it wouldn't be hard at all for people to relate to and to see this is a real problem.

Of course, you might say that all of these different family or neighborhood or even in

the church, the estrangement in the church, these are all kind of aftershocks of the estrangement that we have from God.

I would highlight the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles because that's where Paul takes us.

So that's kind of the problem that you'd be addressing in the sermon.

But then the result of what God has done is then verse 19, we're no longer strangers and aliens.

And the question then is what happened in between.

And that's where verse 13 would be kind of a key part of the sermon.

Would you read that one Jessica?

Jessica: But now in Christ Jesus you who are once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Peter: You've been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Now when I first read that I thought to myself, well brought near to what?

And you can go a couple different ways.
Well first of all, we're brought near to God.
In verse 18 it talks about we have now access in one spirit to the Father.
So we've been brought near to our Father.
You mentioned the prodigal son.
On that kind of image of the nearness and the closeness.
A couple of months ago in chapel, Glenn Nielsen preached and he had a really nice image to start the sermon.
He actually invited one of our students to lay down on the ground like he'd tripped.
And he said, I'm going to reach down and grab your hand and pull you up and I'm going to bring you close, pull you near.

And then he had the student go back and then he preached this whole sermon with that lingering image in his mind.

Jesscia: He did that as a children's message at my church before he preached the sermon.
So the kids got to be, his grandson was the one that he pulled up close.

Peter: It was really a beautiful image that kind of went through the whole sermon.
But you think about in Christ we have been brought near.
Jesus through his love and his sacrifice and his death and resurrection has brought us near to the Father.
And he has removed the separation.
He has ended the estrangement.
He has reunited us with our Father.
And that's central to the gospel.
That is the gospel.
And the other piece of it is then he's brought us near to one another.
He's broken down the dividing line of hostility.
So verse 14.

Would you read that one Jessica?
Jesscia: For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Peter: Okay so he has made us both one.
He's talking about Jews and Gentiles there.
But I think we can think about that with any sort of alienation or estrangement we have.
When God brings us near to himself he brings us near to one another as well.

David: I love the way in the Prodigal Son story when the Son comes to him and the Father just kind of enfolds him and brings him close.
So that you know the way you picture it the Son's formulaic confession he was going to is not even completed before the Father has stifled.

There's no need to talk about that after you've been brought near.

Peter: And that's the pure gospel.
We've been brought near to God.
When you start thinking about being brought near to one another that's kind of good news and it's kind of...
That's more command I think.
Where we've been brought near to one another and Paul doesn't say this explicitly but I

kind of get the impression when you read through this text a couple of times that Paul is saying

he has brought us together so let's get it together.

And that means that we actually have to practice the kind of love and forgiveness that we talk about pretty regularly.

And I think that's actually the rub.

So in some ways this could be a simplistic sermon.

We've been brought near to God.

We've been brought near to one another.

But if you're really going to be honest about what it means to be brought near to one another then we have to deal with this idea that we're still in the church and still in our families.

There are still lingering divisions and lingering reasons for estrangement.

And so I wouldn't want to minimize that.

And the way I would kind of try to avoid minimizing that I'd probably just name it.

But then I think we talk about well what has God, has he's brought us near to himself and he's brought us near to one another.

What is he doing here among us?

And then verse 22 would come into play.

So would you read one more time Jessica verse 22.

Jesscia: In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Peter: So God has brought us near to himself.

He's brought us near to one another.

And he's decided to dwell among us.

To me this is a fascinating conception of the church that God has chosen to dwell.

He has dwell in us collectively.

To me it's important to note that all the yous here in this text are plural yous.

This is all spoken to.

Sometimes we read this kind of you know you're going into a holy temple or something.

We think about it individually the body like the Spirit lives in us.

But this text is all about the Spirit is among us and in us not in me.

Jesscia: You always do this Peter.

I've seen this this theme.

You always bring community into the message.

It would be so much easier.

God forgives me.

I say thank you the end.

Right.

You always challenge me one step further with this connection to community like that.

Peter: I think it's I think it's so important because I think we're so fractured.

The church is so and families are so and neighborhoods are so and the nation is so divided.

And the gospel is.

David: And we glory in our divisions.

Peter: We kind of glory in it.

Say more about that.

David: Well I mean you know you're you're divided for a reason and you take your side and you push that as you know that you celebrate that division.

And I mean there are times when divisions are you know are necessary and the clarity of the truth is seen because of the divisions.

But there are other times when that's a that's an act of of profound selfishness.
I think to hold on to what has divided you rather than be held by Christ and find yourself holding on to one another.

You know having been estranged now having community is just a beautiful thing.

Peter: It's a beautiful thing and if I preach this sermon I would not want to give the impression that now we're all forgiven everything's just perfect and peaceful in the church or perfect and peaceful in your family because that's not realistic.

And yet we're kind of growing into that end.

And that's where the two ways of thinking about the end of estrangement could be kind of helpful that we're not quite at the end yet.

But the end has come near in Christ who has brought us near to the Father and brought us near to one another.

So I do want to reflect on this.

To me it's there's no end to the need to help us be the body of Christ today.

I think this is one way that that I think Paul locates any sort of little estrangement or little alienation is part of this bigger storyline that goes throughout the scriptures of God bringing alienated people to himself and to one another.

Jesscia: Thanks Peter.

David what would you preach on?

David: Well I would preach on the Gospel reading, feeding of the five thousand.

Jesscia: Awesome.

David: It occurs in every gospel right.

Yeah it occurs in every gospel and it occurs every year in the summer in the church and if you're doing kind of the three year lectionary you get different readings of it.

So you know we had Matthew's reading of it and in Matthew's reading of it you have the

report of John the Baptist's death and then as you move into the feeding of the five thousand Jesus is withdrawing into a desolate place and it appears to be coming out of a desire for Jesus to be alone having seen and heard of the death of John the baptizer and obviously thinking about his own coming death.

But in Mark when you get the feeding of the five thousand there's kind of a different tenor to it and that's what I'm interested in is how Mark tells this event in a way that stresses something a bit different.

Peter: Now just before you get in there to me that's really helpful to notice those differences because in my mind and I think probably most here's minds these stories all just kind of blend together.

It's just kind of a vague there's a not vague but a kind of a general feeding the five thousand and without that attention to what how it's located in each gospel you kind of lose what that particular gospel.

David: Yeah and that's actually you know one of the I think one of the things that is present in the three year lectionary that is not possible in the one year lectionary.

With the one year lectionary you only hear an event you know say the transfiguration

from one perspective every year and sometimes when you're preaching in the one year lectionary

you want to conflate the stories because there's things that you want to include that are present in the other accounts that aren't present in the one that's read every year.

But the three year lectionary because you have a different gospel every year the three

year lectionary gives you that opportunity to really lean into how the feeding of the five thousand is told and how it is heard from the perspective of Mark which is going to differ from Matthew and differ from Luke.

Peter: So it helps you be more textual.

David: Yeah definitely.

Peter: Text shape the sermon.

David: So Jessica if you could read the two verses I think that set the stage for a for a particular way of hearing the feeding of the five thousand verse 30 and 31.

Jesscia: The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all they had done and taught.
Okay hold on what did they just do and teach?

David: Well yeah this was last week when they went out or the week before yeah they were sent

out in mission and they were casting out demons they were healing the sick they were preaching the word and you have kind of the set Jesus sends the disciples out in mission we hear about John the baptizer's death and then we have this one small verse about the disciples coming back and they're telling Jesus what they had done and taught.

So they're telling them about their experiences in the mission and the Holy Spirit working and them casting out demons and teaching in his name and healing people and anointing them who are sick.

Jesscia: Great that helps.

So the apostles returned to Jesus and told him all they had done and taught and he said

to them come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while for many were coming and going and they had no leisure even to eat.

David: Okay so in this event the withdrawal into the wilderness is not so much a response to

the death of John the baptizer it's a compassionate response of Jesus to the exhaustion of his church workers right.

Jesscia have you ever have you ever been among church workers who felt perhaps exhausted?

Jesscia: Are you kidding?

Yes we were all exhausted.

I remember teachers who didn't have time to eat because the kids needed them during lunch and they had granola bar they're trying to sneak in their mouth like in between teaching things because they were so hungry.

All of the people who are called to the vocation of parenting little kids.

I mean you have to skip your meal if you need to because you have to take care of those kids it's not even a pushing yourself too far or irresponsibility you got to take care of this little baby.

David: And you feel like you feel so much guilt if you do take time for yourself right?

Because this is the Lord's work we're doing we're healing we're casting out demons you know and so I miss lunch big deal I'm casting out a demon right.

Jesscia: Yes.

David: It's like so you've got this Jesus recognizes that the disciples have been engaged in this

ministry and have been engaged in it so strongly with people coming and going that they don't have an opportunity to eat and so he takes the initiative to take them apart from all

of this stuff that's going on and bring them to a desolate place where they can rest and they can be able to eat.

It's a desolate place but there's green grass so green grass in the desolate wilderness is kind of what we're seeing here.

Peter: Yeah.

David: And it ends the I don't know if I had a if I had a theme that I was going to work with it would be something about the in the end is the beginning. That when you're coming to the end of something that's when you see the beginning of something else. And for me it's all about the end of our limitations. So when we come to the end of our strength

we come to the end of the day. We come to the end of our resources. We come to the end of our imagination. We come to the end of our work. We come at the end of our effort at the end of all of our stuff when we're unable to do anything more. That's the very beginning of realizing that God's the one who's doing it. That God's the one who's in charge and that God's the one who's there because that's what happens so Jesus takes them into the wilderness in order to give them the opportunity to rest. And opportunity to eat and what happens?

Jessica if you could read verse 32 through 33.

Jesscia: And they went away in a boat to a desolate place by themselves now many saw them going and recognized them and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Okay so the paparazzi.

David: I know I know so Jesus is taking them away and the people are running along the shore going from town to town so that when they land in the supposedly desolate place it's filled with this crowd of people. And you've got the disciples who have been you know Jesus is compassionately trying to give them rest and there is the need the need in the world is so great and the ministry that they are doing is so wonderful that the

people have actually walked along the shoreline and beat them to the place where they're going to land. Can you imagine that I mean you're walking through the town carrying your sick and you're watching the speck of a boat on the sea of Galilee and you're dragging these sick along with you to get there because you know that where they land there's going to be a place of healing.

Jesscia: If you had one chance to see Jesus I would run too I wouldn't want to miss it.

Peter: Well there's that with that running along there's the sense of desperation that people

they need desperately help and there's a sense of hope or trust that these people can actually provide it.

David: Right can actually provide it. And so they get there and you know so you've got these disciples who Jesus wants to feed and take away from the crowd so that they can rest

and then the crowds come and there's another demand and Jesus has compassion on them He cares for them like you know like a shepherd would care for the sheep. And then it's the end of the day and the disciples turn to Jesus and they're like send the people away so that they can go buy food right. And I just I love that moment because the disciples you know if you imagine these guys have been casting out demons they've been healing the sick the one thing that they figure people can take care of is you can feed yourself right. I mean so we're planning some big conference and we're like do we include dinner or not now

it's going to be too expensive to include dinner just have them get dinner on their own right you can take care of your food. So they don't send them away they ask Jesus could you send them away because they're going to be able to get their food and Jesus is like no. And then Jesus rather than saying I'm going to feed 5,000 people he says to the disciples you feed them so it's like he's bringing them to the very end of everything. It's the end of the day. It's the end of their resources they look they've only got five

loaves of bread and two fish. it's the end of their strength they're tired they came out they're exhausted and now they're doubly exhausted after all of this. And it's the end of their imagination I mean they do not they cannot imagine how they could feed 5,000 people. And so at the end of all of those things is when Jesus begins his marvelous work. And he says give these to me he then gives them to the disciples they then give them to the people and all

of the sudden you begin to see how in those days of just being overburdened and exhausted and at the end of everything you begin to see glimpses of the beginning of God doing work.

Peter: Which is also the end of desolation the end right it's interesting I mean just looking at how many times the word desolation appears but then Jesus does his thing and there's no more desolation.

David: And now we have green grass right we've got them seated on green grass in groups of a hundreds and fifties and then they're fed and then you actually have baskets full of broken pieces. And so there's this this beautiful moment when you begin to see that there's there's more to the ministry than you're able to do. The work of God is not measured by my limitations. It's measured by His magnificent grace and it will pop up in the strangest of places. Everybody can identify with what it's like to be overburdened to have that day where you can't do another thing and another thing comes to the door and says you need to get done everybody can relate to that. And what this story does is this story acknowledges that that's a reality of ministry but then it asks you to glimpse Jesus who's run in the whole show. Who is in the background desiring to bring you to a place of rest. Who when you're telling him to send people away is in is there to provide

and encourage and equip you for caring for them even when you're at the end because when you're at the end you're at the beginning of his love.

Well I find it really odd that Jesus is taking them away to a desolate place for rest and the only thing they have is the food of other people so he knows they can't eat and He's taking them away to a desolate place but He's not bringing food.

David: It's just kind of an interesting...

Peter: You know I've often thought it would be fun to name this to rename this miracle Jesus

feeds the five thousand and twelve because it's the disciples who were so weary and hungry at the start.

David: Yeah and that's kind of the perspective you're being asked to look at.

Right, yeah I mean you're inviting us to think about the perspective of the disciples and how they too were being fed by Jesus.

David: Not just physical food.

Right.

They're being fed a vision of ministry in this kingdom.

That's cool.

I like that.

Jesscia:

Thanks guys.

That's all for today.

We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org.

You gotta check it out.

While you're there you'll also find episodes of our other podcast *Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived*.

Twice a month I host conversations with faculty members and we talk about the ways in which their understanding of God and their own faith is real in their everyday lives.

The show is for anyone who wants to deepen their theology tell your congregation about it.

It's *Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived*.

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 please subscribe, share, and leave a review.

It actually matters.

It plays into the algorithm so that when people search for *Lectionary* help or sermon help will show up.

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:

Oh!

Popsicles.

Peter:

They're sticky and just like sugar water and it drips down your hands.