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Jessica: 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, guys, let's get started.

Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We are at the 13th Sunday after Pentecost, a season where we think about the Holy Spirit and his work through the church for the sake of the world.

Jessica: And David, what are the texts for this week?

David: We're reading Joshua 24 or Proverbs 9 and then Ephesians 5, John 6, and Psalm 34.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about.

So determine who goes first this week based on our conversation before we started recording.

Has there been a time when somebody wanted you to eat something that they had made and you didn't like it but you ate it anyway?

Don't say the name, just say the food.

David: Oh, yeah.

It was in the Philippines and it was something that I thought was potatoes but was actually chunks of pig fat.

No, I was eating them.

Oh my gosh.

Yep.

All plate full because I was hungry and I thought they were potatoes.

Jessica: Peter.

Peter: Yeah, I don't have anything that good.

But what I find really hard is when you see something that looks beautiful and that you think is going to be just delicious because it looks so good and then you take a big portion of it and then you take a bite and it's awful.

And sometimes that's...

I don't have a specific thing in mind but sometimes a dessert will...

David: Come over, I'll make something for you.

Jessica:

Well, the food that comes to my mind are these great buffalo hot wings that a family member used to make and they were not so great but we ate them and we ate them with a smile.

So David, I'd say that you are the winner since pig fat is the most delight buffalo wings.

David: Okay, good.

So I'm going to go with Joshua 24.

You have a choice between Proverbs 9 and Joshua 24 and I kind of like both of the texts.

Both of the texts are inviting you to follow God and Proverbs text deals with imagery of a banquet being held by wisdom as she invites people in.

And Joshua 24, we're at the end of Joshua.

They're getting ready to enter into the promised land and Joshua has this great call to the people to follow God.

So Jessica, if you could read verses 14 through 15.

Jessica: "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

David: Okay, now I know this text. Some people will be frightened by the text because it says, choose the Lord, right? And so you're thinking of a decision culture, decision theology, you know, I want to follow Jesus, all that kind of stuff. And I think it's, to me, it's a problem of the reading because if you'll notice, you

read, you know, they gave you Joshua 24 verses one through two and then verses 14 through 18.

Peter: Yeah, I always hate when that, I know it's, I get why the lecture does that sometimes, but time, you always find yourself wondering what are those hidden verses?

Jessica: It makes me want to read them.

What do they not want me to know?

David: I know.

Well, you see, so for this one, I think I would let the congregation know that we're going to listen to the intervening verses.

And I would read them because the intervening verses are beautiful.

They're just a listing of the history of God's relationship with his people, starting with Abraham, calling these people from a land beyond the river to leave those gods and follow this God, going to the promised land.

You've got the names of kings, you've got the names of battles, you've got Balaam and the prophecy.

You've got all of the stories that Joshua is choosing to pull out as he retells the history of what God has done for the people.

And so you have kind of an entire section of verses that basically say, God chose you.

God chose you, God loves you, God fought for you, God speaks to you, God provides for you.

You've got all of these beautiful ways in which God has helped his people throughout the history of their generations.

And then Joshua says, so choose today who you're going to follow.

It's like, well, who else would you choose?

God chose you, he's providing everything for you.

Oh no, I want to go to this other god that you defeated.

Yeah, that's the one I want to follow.

So I think it's a problem of our own making when we don't have those verses there.

And the verses are just beautiful.

And it awakens me to this idea of individualism and community.

And in our culture, we can be so individualistic and we can feel so isolated and so unconnected with other people.

And then this verse kind of gives, if you read the whole thing, it gives us a picture of our history, that these are our ancestors, that this is God who has been working for

generations.

It's not just me and my life that he's working in, it's my grandparents' life, their grandparents, all the way back to Abraham.

I mean, it's just a beautiful, beautiful reminder of being in the community with the people of God.

And, you know, I was at a person's house and they were making, he was Polish and he had made a dish and it was actually good so I could eat it.

Jessica: You didn't have to fake it.

David: I didn't have to fake it.

It didn't look good, but it tasted good.

So I ate it anyway, but I was talking to him about it and I'm like, oh, well, what was in this?

And he's like, he started, he said, well, you know, this is my grandmother's recipe.

And then he started telling about his grandmother and how his grandfather came over to the United States with \$20 in his pocket.

And I'm just like, all of the sudden, you know, we moved from just being a friend of mine, who happens to be Polish, who invited me over for dinner, to suddenly hearing about this much larger family, the value of traditions, the meaning of this food.

And it just became a much bigger picture of his life and the history of food and fellowship in that family.

And I thought to myself, you know, sometimes, you know, it can be pretty lonely being a Christian.

You know, you're out in the world, you may not have a lot of Christian friends, you feel by yourself, isolated, you come to church, you don't talk to many people, you come to church, you leave church, you don't feel connected.

And this text invites us to think about the story of God's love.

How has God loved you?

And not just you, but how has God loved the people before you?

And in what ways, what things has he done?

And so you feel connected to this much larger and bigger community.

Peter: Yeah, how has God loved us?

And us more than just the temporal us, but goes way back.

David: And the beauty of it is, you know, when you think about it, so many times in Scripture, people stand up to speak and they retell the story of God's love for people.

And yet they don't always choose the same events.

And so, you know, you think to yourself, how many stories, how many times when somebody retells the story of God's people, is Balaam included in it?

Right?

How many times is that episode included?

And so what Joshua is doing is he's kind of looking over that history and he's choosing moments to tell for a purpose.

And it then makes you think to yourself, you know, number one, how well do I know God's history?

Right?

So that I actually have the option to choose different things to remember.

But what happens when I start remembering different stories and stringing them together

in a way that helps me see the patterns of how God works among his people and be reassured of the patterns of how he works with us today?

Peter: I wonder how much of these stories, I mean, you're right, there's Balak there, there's Balaam, you've got all the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites. Would you kind of recall any of these episodes or would you just kind of look at them?

Would you pick a couple of them or would you just kind of generally sweep as you were kind of pointing this out in the sermon?

David: Well, I think I would take one and pull it out and think about it.

So like with Balaam, wasn't that the one where he was going to, Balak was asking him to curse Israel and God causes him to bless them?

And so you think about the way in which God intervenes and takes that which is intended to be a curse and turns it into a blessing.

And so you take a quality or an aspect of the actions of God, so God being with you when you are alone, and you say, how many stories from scripture can we come up with where we see God being present with you when you are alone?

We've got Jonah in the whale, we've got Elijah in the wilderness.

Peter: So bring up this one way you could do this is even before the sermon, ask people during the week of these stories and then you could include those or even in the sermon, invite them to just think, not necessarily say out loud, but think about these stories and you could have them more participating in the construction of that part of the sermon. And so then at times when I think I'm alone, all of the sudden I've got all of these stories of other people in the kingdom of heaven who have felt alone and yet God was with them. And you know, when I begin to share it.

And so that's the type of beauty that I see happening here.

So maybe it's kind of a gift that they took the verses out because it's like, okay, fill in the stories that you remember.

You know, Joshua has his stories and you know, you can read those.

What are the stories that you remember and what does that teach you about God in such a way that when you're overwhelmed by his love, you choose to follow him, right?

Jessica: A great lead into your sermon would be the children's message.

You could ask the kids, can you remember a time where you felt alone?

David: Yeah.

Jessica: No, that's something that they could relate to and talk to them very simply that they are not alone.

God is with them.

So you could even.

David: You ask, what do you do when you're alone?

Right.

I cry out for my mom and dad.

And then you think to yourself, well, in the Psalms we have David crying out for God, right?

In times when he feels alone and abandoned, right?

So yeah, you can kind of play with things like that.

Peter: Well, what's nice about this then is what you're doing is you're kind of relativizing that verse about choose this day whom you will serve into a bigger picture of God doing so much so graciously for us where it's almost kind of like, well, duh, you know, who am

I going to serve?

That kind of decision's already been made.

Well, that's, I also like about this is that's a familiar passage because we take it out of context and put it on a plaque on our wall or something like that.

But this is putting it back in its context.

And this is like good theology.

Every time you put theology back in its context, it kind of makes sense.

David: It makes sense.

Peter: Or it doesn't make sense, but at least it's faithful.

David: But it's faithful.

There you go.

Well, no, I mean, and that's the beauty of it is that you're helping your people see that there are many ways to retell the stories of scripture.

And if you were going to write down everything God has done, not even all the world could contain the books that you would write, right?

So our part of being part of the people of God is retelling these stories with one another and overhearing all of the different aspects of our history so that we're a community of people rather than isolated individuals.

Jessica: Peter, what about you?

What would you preach on?

Peter: Well, I'm still in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4 to 6, this five-week series that I'm suggesting you call, Walk This Way, kind of drawing from 4, verse 1 where Paul says, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

And so the last couple weeks we're talking about walking eager to maintain the unity that we've been given in Christ, walking in a way that sounds like a Christian, a Christian accent.

The theme for this week would be to, if the walk this way, would be to use your time like this.

So I want to pick up on specifically verse 15 and 16.

So maybe we could start with that, Jessica.

Jessica:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time because the days are evil.

Peter: Okay, making the best use of the time.

Walk like this, use your time like this.

This brings up for me kind of the concept of stewardship but not stewardship of financial resources or stewardship of something like that but stewardship of our time.

How do we actually use our time?

And I don't know if we talk about that a whole lot as Christians.

We use our time in ways that are kind of driven by our life in this world.

And I don't know about you guys but I feel like my time is never my own.

You're always got things that are pressing in on you.

And so I think this might be a nice sermon, a chance for you to just help your people reflect on how are they stewarding the time that they have.

David: That's interesting because I think we often feel that other people are taking our time.

And even that you're taking too much time.

That's like I don't have control of time.

Somebody else is having control of the time.

And this is asking me to think about I've been given time as a gift from God.

We've all got time and the question is how am I going to use it?

Peter: And as I've been thinking about this for a little bit, this could get pretty heady pretty quickly by thinking about time and time is not my own.

Like what am I making the best use of?

Paul talks elsewhere about the opportunities that we've been given.

But this is just kind of a chance to reflect I think on what we do with our lives.

There's this contrast between wise and unwise.

This whole section of Ephesians has been contrasting life apart from Christ, the life of the Gentiles and the life of God's people.

And so I think the comment that the days are evil is maybe at least to me it's a reminder that we're not playing on neutral ground here.

That as Paul is calling us to live one way, not another, think one way, not another, that the days themselves are in a way against living faithfully.

This is a way to think I think about the sinfulness of the world that we're not standing here like kind of like the text, the Old Testament text.

It's not like we're standing here in this, which should I choose?

The good or the bad.

It's I'm in this neutral position.

No, the days are actually evil.

And so that's why Paul has to call them to this this Christian way of living.

But if you notice kind of throughout this text, there's a couple of different contrasts that Paul is using in these verses.

He calls us to be wise, not unwise.

But earlier verses 9 and 11, he's talking about being fruitful, not unfruitful.

In verses 7 and 8, he's talking about living in light, not in the darkness.

In verse 14, there's the be awake, don't be asleep.

So you've got a lot of different kind of metaphors you could use here, which is actually kind of a challenge.

I think you've got to restrict and focus your time a little bit more or focus your attention in the sermon a little bit more narrowly.

More narrowly. And so I would suggest maybe looking at verses 18 to 20 in this context to kind of limiting yourself to that.

So maybe Jessica, could you read that part?

Jessica: And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit addressing one another in psalms and hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter: OK, so one way to think about that is you use your time by living according to the Spirit. Paul says be filled with the Spirit, which is very abstract and very, you know, you go all sorts of directions for this.

But where he goes in verse 19 and 20, I think I would kind of use the three parts of those verses 19 and 20 to kind of unpack, OK, here's how you use your time.

Here's how you make your best use of your time.

Verse 19, addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

This gets a little bit to what you were talking about, David, with addressing speaking to one another, using the songs and the psalms that God has given us.

And so I think it wouldn't be too far of a stretch to talk about when you think about the different songs in the scriptures.

You've got the book of Psalms, of course, but you've got Moses' song, Miriam's song, Simeon's songs, all these different songs that people have sung.

But these are addressed to each other.

So one way we're talking about you making the most of the time is by speaking to each other about the things of God, the good things of God.

David: Whereas you're tempted to speak to one another about how evil the days are.

Peter: Yeah, yeah.

David: Yeah.

Peter: I mean, yeah, no kidding.

David: Right.

You know, we get together and we all feel oppressed or, you know, and so we share with one another how bad things are.

And in fact, you know, here, talk to one another about God's things.

Peter: Yeah.

Right.

David: Yeah.

Peter: So you're addressing one another.

And then verse a little later in verse 19, singing and making melody to the Lord.

So we're speaking to one another.

We're also singing to the Lord.

Now I'm not advocating kind of life as a musical.

Jessica: There is nothing wrong with musicals.

Stop right there.

Peter: Just burst into song.

Jessica: I do.

That's not weird.

Peter: But the idea here is not so much the singing necessarily.

But the speaking changes kind of to whom you're speaking.

David: Right.

Peter: It's to the Lord.

And so now we're talking to the Lord.

I think this is a way to think about prayer, of course, and kind of in that kind of relationship.

And then verse 20 gets even more specific in terms of what does that sound like?

Well, giving thanks always and for everything.

So giving thanks always, even in this evil age, for everything to me, that's hard to imagine.

David: I know.

Peter: Giving thanks to God always for everything.

And the only way I can make sense of that is the last phrase there, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I give thanks always and for everything.

And so I'm thinking about it again.

You've got to really restrict a sermon that make the best use your time.

Even in this text, there's so many directions you could go.

But I would think about this.

How do we talk to one another, to God, and then the thankfulness that accompanies everything always in the name of Jesus?

David: And so, I mean, the other side of the coin is the evil days that cause us to complain to one another about how things are, to turn away from God, and to be not thankful but ungrateful.

Peter: Yeah.  
And that's where the text is just kind of interesting because Paul contrasts drunkenness with life by the Spirit.

David: Oh, that's, oh, so, yeah, so maybe that's where the songs are coming in.

Peter: Yeah.  
And so I don't know exactly what to do with that.  
I'm not so sure.  
Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.  
I don't know if you want to focus too much on drinking.  
I'm not sure that's the point.  
And so maybe that's where I like your idea about because Paul invites us to think about these days are evil.  
What do we do with the evil days?  
Well, maybe we're tempted to drink our self out of them.

David: Yeah.

Peter: But maybe more universally, we're tempted to just complain or just to lose our thankful hearts, to lose the song, to lose the positive things that we talk about with God and just focus on the evilness.  
What came to my mind when I was looking at this text was Luther's morning and evening prayer, which began, We thank you, our Heavenly Father, for you graciously kept us this night from all sin and danger.  
We thank you, our Heavenly Father, for keeping us this day from sin and every evil.  
And so there's this this thankfulness that invites, well, what are we thankful for?  
And that's where the in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
That's how I would get to the gospel in the sermon would be, well, why would we even give thanks?  
What would we address one another?  
What we sing to the Lord about?  
And then, you know, you're taking attention off of yourself and putting on what God has done and what God continues to do for us in Christ.

Jessica: Thanks, guys. That's all for today.  
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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.  
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