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Jessica: 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, 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 year?

Peter: We're talking about September 1st, the weekend of

Labor Day. This is the 15th Sunday after Pentecost as we continue to think about the work of the Spirit in his church for the sake of all creation.

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

David: We'll be having readings from Deuteronomy 4, Ephesians 6, Mark 7, and the Psalm is 119.

Peter: Not the whole thing.

David: Not the whole thing. A portion of 119, you're right.

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

preach about. To determine who goes first, since it is Labor Day weekend and kids are going back to school, when you were a kid, what was your favorite school supply to buy?

Oh, I loved the thick crayons. Do you remember those really thick ones? You could hardly hold them because you're a kid. I loved those.

Peter: The problem with those is you only got so many colors, though, because the box was...

David: I know! It's like two colors, right? A big box of two colors.

Jessica: What about you, Peter?

Peter: I like the Trapper Keeper. Remember those?

Jessica: Oh, I do remember Trapper Keepers.

Peter: They had the folders and all the pockets and zippers, and you could put everything into this one Trapper Keeper. It was awesome.

Jessica: I have to go with crayons. Not the big ones, but the ones where you open up and there'd be like 64 colors.

David: Oh, wow.

Jessica: And the smell of new crayons. Yes. Okay, so that means David wins. You get to go first.

David: Okay. I would be preaching on Mark 7, the Gospel reading. And I guess I think it's an interesting one because I think it was like the week before

we had Jesus talking about traditions with the Pharisees, right? And, you know, traditions of washing and keeping your hands clean and so forth.

And so this kind of continues the conversation, but it continues it in a way that's a little, I don't know, a little disturbing because Jesus kind of ups the ante on this one.

And so, let's see, Jessica, if you could read verse 18 and 19.

Jessica: And he said to them, then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is expelled?

Thus he declared all foods clean.

David: Right, so that little paragraph, thus he declared, I mean a little parenthesis, thus he declared all foods clean.
That's Mark kind of letting us know this is what Jesus is doing. But if you think about how difficult that must have been for the disciples,
because earlier when Jesus is dealing with traditions of washing your hands, he's dealing with human traditions. Here this is Mosaic law.

Peter: Right.

Jessica: Oh, oh.

David: Right? So he's kind of, you know, I think it's like Leviticus 11 or something like that. He's, you know, upping the ante here. Right? So he's kind of, you know, I think it's like Leviticus 11 or something like that. He's, you know, upping the ante here.

He's, you know, at first he's dissing all of these traditions of hand washing and stuff. And you're like, okay, yeah, that's, you know, that's human made rules that we have done in order to make sure you don't break the Mosaic law.

But now he's saying, you know, I'm declaring all foods clean. The whole Mosaic law is being changed.

And so I think if I was going to preach on this, my theme would be not rules but a relationship. And so with the not rules part, I think I would just highlight what's going on here, that Jesus is speaking about not human traditions but the Mosaic law.

He's come to fulfill the law and the prophets. And because he fulfills them, he now changes things.

And then I might get into, you know, the statement that Jesus makes about why he's changing things, that these laws are not going to change the heart.

And so following these rules is not going to change your heart.

And it would be kind of easy to think that if you followed the rules then everything must be okay with you and God.

But what you've got is you've got people with awful hearts who look really good.

Peter: Yeah, whitewashed tombs.

David: Right, right, yeah.

So you've got, you know, somebody who's, I don't know, a liar but he tithes.

You know, somebody who's an adulterer but is a greeter at church.

I mean, you've got these rules that people are keeping and yet the real problem is what's in their heart.

And that's not being addressed by keeping all of these rules.

And, you know, I have friends who are not Christian and when they find out that I am a Christian there's always these questions like, well, can you gamble?

Can you go to R-rated movies?

Can you, I mean, it's all rule issues, right?

Jessica, have you ever encountered anything like that with people?

Jessica: Oh, absolutely.

A lot of people feel like they have to be good to go to church or they have to be perfect to be a part of that community.

So they're like, well, I'm not even going to try.

And I think maybe we reinforce that as Christians by the way that we treat people who are doing certain sins or who are living a certain way.

I mean, I remember a friend of mine who I was trying to witness to and she was interested.

She even came to a Bible study once, but ultimately she's like, well, I can't be a Christian because then I can't live with my boyfriend anymore.

As a Christian, God would have worked in her heart to change her actions, you know?

David: Right, right, because people, they want to put the cart before the horse.

Jessica: Yes.

David: It's like, I've got to get my life perfect before I go to church and they don't realize that church is going to help you get your life in order.

Jessica: Right.

You don't have to be perfect to be a Christian.

David: Right.

Jessica: But God doesn't leave you that way.

David: Kind of lose sight of the fact that the church in some ways is a hospital.

Jessica: Yes, only us sick people can come.

David: Right, only sick people come.

Jessica:

But we're all sick and we can't pretend like we're not or I think people, they get confused by that.

David: You're like, yeah, I can tell you all of these rules and you can try to obey the rules, but it's not going to change your heart and we're just going to have a tomb that is whitewashed.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, think about why they have that kind of conception.

It's because sometimes we emphasize the rules and the laws much more than we emphasize the relationship.

We kind of present that sometimes, we as Christians.

David: Right, that we need to keep all of these rules, right?

And by keeping all of these rules, you know, we preserve our purity, our sanctity.

And there is, you know, there is growth in the faith and growth by the Holy Spirit, but it's not the rules that are going to change.

It's the rules that are going to actually get at the root of the problem.

Peter: Well, and that's where I think it's helpful to think about Jesus because Jesus here is relativizing the Old Testament law.

David: Right.

Peter: He's saying basically, you've heard it said, but I'm bringing something different.

And it's not like he's doing away with all rules for all time because he does have guidance and instructions, commands for us.

But he's turning it from a rule to a relationship with Him.

David: Right, right.

So then everything then flows from a relationship with Jesus.

David: Right.

And so that's kind of the second part of the sermon would be about relationships.

And that what matters is not spending all your time enforcing the rules.

What matters is cultivating the relationship.

Because if you're in a right relationship, you're going to follow rules.

It's going to be manifested in your life.

So I'm thinking that, you know, the kind of the turning point in the sermon would be, well, if these rules can't do it, what can change the heart?

And what can change the heart is a relationship with Jesus.

And here I would kind of jump, you know, the text really has no gospel in it.

Right.

It's just this puzzling statement of Jesus, his declaration that all foods are clean and it ends with this long listing of all of the nasty stuff that comes out of your heart.

Peter: The defile.

David: Right.

Peter: Person.

David: I know.

So you could go to that long listing and it's kind of like, you know, and this is the word of the Lord.

Peter: Thanks be to God.

David: What do we say to all of this?

And so that's where the turn comes.

And for me, I'm going to jump out of this text and I'm going to jump to the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

And the moment when Jesus is conversing with them and they say, did not our hearts burn within us?

Peter: So the connection you're going to Emmaus is around the heart.

David: Is the heart.

Peter: I was about to ask you what made you think of the man's disciples.

David: And that's because, you know, Jesus has all of this problem with the heart.

What is it that comes out of the heart?

And then how was that fixed?

Well, it's fixed by this word that he speaks into the heart.

Right.

A word of forgiveness, a word of triumph, a word of calling, a promise, and that it's that thing that changes the heart.

And when your heart is burning within you, then things are changed and you start living in as a follower of Jesus.

And so that's kind of that would be kind of how I might do it is think about the power of God's word to cleanse the heart.

And then, you know, the way life follows after that.

Peter: Yeah, kind of old rules, new hearts kind of thing where you're really helping people.

I always find it interesting when we think about the heart, when we refer to the heart as kind of a metaphor or a way of talking about the person.

David: Right.

Peter: And to think about this is just kind of wondering, but I wonder what it is that makes us talk about the heart as the center of the person.

You know, and Jesus does it here.

David: Right.

Peter: You know, out of the heart comes all of these things.

And then he gives us a new heart and it kind of springs.

David: Well, we still have that today, right?

We talk about having a heart to heart conversation.

Right.

You know, you spoke to my heart.

Peter: You got a heart of gold.

David: Right.

You spoke from your heart.

Right.

I mean, so we still that.

So that's good to know that we still value that language of the heart.

Right.

And we can kind of capitalize on that.

Peter:

What I really like about this is it allows you to put Jesus right in the center of the whole thing.

Because he's the one, it was his spirit that led the prophets of old to write.

And he's the one who comes now to renew all things starting with you.

David: He does it Himself by his death and resurrection, right?

Peter: Right.

David: But then he sends his spirit through his word that penetrates into this horrible heart.

Peter: Yeah, these hard hearts.

David: Right.

And brings out of it, you know, love, joy, peace, patience.

You might even go to that passage about, you know, the fruits of the spirit that come forth from the heart that are kind of the counter to this awful listing here.

All of the stuff that comes out of the heart.

Peter:

And, you know, this passage helps us recognize even more how much, how the reason for the opposition that Jesus faced.

That he's really calling out these people who follow Moses and the law.

And when you don't trust in Jesus, the only response to His revolutionary words here is rejection and anger and all the things that led them to kill Him.

David: Right.

And I was thinking, I did a hospital visit a week or so ago.

And I had to like wear all of this stuff, you know, when I went into the room.

And you followed all of these rules.

And I just thought about that.

I thought, you know, wouldn't it be weird if I came here and I followed all of the rules, but the one thing I didn't do was talk to the patient.

Peter: Oh, yeah.

David: Right.

I mean, because the thing that matters is not all of these rules as much as that conversation.

I mean, the rules matter because they're life-saving.

But what really, you know, the whole purpose of the visit is not to follow the rules.

The purpose of the visit is to connect, to speak a word into that situation.

And that's kind of what I see going on in this moment in the ministry of Jesus.

Jessica: Peter, what about you?

Peter: What would you preach on?

Well, I'm finishing up a series on Ephesians.

If you remember the last couple of weeks, I've been picking up on Ephesians 4, verse 1,

where Paul says, as a prisoner of the Lord, he urges the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they have been called.

And so the theme has been kind of walk this way.

And so we've talked about the last number of passages from Ephesians 4 to 6.

And this kind of wraps that up.

And so let me just say a thing about this.

You know, every time you're doing a series, at least I find it helpful, on the front end to kind of give a little bit of a preview and orientation for where you're going, on the back end to kind of reflect and recall where we've been.

And so I would think a little bit of, even if you're not been doing a series, locating, this is Ephesians 6, verses 10 to 20, which is at the very end of the letter.

Ephesians basically is the first three chapters proclaiming the goodness of God, the grace of God, the forgiveness, the gospel.

And then chapters 4 through 6 are all kind of what now?

And that's what we've been thinking about.

And this verse 10 begins, finally, be strong in the Lord.

So it's kind of wrapping up all this stuff we've been talking about, the Christian life, walking this way, eager for this, talk like this, use your time like this, married like this.

Now the last in the series would be stand like this.

And I'd pick up on the language from the first couple of verses.

So Jessica, would you read verses 10 through 14?

Jessica: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm.

Peter: All right, stand firm.

That's the goal in the end, stand like this.

So Paul here, after he's given all this direction, is saying, finally, brothers and sisters.

And what he does then is he tells us what we're going to stand against and how we're going to stand as Christians.

And I'm going to kind of use those two.

I wouldn't call it those two because I'm going to have three kind of ideas to flow from there.

But that would be kind of the idea.

Here at the end of this epistle, Paul in a way peels back the curtain and he says, we're not struggling against flesh and blood.

Christians, this is not, there's more than meets the eye.

David: This is so scary.

Peter: It is.

David: It really is.

Peter: It is.

It, it, well, why do you say it's scary?

David: Well, because it's, I mean, you know, these spiritual forces who have been around a lot longer than I have, these demons were present at the time of Jesus.

These demons were present at the time of Israel and they're still present now.

I mean, that's kind of scary.

Jessica: That's terrifying.

David: Oh, thank you.

Jessica: That's absolutely terrifying.

I can't tell you how many nights when I was 12, I just lay in bed and think about, you know, the scary guys in movies, they're not real.

Satan is real.

And I was so scared.

So there's 10 year olds sitting in the pews right now.

What are you going to tell them?

Peter: Yeah, I think you kind of got to walk a bit of a line here because you don't want to scare.

I mean, the line you're walking here is distinguishing law gospel.

Yes, that's true.

And so the law here, the problem that you're pointing out is that we are battling forces that are so far beyond our ability to withstand.

And we have to take that seriously.

Now, I don't know if you need to get into language of demons and all the scary stuff that conjures up just for the sake of the reason you mentioned, Jessica, with children in the congregation.

But I think you can point out in clear terms that the forces that we battle against are much bigger than what we see.

Jessica: You should name it.

You should say devils and demons.

They've heard of it.

They know what that is and they need to be comforted.

David: Well, there is a I mean, you know, there has been some resurfacing of movements that are trying to reclaim Satanism.

I don't know.

Some people might be interested in that without really thinking through what you're talking about.

Peter: Well, and here's what makes those scary, I think, is that they're well beyond our control.

That we have ...

David: Right.

Peter: We are helpless.

David: Oh, definitely.

Peter: Problem here that Paul's addressing is helplessness.

And, you know, when we think the problem is within our control, then we resort to things like exercising control.

David: Right.

Peter: That we've got it.

We've got it taken care of.

And then we will save ourselves, essentially.

And Paul's basically saying at the end, OK, we've been talking about how you live in a manner worthy.

And I just want to let you guys all know that this is way out your way out of your league.

David: Yeah.

Peter: And and so the stand against stand this way.

First of all, we have to understand who we're standing against and whether you go back to the tempter in the garden or you go to First Peter prowling around like a roaring lion,

or you just simply choose a couple of episodes from the from the gospels where Jesus is battling against the forces of evil and you see what effect that has on people.

You I think you want to in this part of the sermon be very clear about who we're standing against.

And the scariness of this then leads to the the wonderful opportunity to proclaim the gospel to proclaim the gospel in terms of strength of the Lord.

That's the language that Paul uses there in in the in the first verse of our reading.

Verse 10, finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

And so when we're talking about standing firm, so stand against the forces, stand firm in the Lord, in His strength, in His might.

That's where I would focus the whole thing about the armor.

What I want to do is I want to emphasize not so much the armor as much as in the Lord, in His in His might.

And the way I would do that is I would point out you look in a lot of these images of breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation, the faithfulness.

These things are drawn from Isaiah.

These are all this is language from describing the servant of the Lord who's going to come and deliver.

Isaiah 11:5, Isaiah 49:2, Isaiah 59:17.

This is the language of the one who's coming will wear this armor.

David: Wasn't Ephesus where they burned a bunch of books of sorcery and stuff when Paul came to came to Ephesus and they kind of had all of those magical texts and they burned those magical if it wasn't Ephesus there's another place where it's at.

But it's kind of like you have all of this tangible sorcery and trying to control the powers, the spiritual powers that they turn away from by burning the books.

And then Paul here is kind of taking a whole other set of books.

Isaiah, passages of scripture, the story of God and the promises of God and he's placing them in the hands of the people and they're going to stand in these rather than in the other stuff.

Peter: Yeah.

And that's the stand in these promises stand in the one who has called you His own.

And I think that's what I get a little discomforted I think sometimes with the focus on you putting on the armor, the armor as if it's something that we are responsible for doing.

But we're standing in his strength, we're standing in his might.

And Ephesians 2 earlier talks about he's put His spirit in us.

And so this is how I think Jessica you want to address the fear or the concern of the uneasiness with these spiritual forces is the one in whom you are strong is the one who has made His home in you.

You stand in His strength, in His might.

So we've got this champion, we've got this deliverer Jesus as the one who rescues us.

But that's kind of the idea He's our strength and so we stand in Him.

It's not up to us to do it on our own.

Jessica: See that would have been so comforting to me as a kid because I knew that Satan was real.

You know I don't think you can minimize his power or his terribleness.

As a baptized child of God He's going to be strong for me so that would have comforted

me.

So I would say name it in your sermon.

It's okay even if kids are there to say the devil is real but you don't need to be afraid because your God is stronger and your God is protecting you.

Peter: Right so you've got stand against the evil one and all of his powers.

Stand firm in the strength of the Lord and in His might.

And then I would actually in the sermon I addressed the last few verses too.

So in a way this sermon would be kind of an expository kind of verse by verse you could kind of walk through.

So if you'd walk through this text stand against would be verses 11 to 13.

Stand firm would be verses 14 to 17.

That's where you'd focus on Christ and He's the one who gives us strength.

And then the last couple of verses 18 to 20.

Notice what Paul does there.

He encourages them to stand in prayer.

So it goes from you know this armor and the strength of His might to pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

Supplication for all the saints verse 18.

Paul in verse 19 pray also for me for the ministry of the gospel.

And so there's this if you're going to focus on what we're doing encourage your people to spend time in prayer.

So we stand against with our eyes wide open we stand firm in the Lord and what He's done His strength His might and then we we stand in prayer.

David: And pray for others.

Peter: Right.

I love that.

So this is a time to to pray that the word would go forth in power and confidence through preachers through Christians as they witness.

But call your people to pray in the Lord as they stand.

David: Good I like that.

Jessica: Thanks guys.

That's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer Jessica Bordeleau.

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