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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, 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.

Alright guys, let's get started. David, where are we in the church year?

David: We are celebrating the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, a time when the church celebrates its mission

under the guidance of God the Father, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the love of Jesus Christ.

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

Peter: The texts are taken from Isaiah 35, James 2, Mark 7, and the Psalm is Psalm 146.

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 the beginning of September and it is apple season, what is your favorite use of apples?

Peter: Applesauce.

The real chunky kind, the kind that you make at home and you dump loads of cinnamon into it and it's still warm when you serve it and you eat it all fall.

Jessica: Oh, totally with you. What about you?

David: Oh man, there's no way I can beat that.

There's only one thing that can beat it and if you say that, you win.

David: Apples and peanut butter, I like that.

Jessica: Nobody said apple pie. Are you guys crazy?

Apple pie is one of the best foods in the world. It is the best use for apples.

Peter: That's true, that's true. And so is apple butter.

Jessica: These things are good, but apple pie is apple pie.

So the closest would be, Peter, you win and you get to go first.

Peter: Okay, I think this week I would preach on the Old Testament reading from Isaiah chapter 35.

David: That is so beautiful.

It's one of the most beautiful poems, sections.

Interestingly, the appointment for this season is only verses 4 through 7.

The whole chapter 35 verses 1 through 10 is actually appointed in Advent in a couple of years.

So you get a couple different chances, which I'm okay with.

readings like this are worth reading a couple times.

And so there's some beautiful language here.

What I'd like to have you start with, Jessica, is just read verse 4.

Jessica: Oh good, I want to read that one.

Say to those who have an anxious heart, be strong, fear not.

Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.

Peter: This summer I read this new book, have you guys seen this, by Jonathan Haidt called The Anxious Generation?

Jessica: No, but I am intrigued.

Peter: It's really interesting.  
It's particularly, well the subtitle is,  
How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness.  
And he's talking about the impact.  
There's been, you know, we're 15 or 20 years into kind of smartphone, digital, kind of widespread digital use.  
And he's pulling together studies and resources on the effect of, specifically technology, on young people.  
But what he's noticing is the undeniable, stark uptick in mental illness, just as a culture.  
And central to that mental illness is anxiety.  
Now he goes, it's really, if you're into tech kind of stuff, he goes really heavy into social media and that kind of stuff.  
And so, but it's the title, The Anxious Generation, that caught my imagination when I read this text.  
Say to those with an anxious heart, I almost think, man that's for our time.

David: Yeah, oh yeah.

Jessica: That's something I've totally observed in youth work, because these youth were so stressed out, they were so anxious.  
And it was in American Psychology magazine, or I was reading about stress tests that they did with adults and with teens.  
And that teens were more stressed out and more anxious than adults were.  
And I definitely saw that in my youth group.  
They had all these pressures on them, all these fears, exactly what you're saying.

Peter: So what's interesting is I'm reading this book this summer, and it's mostly about young people, but you can see so many correlates to adults today, because we're all living in the same world.  
  
And so this anxiety-laden generation in which we live, a text like this I think can be really helpful. There's a couple of cautions though.  
One is that I would not want to, if I'm going to address or even bring up or even mention something like mental illness or anxiety, I don't want to diminish it or disrespect it as if all you have to do is, for instance, go to the Lord's Supper and all your mental illness will go away, something like that.  
Or if you just confess your sins, then you'll no longer have anxiety.  
These are serious diseases.

Jessica: I'm so glad you're saying that.  
I've heard people kind of imply that you can pray away your depression,  
  
and that puts people in a position where they don't get the professional help that they need.

David: And then they can actually question whether or not God is real or God cares for them.

Peter: And I think that kind of idea comes from a misunderstanding of mental illness, because we would never say, pray away your paralysis or something like that, or pray away some sort of physical disease.  
But mental illness really is a thing.

And so one caution is you don't want to diminish that as if it's just something that can be solved with confession of sins.

Jessica: Mental health professionals are a tool that God has given us.

So it is God helping us through these tools, which He always works through means.

Peter: Another caution is that don't avoid it because of this.

Because you're called to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins, therefore I just won't mention it.

Well, that kind of misses a good opportunity to address something that's really important and serious in our culture.

And so you want to avoid diminishing mental illness.

You also want to avoid just ignoring it altogether.

And so what you really don't want to do is have your sermon become kind of a referendum on what do you think about anxiety, mental health professionals, that kind of thing.

David: Well, it is kind of interesting, isn't it, that the verse Jessica read, it's say to those who have an anxious heart.

So here we have God speaking to Isaiah to help him speak to those with an anxious heart, because God cares about them and wants to be able to reach into their lives and commissions people or finds people to somehow speak to them.

I mean, that's really a beautiful thing.

Peter:

And that's where I think if I'm if I'm preaching on this text, I'm that that language of anxious heart, I think I'll use kind of as a way to connect with our current generation to those who have an anxious heart, whatever the cause is.

There's a lot of anxiety today.

And so the message that God has through Isaiah is something that would be appropriate to be speaking to the people of God even today.

The movement of the sermon, I think, would be something like this.

First of all, I would want to affirm that there is good reason to be anxious.

David: OK. Yeah.

Peter: That we live in a world that is not right.

Israel had good reason to be anxious.

They were about to go into exile because of their sin and their disobedience to God.

And so the you can't just say, oh, don't worry, it's not a big deal. It is a big deal.

And the things that cause us anxiety are significant.

You can't just act like it's there's no good reason. So I want to affirm the reason to be anxious.

And to do this, I might actually draw on Isaiah's own call.

You remember the call of Isaiah where he he's brought before the throne room of God and he sees this vision and the smoke filling the temple and all these seraphim flying around.

And he is anxious. He is very anxious because because he's from a people of unclean lips.

David: Right.

Peter: A man of unclean lips.

David: And then you got this angel coming with a burning call directly at him.

Right. Right. Oh, my God.

Peter: That's reason to be a little concerned. And yet because of the the promise of forgiveness and purifying through that coal.

Now, Isaiah goes forth with the confidence as one who has been sent by God.

And so I'd want to maybe look at Isaiah as one who had good reason to be anxious and yet also then was was forgiven and given the promise of God and his spirit to send him forth.

We certainly have good reason to be anxious today for physical reasons, for social reasons, also for our own sin.

And yet God has said to us, you are forgiven. You are mine.

And so the anxiety over sin, at least we don't need to have anymore.

And so maybe I would distinguish between the anxiety caused by life in a world that's not right, that doesn't just go away with the the the anxiety we have over our own guilt, that there's no there's no need for that.

There's no place for that in the Christian life.

So so affirm that there's reason to be anxious.

Then the summer would maybe move toward proclaiming, well, what is it that that relieves our anxiety over sin?

And frankly, what what helps us deal with our anxiety just in life is the promise, the promise that God made to Israel, the promise that God makes to us.

And so that's where this what makes this such a beautiful section of Isaiah's prophecy is the promise.

These verses that that Jessica read verse four, but then that which follows from it, your God will come.

He will come and save you.

That's how I want to help people deal with their anxiety, not by telling them don't be anxious, but by proclaiming the promise of of the restoration and the recreation of of all things in Christ.

Jessica: Thanks, Peter. David, what about you? What would you preach on?

David: I'm going to preach on the gospel reading.

Jessica: Yes.

David: Oh, God, this I was hoping you'd be excited.

I was hoping you would read this.

David: I just think I mean, this is one of those situations where I wish they had split these up so you could spend more time with each of them because you have two different stories and there is so much good stuff.

So like, Jessica, you seemed excited. What are some of the great things that you like remembering or recalling as you hear this?

Jessica: Well, see, now I have to be careful because you might not have picked the story that I'm thinking of.

David: It doesn't matter to me because there's a lot you can preach on. And that's the problem is that there's so much.

And so I kind of want to celebrate everything that's going on here.

Jessica: OK. OK. Sit back. Get relaxed. Because I love this. OK.

So the woman that comes to Jesus and says, heal my daughter. And he's like, oh, sorry, I've come for the lost children of Israel, not you.

David: Dog. Right. Yeah.

Jessica: And she's like, well, even the dogs can eat the crumbs. So in Luther's commentary of Genesis, when he's talking about Jacob wrestling with God, he mentions this woman and he's like, she is wrestling with God, just like Jacob.

And say, I'm not going to let you go till you bless me.

David: I know. Yeah. Yeah. And she takes His word and uses it. Right.

He calls her a dog and she says, fine, I'll be a dog because you feed dogs the crumbs from the children's table.

Jessica: Oh, I feel like that gives me permission to talk with God that way, too, and say, well, how are you doing this?

I don't know. It feels like it invites conversation from me to God and that he's OK with it.

David: Yeah. Oh, beautiful. Beautiful. I love the thing that, you know, she uses this imagery of food and you've just had the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus now is leaving Jewish territory.

They didn't get it. He's going into gentile territory. And here the gentiles are picking up crumbs. I mean, it's just it's gorgeous. You've got that going on. Other things that are exciting.

Peter: You can't read this without recognizing kind of the bigger story, because Jesus did come to redeem His people. Right.

And and He came as He redeemed His people. He was coming to fulfill the promise of Abraham that God made to Abraham to bless all nations.

David: Right.

Peter: The nations are always there, even though the focus of Jesus is on the lost sheep of Israel.

But I love little glimpses like this because these remind us that the gospel is all about Jesus coming through His people to all people.

David: Right.

Peter: And so this helps you locate the this event in the greater narrative.

David: Yeah. And then you've got that, you know, he goes to Tyre and Sidon and then he goes to the region of the Decapolis.

And now he comes back to the Decapolis and there's a crowd bringing a person who's who's deaf and has a speech impediment to Jesus.

There's so much in here. And I I love that.

Peter: Well, there's also the in the second account, the the putting his finger into his ears.

David: Yeah.

Peter: Spitting touched his tongue. You get this in a way it's kind of gross, but it's also very intimate and very personal.

David: Very personal, very tangible.

Right. Yeah. So there's just I mean, it's it's hard. And I think as a preacher, you can choose one story and really go deep into it.

So like pick up as Jessica's seeing with the Syrophenician woman and really delve into her story in a way that's that's strong and intimate and and shows that that faith and that struggle with God.

Or you can kind of try to do both so that the two readings hang together for people.

And so that's where I'm going to go. I'm going to try to have a theme that's going to be broad enough to do both of them.

But but what happens then is you kind of lose out on some of the small details. It's really fun.

So it's just it's one of those situations where you don't feel like I'm scraping the bottom of the barrel to come up with something.

And I preach on because there's just so much in here. So for me, the theme would be about the word.

Jesus is the word. Right. And I think that we have two pictures.

We in in the first story with the Syrophenician woman, we have a word that is far away.

And then in the story with the man with the speech impediment, we have a word that is near.

And so God God sends Jesus as His word and His word is both far away and it's near.

And so I kind of look at the dynamics of it being a word far away in the opening story.

So, Jessica, if you could read verse twenty five.

Jessica: But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of Him and came and fell down at his feet.

David: OK. And so and then Mark tells us that she's a gentile and a Syrophenician.

And so notice how this is a word from far away.

Jesus has is departing from the Jewish territory.

He's going into the gentile territory. He's actually going into a house. He doesn't want anyone to know that he's there.

So there's kind of resistance of Jesus against people knowing that He's there.

And this gentile woman hears of Him and knows that she doesn't belong in the kingdom and yet comes anyway.

And then Jesus only reaffirms all of the fears that she would have had in terms of his reaction.

Jessica: Oh, yeah. Can you imagine Jesus talking to you that way? I know. It'd be heartbreaking. Be devastating.

David: I know it's just awful. And, you know, let the children be fed first.

It's not right to take their bread and throw it to the dogs. Just really.

It feels cruel in that sense. And so you've got this. Again, it's a word that's far away.

It's not like, you know, there's a sign saying gentile women are probably here.

It's like, you know, no gentiles allowed, no gentiles wanted.

And Jesus basically says, I'm not going to take the children's bread and waste it on people like you.

And then she says, OK, but for people like me, they even get the crumbs that fall from the table.

So you have this this word that's far away that she's going to hold on to.

I mean, it's just beautiful when he says to her, look at what he says, if you could read verse twenty nine.

Jessica:

And He said to her, for this statement, you may go your way. The demon has left your daughter.

David:

Notice that for this statement. For what you said, there is so much faith and revelation and understanding and humble obedience in that statement that Jesus says for this statement, you go your way.

Your child has been healed. And now imagine that. Imagine what it would have been like to go all the way home for that journey.

You left your demon possessed daughter at home and you're wondering. Is this a word that can work from such a far distance?

I mean, I didn't bring my daughter to Jesus.

Peter:

I did. The little girl is still far away.

David:

I know. I know the other you know, the other demoniac healing. They bring the guy to Jesus. Right.

And, you know, and they've tried to contain him and he strips off his clothes. He breaks off the things they bring him to Jesus here.

Here, like this demon possessed daughter is in a whole nother realm. She's not even there.

And now this woman has this word from Jesus that her daughter's healed and she goes that distance and finds out that, yeah, the word of God can even handle things at a distance.

Right. And so you think about times in your life, you're praying for people who want nothing to do with God.

They're standing at a distance from Him. Well, who knows? This is a word that can work from far away.

So that's kind of the first part would be a word from far away. And then the second part would be a word that is near.

Because here we see this just amazing intimacy of Jesus.

So, Jessica, for this one, if you could read verses 32 through 35.

Jessica: And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. And they begged Him to lay his hands on Him.

And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put His fingers into his ears. And after spitting touched his tongue.

And looking up to heaven, He sighed and said to him, Ephetha, that is, be opened. And his ears were opened and his tongue was released. And he spoke plainly.

David: Okay. So this one is a word that is near. First thing Jesus does is he takes him away from the crowd.

So that there's no distraction. This guy can see Jesus in a one to one relationship. He's not kind of this object of attention in the midst of a crowd.

Jesus pulls him away privately. And then, okay, so this guy cannot speak and this guy cannot hear. What can the guy do? He can see. And so Jesus uses sign language.

Peter: And he can feel.

David: And he can feel.

Peter: He can feel that Jesus in his fingers and his ears, the touching of the tongue.

David: So Jesus highlights for him his ear. He puts his hands in his ears. Then he spits and touches his tongue.

So he's pointing to the things that are going to be healed. And then he looks up into the heavens. Right?

And so how are you going to get the healing? It's going to come from above. And then he sighs.

So, you know, you can see a sigh. And then at the moment he sighs, suddenly this man hears Ephetha. Right?

And so it's like you want to talk about the word becoming flesh. This word literally becomes flesh because Jesus says, I'm healing you.

I'm going to touch your ear. I'm going to touch your tongue. God in heaven is going to open it up.

And so, you know, the word in sign language actually becomes flesh. And it's just how could you? It's so beautiful and so intimate.

So we've got this word from far away where, you know, Jesus is kind of pushing the woman away.

She's holding on. And that word from far away actually works. And now you've got this word that's really close and intimate and actually heals by becoming the message.

And when you think about, you know, this is your connection to the cross. Right? You know, God forgiving our sins. You know, how?

Well, Jesus actually becomes them. Right? He bears the punishment of God for our sin and he becomes the new life, the first fruits that will now be bestowed upon us.

And so it's just so, so beautiful. I just love both of them. I hate to kind of treat them short, but you only got so much time.

But that's how I try to hold them together.

Jessica: I never thought of pairing those two stories together like that. That is very interesting. And the first one, Jesus heals after a whole conversation. And then the second one, he just says one word.

David: I know.

Peter: I'm thinking about your hearers and some of them feel close to the Lord. Some of them recognize his presence.

Some of them are rejoicing in that already when they come. Some of them feel far away. And even when they're at church, it's easy to feel distant.

And so I would imagine this could be a helpful way to even say in the sermon, you know, acknowledge that there's some of you are further away than others.

David: We're not all in the same place.

Peter:

Make space for every for a diverse set of hearers to hear a word that's more on target for them.

David: Yeah. Some people feel like they're struggling with God and he's not listening.

And, you know, they have things too big to bring to him. And then you've got other people who who are are very, very close and wonder if Jesus could even come into the midst of this mess.

And he does. You know, it's just. Yeah, I think it's I think it's nice because it has two two different rhetorical spaces, like you're saying that you've got people who feel close, people who feel far away.

And yet it's the same Jesus. Right.

Peter: Right. Same word. I like the word made flesh. Yeah.

David: Yeah. The word made flesh for both of them. Yeah.

Jessica: Thanks, guys. That's all for today. We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at [Concordia Theology.org](https://www.concordia-theology.org).

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