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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, let's get started.

David, where are we in the church here?

David: We are at the 17th Sunday after Pentecost, a time when the church remembers the work of the Holy Spirit, renewing the hearts of God's people and extending God's mission to the ends of the earth.

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

Peter: The texts are taken from Isaiah 50, James 3, Mark chapter 9, and Psalm 116.

Jessica:

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

This is the question this week.

Now, I don't know which text you're going to choose to preach about, but in the Isaiah text it says, Behold, the Lord God helps me.

Who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment.

The moth will eat them up.

What article of clothing would you want never to wear out?

Peter: My Larry Bird jersey.

When I was in college, we went out to the National Basketball Hall of Fame and I bought a Larry Bird jersey.

I rarely ever wear it, but it hangs in my closet and I want to keep that.

David: Wow.

Jessica: Nice.

David: It would be a shirt for my dad.

Jessica: Oh, nice.

David: Yep.

Jessica: Do you wear it yourself?

David: No.

I just keep it in the closet.

But, yep.

Jessica: That is awesome.

David: Yep.

Jessica: Well, I think, Peter, your answer would be most like mine.

I've got a pair of Chacos, a pair of sandals that I wear whenever I'm not at work and I hope they never wear out.

And that sounds more like a jersey.

So, you get to go first, you win.

Peter: All right.

I am going to suggest preaching on James, chapter three.
So the readings for the last week and I guess the next couple of weeks are all from James.
And James is a book that sometimes we sometimes avoid.
It's very law heavy.

David: People speak disparagingly of it.

No, you're just saying these are attitudes we sometimes have as we approach this book.
Right.

Peter: So we tend to just kind of avoid James and partially because it makes us feel bad because
it is pretty heavy on the law.

But this text, there's times when texts like James raise issues that I think need to be
addressed.

And so I'm just going to lean into that this time.

And maybe we could start, Jessica, if you would read verses six through 10.

Jessica: And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire
course of life and set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature can be tamed and has been
tamed by mankind.

But no human being can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

With it, we bless our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse people who are made in the
likeness of God.

From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing.

My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Peter: Yeah, so those are kind of some hard words.

Jessica: Yeah, I guess I'm never going to talk again.

David: You might as well put my picture right there.

Jessica: Oh no.

David: This is yes.

This is what I struggle with.

Oh my gosh.

Peter: This is partially why I'd maybe lean into preaching on it, because this is some pretty
hard stuff.

The whole body.

David: Set on fire by hell.

Peter: It's set on fire by hell.

David: Man.

Peter: So I'm thinking about Charles Taylor's book, *The Language Animal*, where he talks about
human beings as creatures who use language and are used by language.

And the idea here is that language and words don't just communicate information.

They also shape us, the words we use and the words we hear.

So my question, just to kind of get us started along these lines, is can either of you think
of an example when words you heard shaped you?

So I think of an example of a member of my congregation.

Laura was her name, an older lady, and she would give me a big hug after church every
once in a while.

And every once in a while she'd whisper in my ear, you're my teacher.

And she always said it with affection, and I always received it with encouragement.

And I felt it kind of led me to want to be a good teacher in the congregation.
And it always was kind of a, but she'd always just whisper it so only I could hear it.

Jessica: That's sweet.

When I was in high school, walking down the street, past a bookstore, looking at the windows, and the bookshop owner came out, went up to me.

And she was like, oh, I just wanted to stop you and say, I think you have really lovely hair.

And I was like, what?

Well, thank you.

And she's like, a compliment unspoken is a seed unplanted.

And ever since then, if I think something about somebody, I tell them.

And so if I think somebody has done a good job, I'll tell them.

I'll try to encourage them.

Sometimes they look at me like I'm a weirdo.

You know, like, I don't know you well enough for you to be affirming me.

But that was huge for me as an awkward high schooler.

And so I try to do that.

David: I like that.

I like that phrase you had, that proverb, a compliment unspoken is a seed unplanted.

Because you know, it's easy to think of negative words that people have said, that is what this text is about.

But it's the positive use of the tongue that at some point in the sermon, I assume you're going to get into that.

And so you're going to want to think of what are examples where somebody said something that had a positive effect.

So both of your examples are like, great for that.

Jessica: I think it's changed my, I think that changed who I am a little bit to being, because I look for things to say to people like that.

Like it made me want to be affirming, especially because I did youth ministry.

And youth need to be affirmed so much.

And they just need someone to tell them that they're okay and that God loves them.

And so I think that that little thing she did kind of motivated me to speak differently.

Peter: Well this is part of the reason I want to lean into this text for the sermon is that all of our relationships are driven, I'd say almost primarily, predominantly by the words we speak.

When you think about all the people you relate to in life, we can hardly relate without words.

Philosophy of languages has helped us understand that words do things.

But what the philosophy of language shows us also is not just what our words have an impact on other people, but our words have an impact on ourselves.

The words that we speak, that we hear from ourselves, shape us as well.

There's just a strong aspect of words that we should attend to more probably as Christians.

So that's one piece I want to have in mind here.

I also want to think about how Christians talk in a way, at least we're called to talk in a way, that is, as Will Willimon says, we talk funny as Christians.

We don't talk like our world speaks.

And in a culture where the rhetoric is so filled with rage and fear and anger, to me

this text is really convicting.

David, you made a comment about that earlier.

David: Oh yeah.

Peter: Because you think about how much we are kind of lured into our culture's way of speaking in anger and in fear.

And I think that's a real challenge for a lot of us, especially we're in election season right now and these things tend to get escalated.

But I also want to think about the positive on that side too.

So let me give an example.

And I promise I'll get to some theology here in just a minute.

So we went this summer to a lake house with some friends, a tiny little humble little cabin just in the middle of Missouri, kind of middle of nowhere, this lake.

And our friends from church took us there.

And the dad, he's about my age.

He's a great guy.

He's a high school teacher.

We got out there, we're kind of in the country and he starts talking there with this completely exaggerated drawl.

And he talks about being a country hick out in the lake, everybody.

We're going to go fishing.

And at first he started talking like that and we were like, that's kind of goofy.

But what was so funny, we were there for, we spent one night there, I think, and we were there for a couple of days.

The longer he talked that way, the longer all of us talked that way.

And we were all just adopting his way of speaking.

And what I think is powerful about that is the words we hear shape the words we speak and the words we speak shape us and our relationships around us.

I want to approach this text as a chance to help my hearers reflect on the words they use and the words they hear.

Now it's going to be really easy to find all sorts of law examples and negative examples.

And so one thing you want to be really intentional about as a preacher is to make sure that that doesn't dominate the sermon.

So I was looking at this text and I was thinking, well, how could the gospel come through in this text?

If you have to, you've got to go somewhere else to get the gospel.

But I think there's kind of the seeds of the gospel in verse nine.

Jessica, would you read verse nine again?

Jessica: With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

Peter: Now, of course, James is talking here about kind of this dual kind of split personality with our tongue.

We shouldn't both bless and curse.

But that first half of that, we bless with our tongues, we bless our Lord and our Father.

And I think that invites us to say, well, why do we bless?

Why do we say blessings, positive things, grateful things to our God and Father?

And what came to mind, of course, is Jesus interacting with the disciples and asking

them if they're going to go away like everyone else does.

And Peter says, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

And so I want to think about Jesus as one who comes to speak words that enliven, that don't tear down, that set ablaze with love, not burn the forest down.

And this would give me a chance to emphasize the gracious words that we hear from our Savior.

I forgive you.

You are mine.

I am with you.

You can pick any phrase that Jesus said that was gracious and kind and proclaim that word.

Use your mouth as a preacher to speak those promises to your people.

And then help them think about how those promises then change the way we talk.

And that would lead us to thinking about, you can get there in a lot of different ways, but I thought about that hymn, Thy Strong Word, verse five, give us lips to sing thy mercy, tongues thy, sing thy glory, give us lips to sing thy glory.

Jessica: Sing it, Peter, sing it.

Peter: I'm not going to sing it.

Jessica: David sang in an episode.

David: Oh yeah.

Peter: But give us lips to sing thy glory, tongues thy mercy, dear proclaim, throats that shout the hope that fills us, mouths to speak thy holy name.

Alleluia, fill our songs with alleluias.

That prayer that stands at that hymn is such a prayer for, Lord, give us your words.

Fill us with your way of speaking.

I think about the reading from the gospel where the guy says to Jesus, Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.

And I'd almost maybe riff on that a little bit and say, Lord, I cherish what you have said to me.

Give me your words.

And so the renewal of the Christian life I want to lead my ears toward is to give them those kinds of words that that stands in the hymn, talk about, to help us use our words for the building up of others.

Maybe that's where your proverb would come in, Jessica, to speak the things.

And so my goal would be to have the congregation grow in its gracious talk with one another.

David: Yeah, and I think the closing imagery of the text, it's dealing with that not having two things come out of the same source, but the closing imagery is natural imagery of trees that produce things, springs that produce water.

And so you've got the fruits of the Spirit and the way in which it's not necessarily something we put in our day planner, I must start doing this tomorrow, as much as it is something that God brings about because His word is powerful.

Just like your friend talking that way ended up, you all started talking that way.

But it wasn't like, oh, tomorrow we're going to start talking that way.

It just kind of begins to happen.

Peter:

And that's actually kind of, to me, an encouraging thing, thinking from a ministry perspective that the words we say and the words we hear do matter.

And so that kind of speech grows and bears fruit, I think.

Jessica: Thank you, Peter.

David, what would you preach about?

David: I am going to go with the Old Testament reading.

So it's from Isaiah and it's one of the servant songs.

So Isaiah is going to be introducing us to the servant of Yahweh, which we would believe has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

So, and I guess I was thinking as I read this, one of the things I loved doing in a congregation, and Jessica, I'm wondering if you like doing this with your youth ministry stuff, is connecting people.

Jessica: Yes, I love doing that in my congregation, finding places where people could serve.

David: Yeah, for me it was kind of, you know, Paul has that, I think it's 2 Corinthians where Paul talks about the comfort that I've received, I share with those who need it, right?

And so, you know, people have life experiences and they may not always be pleasant, right? They have life experiences that God is not going to let go to waste.

And, you know, so somebody is having difficulties with their child and drug abuse and then somebody

else is having those difficulties and you're like, you know, you two should kind of talk with one another and maybe there's stuff you could share and you can build one another up.

And so it's that, I like that, that putting people into someone's life that you believe they're going to be helpful for them.

And I think a way of approaching this text would be kind of thinking about Isaiah trying to connect us to this servant of Yahweh who Isaiah knows is going to be helpful for us.

And so, Jessica, if you could read verse 4.

Jessica:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with the word, Him who is weary.

David: Okay, so Isaiah is speaking in the first person and you might think that Isaiah is speaking about himself.

The Lord has given me Isaiah, the tongue of those who are taught.

But this is actually Isaiah kind of entering into the servant of Yahweh and speaking as if he were the servant of Yahweh.

And the servant of Yahweh is saying, the Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught. And then you get the reason for this, that I may know how to sustain with the word, Him who is weary.

So the ultimate goal of connecting you to this suffering servant, the ultimate goal is that this servant will be able to sustain you with a word when you are weary.

And I like that, that he is sustaining us with a word.

It's not, you know, he's taking away what makes you weary.

It's not he's fixing everything.

He's got a word for you and that word will sustain you.

I think sometimes we kind of, you know, we want the quick fix.

You know, Jesus is the problem solver.

We want Him to come in and redo everything so that everything works out well.

But in this case, we're going to be given a servant who's going to have the ability

to say things.

Here once again, your idea of the power of words, right?

To say things that are going to sustain us when we're weary.

Jessica: Is Jesus the servant that's talking?

David: Yeah, that would be as if Jesus were saying, the Lord God, you know, my Father has given me a tongue that knows how to sustain you when you're weary.

So come to me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, right?

So that Jesus, he knows the words that are going to touch your heart and that are going to sustain you when you're weary.

And Isaiah wants to connect you to this servant.

And so then, I think for me, the sermon, you know, it's, you can't cover everything, but you've got several qualities of this servant that are revealed as you read through the whole thing.

You have several qualities that are revealed about the servant.

And I think for me in sermon prep, I'd probably choose one or two of them to kind of preach with depending on who my people were, what was going on.

But I just like to kind of walk through some of those qualities and think about why is this something that would help this person sustain you when you're weary.

So I'm weary.

God, Isaiah is introducing me to the servant who's going to have a word to sustain me.

And now I'm going to learn something about this servant.

You know, what is it, you know, what was his life like?

What did he do?

What has happened to him?

And I'm going to learn something about this servant.

And it's going to be that thing, which has been part of his life, that enables him to sustain me with a word when I'm weary.

So the first thing we learn is that morning by morning, he awakens.

He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

So this Jesus, this servant, is in a daily relationship with his Father.

It's morning by morning.

It's kind of an ongoing daily relationship and renewal.

It's not a one time event that made you the way you are.

It's a daily relationship.

Why is that something that would be helpful if somebody is going to be there to sustain you when you're weary?

Why is it helpful that they're in communication with God every day, morning by morning?

Peter: It's interesting that you say the question, listening to God, because when I first read this text, I was thinking of Jesus listening to others.

And so you just set me on a little bit different path than where I was kind of naturally headed, and I was just looking at the text.

I don't think the text is explicit about what He's listening to.

And so if it's the way you say God is listening, He's listening to His Father, then you highlight that Jesus, first of all, isn't working on His own accord.

He's learning as one who's been taught by the Father, by the Creator.

And He's being given not only the Lord's ear, but the Lord's heart then, I guess I would think.

David: Well, I mean, I think it's, you know, life is complicated and things change.
And I just went for my yearly physical.
And after the yearly physical, I'm like, oh, good, I'm good for another year.
It's like, I think a lot could happen in a year, right?
It's much better to, you know, I'm not going to go for a daily physical because I don't enjoy those.
But it would be nice to be in contact with somebody day by day, right?
Who's constantly up on what's going on, thinking, hearing from God, things to speak with.
You think about Jesus going off by himself late at night, early in the morning to commune with His Father and then be ready for ministry to people, right?
So we've got someone who's connected to God in a daily relationship.
Then we also have somebody who has experienced the deliverance of God.
So kind of verse six through seven, you've got this verse six where he's, the servant has humbly followed the will of God, even though it leads to abuse, right?
He's opened his back to people who are going to strike him.
He's opened his cheek to people who are going to pull out his beard.
He's been disgraced.
He's been spit on.
And then verse seven has this huge turn.
But the Lord God helps me.
Therefore I have not been disgraced.
I set my face like flint and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
So this guy has experienced the fire and has experienced how God delivers him.
When you think about a culture that at times can be shaming for Christians, what are our responses?
Sometimes we withdraw from it.
We don't want to open ourselves to that kind of abuse.

And yet we have a servant who has gone through the abuse and God has brought Him through and has delivered Him from being ashamed.

And so there's this, I don't know, there's kind of a strength in this guy.

And then another quality is in verse eight.

Jessica, if you could read verse eight.

Jessica: He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me.

David: I love this.

I love this.

There's this, if I were going to, you know, if you were going to dramatize this, this is the moment when there's a turn and now this servant is speaking in a much stronger voice and is much more courageous, right?

Because you know, He's like the one who vindicates me, God who vindicates me, He's near at hand.

So I'm going to call out on you and I'm going to ask you, you know, who's going to contend with me?

Let's stand up to, who's my adversary?

Let him come to me, right?

Peter: It's like Rocky getting off the mat.

David: Right, so he's calling out.

So we have a servant who courageously confronts all evil.

And sometimes when you find yourself surrounded with situations of evil or suffering, you know, you don't have the courage to confront it.

And yet you have one who speaks on your behalf, who is confronting evil for you.

So we have a servant who's able to courageously confront evil.

So we've got a servant who has a daily relationship with God, is constantly being renewed and is able therefore to sustain us with the word.

We've got one who humbly follows God's will, even though it leads to abuse, but He's experienced

this deliverance of God.

And because He's experienced that deliverance, now He can courageously confront all evil.

And then, Jessica, you're kind of your favorite line that you opened with from verse 9.

Jessica: Behold, the Lord God helps me.

Who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment.

The moth will eat them up.

David: Okay, so this servant knows the end of the story.

He knows what's ultimately going to happen.

That all of these things that we worry about, that we're concerned about, they're like garments that are going to be eaten up by a moth.

And so I've got somebody who knows the end of the story, who's with me now and sustaining me when I'm weary.

Because the things I worry about, in the end, Dave, don't worry about it.

It's going to dissolve away like a garment eaten by a moth.

I know the end of the story and I'm here for you.

And I've been vindicated.

I'm going to courageously fight all evil.

I'm going to keep talking to God until the end and I'm going to sustain you all the way through.

Jessica: And the things that seem like such a big deal now are going to wear out like Peter's Larry Bird shirt.

David: I know.

There you go.

Jessica: Well, that's all for today.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

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will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.