

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

- 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: The 18th Sunday after Pentecost, a time when we celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit in the church as God reaches out to the world.
- Jessica: And Peter, what are the texts this week?
- Peter: The texts are taken from Jeremiah 11, James 3 and 4, Mark chapter 9, and Psalm 54.
- Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about. To determine who goes first, I'm looking at the readings for this week. James 4:1 says, what causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? What did you fight about with your siblings when you were a kid?
- David: What didn't we fight about?
Oh, we could fight about anything.
Ravioli, right.
- Jessica: Because you both wanted it?
- David: No, I mean, yeah, you're only supposed to take so many pieces and oh, his is bigger than mine.
That one's bigger than yours.
- Peter: Do your parents have to count them out for you?
- David: Oh, yeah.
Oh, yeah.
We fought about anything.
We fought about which, you know, which stuffed animal would hurt the most.
- Jessica: Would hurt the most?
- David: Oh, yeah.
We had one, we had Ducky that had this big plastic bill.
And then Winnie the Pooh had a music box.
If you hit somebody with Winnie the Pooh, you could really do damage.
- Jessica: Oh, no.
- David: My mom, once she had like this box of stuffed animals, she was going to give them away. And we all started grabbing, you know, our favorite ones.
And she's like, how come nobody likes Lamby Pie?
And we're like, because Lamby Pie doesn't have anything that would hurt you.
- Jessica: You can't use Lamby Pie as a weapon.
- David: As a weapon, right.
- Jessica: What about you, Peter?
- Well, what comes to mind for me is family road trips and he's touching me.
- Jessica: Oh, yeah.
- Peter: You know, the family station wagon where one of us would sit backwards in the back end,

you know, and face the rear.

And then, you know, you had these clear lines where nobody's supposed to transgress the line and my brother's, he's touching me, she's touching me.

Jessica: We had a station wagon growing up.

We would go on trips and my brothers would be like, he's looking at me.

I can tell he's looking at me.

So, Peter, you win.

You get to go first.

Peter: All right.

I'm going to suggest...

Jessica: Just don't look at each other while you're recording.

Peter: I won't touch you.

Mark, chapter nine.

I was thinking about the gospel.

And it's a brief reading and it kind of has two parts that go together pretty closely.

And so I thought maybe we'd start.

The image of the Jesus and the child to me is a compelling image.

And so...

Jessica: I love this.

Peter: Would you read verses 35 to 37?

Jessica: And he sat down and called the 12.

And he said to them, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

And he took a child and put him in the midst of them.

And taking him in his arms, he said to them, whoever receives one such child and my name receives me.

And whoever receives me receives not me, but Him who sent me.

Peter: So what does the child look like in your mind when you picture Jesus picking up this child?

Jessica: If you picked him up in his arms, he has to be under five, right?

It's got to be someone that you could pick up.

Peter: Okay.

What else do you see?

David: Somebody totally clueless, kind of wondering why the heck are you picking me up?

Peter: Okay.

So maybe the kids just happen to be playing nearby and Jesus kind of turns around and picks the kid up.

I'm picturing a kid in a daycare.

Now, of course, time has changed here.

But I'm picturing a kid in a daycare who's just had snack and is out at recess.

And he's got a snotty nose and he's got a sticky face.

He's got Cheetos all over his fingers.

And you have a kid who comes up and wants to tell you something or you interact with the kid and they put their snotty face on your shoulder or their fingers with Cheetos all over your shirt.

And just kind of this image of this kid that is just kind of a mess.

Jessica: You really like kids, don't you?

Peter: Well, I do like kids.

I work daycare for a summer.

And so I'm picturing a kid at a daycare who is all child, all dirty.

And to get close to this child, you kind of got to get messy.

David: Okay.

Peter: And that's kind of the image that I have.

And the reason I kind of pause on the image of Jesus and the child is Jesus does this every once in a while, right?

I mean, he kind of points at a child and he's trying to use them as an object lesson in a sense.

But this, what a child is actually like and what kind of person gets up close and personal with a little child.

You got to be ready to kind of get your hands dirty a little bit.

And so I have that in mind.

And then I have the second half of Jesus' phrase in verse 35.

So he says, if anyone would be first, he must be last of all.

That's kind of whoever wants to be first, last.

That's the first last thing.

But then he adds this little addendum and servant of all.

And I want to think about Jesus in this text as what I'm going to call the lead servant.

And I use that language because the superintendent of our kids' school is the last number of years, he's no longer the superintendent.

But in all the correspondence he would send out to the district, he would always sign his name, the lead learner.

David: Oh, I like that.

Peter: And I always kind of thought, first couple of times I saw that, I thought, oh, that's kind of cheesy.

You know, he's just trying to...

But then I got to know how he led a little bit more.

And he was kind of one who was interested in learning along with the kids and along with the parents.

And I thought, you know, the lead learner, that's not bad.

The lead servant.

Here you're getting a word from the servant, the suffering servant we read about last week.

But he is this lead servant.

And so this image of Jesus as a servant who gets his hands dirty with this runny nose, Cheetos fingered, little toddler, he's serving people like him.

And so Jesus says toward the end, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me.

And whoever receives me receives not me, but Him who sent me.

And so that then is going to invite us to think about, well, what kind of servant is Jesus, the lead servant?

Because if we're going to follow his lead, then it helps to know what kind of servant He is.

And of course, that takes us back up to verse 31, where Jesus tells His disciples explicitly, here's how He's going to serve.

He's going to be delivered in the hands of men, they will kill Him, and then He will rise.

And so I think that kind of emphasis on Jesus as the lead servant is actually really helpful in a world in which serving is not honored.

In our context, in our culture, we want leaders who are assertive, who insist on their own

way.

We don't want that actually, but that's kind of what our leaders exist in that way.

They get power and they assert their power and they say, you follow me.

I think about what we call great in our society.

We call great the people who are the most impressive, who have accomplished the most.

So you've got the Olympics this summer, record breakers, we honor those who are the most accomplished.

David: You know, I like that language of following the leader, because follow the leader is a kids game, right?

And it is kind of fun when you think about it, that with Jesus, it really is follow the leader because He's such a weird leader.

And to follow Him is really hard because He does things that are so crazy, right?

Because the disciples in this text, they were playing follow the leader, but the leaders of their own day.

They're arguing among themselves, who's the greatest?

Well, Jesus never had that argument.

Am I really the greatest around here?

Following the leader with Jesus, that's a really strange game to play because where He goes, you would never think a leader would go.

Peter: Which is why the disciples are afraid to ask Him questions, they keep silent.

This is a different kind of leader.

And His leadership is one that serves the least of these, even the little children, that serves all of us through His death and resurrection.

And so I think this idea of, I like what you said, following the leader and following the lead servant to service toward others.

It did strike me in James, I'm not suggesting preaching on James again, but in verse 14 and 15 and 16, He warned against selfish ambition and these kinds of qualities that are so strong in our culture.

He even calls them demonic, James does.

And so I want to think about the gospel in this sermon would be Jesus, the work of Jesus and the love of Jesus, the service of Jesus for His people, for all of us.

And then the goal of the sermon would be to lead people to follow the lead servant according to their vocation.

And so we are kind of early in the school year right now still.

And so I think I would maybe try to think of people in my context or settings.

And for some reason, I guess it's because of the little child in the text, but you think of teachers of little children.

David: Or my niece, she just got a job for daycare.

She suffered a broken nose and a dislocated shoulder already.

Jessica: From the kids?

David: Yes, I know.

One kid hit her in the nose with a water bottle, a metal water bottle, another threw a basketball, knocked her over, she fell on the ground.

Jessica: Oh, tell her to listen to this episode.

She's doing some good work.

Peter: She was delivered in the hands of little children and they will kill her.

No, but I think this is, so I would want to think maybe about vocation, that you could be explicit about vocation in a sermon like this and lift up some vocations of people who serve, who follow the lead servant in a way that is often unrecognized and appreciated and yet is an example of the love that God shows us in Christ.

Jessica: Thanks, Peter.

David: What about you, David?

What are you going to preach on?

I am going to tackle the text from James.

Peter: Dun dun dun.

David: But I'm going to do it in an odd way.

It's kind of cheating, I guess.

You know, James is, in many ways, it's kind of like the wisdom tradition, a book of wisdom tradition.

There's a lot of short sentences that are thematically connected, but those sentences are like pieces of wisdom that you can meditate on.

Jessica: Like proverbs.

David: Like proverbs, right.

And so in the world of preaching, there's a proverbial sermon structure which takes a proverb and basically meditates on the proverb.

So the sermon is like one long, extended meditation on a proverb.

And what you do, there's several different ones, but one's called like the roving spotlight, where you take the proverb and you just set it down in different situations.

And you kind of see how that proverb works and what kind of light it casts upon those situations.

So with this text from James, I'm going to choose one small verse and actually one part of a verse.

So it's going to be like, you know, verse 7c.

So Jessica, if you could read verse 7 and then I'll tell you the part that I would, oh no, I'm sorry, 8.

Read, well read 7 and 8.

Read 7 and 8.

Jessica: Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.

David: Okay, so what I really want to focus on is that phrase, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

Now James puts that, juxtaposes that with resist the devil, he will free from you.

So he's contrasting relationships.

A relationship of resistance with the devil, a relationship of drawing near to God.

If you resist the devil, he'll flee from you.

When you draw near to God, God will draw near to you.

But I really like that phrase, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

And actually that phrase has kind of been with me many times in my life.

Where I just, after the fact, I think about how I was drawing near to God and how God entered into a situation.

He was already there obviously, but had me see how he was already there and he drew near to me.

Peter: Do you know why that stuck with you?
Did you hear it in a sermon or devotion?

David: No, I think it's just from reading James.
But yeah, I just.

So, so for me, the proverbial sermon form, and in this case, it's not really a proverb, but we're going to use it as a refrain.

And so we've got this teaching that draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

And I will want to kind of show that teaching happening in many different places.

Now obviously one of the challenges here is that this is an exhortation.

So it's about human action.

And so this is law and we want to have gospel in the background.

And so somehow at some point in the sermon, you're really going to want a strong emphasis on God's grace.

And I'd probably do it in the opening of the sermon that God being love is kind of like gravity.

You know, when you're around gravity, it just pulls you.

No matter where you are, it's going to pull you.

And God's love is like working in a world like gravity.

It's always, it's always drawing us closer to God and God is drawing closer to us.

And so I'm going to kind of work with, you know, it may be that the cross of Christ is the, you know, kind of the focal point, the death and resurrection of Christ, and that this is our God.

And everything, everything's going to be drawn toward Him.

And so this encouragement is really encouraging us to do something that should come naturally to us as Christians, drawing near to God and he'll draw near to us.

And then once you've got kind of that anchor, now we can look at situations.

And so, you know, you guys can think about your own.

I'll just give you a few that I might work with.

So each situation is going to have a quality to it.

And then you're going to kind of tell a story that deals with a person in that situation.

So I would think, you know, draw near to God and he will draw near to you when you've lost all hope.

So when you've lost all hope is the, is the situation.

And I could talk about the thief on the cross, the repentant thief on the cross, right?

So here are three men, two thieves and Jesus, all being crucified.

Jesus is the one who's being mocked.

And one of the, one of the criminals joins in the mockery.

The other criminal, however, is, knows he's lost all hope.

There's nothing he has, but he chooses that moment to draw near to Jesus.

And he asks Jesus, you know, if you, you know, could you remember me when you come into your

kingdom and Jesus draws near to him, listens to his prayer and promises that He'll be with him in paradise on that very day.

And so you've got a story of when you've lost all hope, draw near to God and he'll draw near to you.

And then you tell the story of this thief whose life ended up there next to Jesus.

And what did he do?

He drew near to Jesus and Jesus drew near to him.
You could do it when you've lost your pride.
Draw near to Jesus and he'll draw near to you.
I think of Peter who was quite proud before the crucifixion, basically saying, you know, everyone else might fall away, but not me, not me.
I won't fall away.
I, you know, I'm going to, I'm going to go with you.
I'm going to follow you to crucifixion and to death.
So Peter was quite proud.
And then he ends up in the, you know, the courtyard.
He ends up denying Jesus.
He's lost all of his pride.
He's the one who's denied his Lord.
His Lord actually looks at him, you know, in Luke and he sees his Lord's face, realizing that he's denied.
He goes out and he cries.
And then, then after Easter, they're out fishing and here Peter's lost all pride.
And Jesus calls to them from the shore, you know, do you have any fish?
And Peter recognizes the voice.
He's been in something like this before.
And what does he do?
He draws near to Jesus.
He's lost all pride.
He puts on a cloak.
He jumps in the water.
He gets to Jesus and then Jesus draws near to him.
Like a father, you know, removing a splinter, Jesus asked him three times, do you love me?
And three times Peter can confess it.
And when you've lost all pride, you draw near to Jesus and he'll draw near to you.
Think about, you know, when you've lost your God, when you feel like you've lost a hold on who God is for you, you draw near to God, he'll draw near to you.
Mary outside the tomb, she's coming to see Jesus.
The body's not there.
She's lost her savior.
She turns to the gardener and says, where have you put Him?
I'll go get Him.
And Jesus says Mary.
She draws near to Jesus.
Come into that tomb.
Jesus draws near to her, being there.
You could do when you've lost your confidence.
Tell the story of the feeding of the 5,000, right?
The disciples are kind of like, you know, Jesus, it's getting late.
You got to send these people away to get something to eat and Jesus is like, you feed them.
And they're like, oh, what are we going to spend?
300 denarii to feed all these people?
They've lost all their confidence.
But Jesus says, go see what you have.

They come to Jesus with just a little, they draw near to Jesus.

And what does Jesus do?

He blesses that little, feeds the 5,000 people and Jesus draws near to them.

So kind of the sermon would just be a rehearsal again and again and again.

Now I chose stories from scripture.

You can weave your own stories in.

You can tell stories from the congregation.

But the goal is at the end of the sermon that people will remember, draw near to Jesus.

He'll draw near to you.

Peter: You also used all examples that were negative.

I wonder sometimes if it would be helpful to help people see how hard it is to endure success.

David: Yeah.

So you think of an example?

Peter: I'm just thinking of, I was trying to think of biblical examples of people who have, you know, someone like Solomon has done very well.

He's been given this great gift of wisdom and we see kind of by way of negative, he does not draw near to the Lord and that causes him trouble.

I think about that, at least seems to me in my life, when things are going the best, that's when I feel less inclined to draw near to the Lord.

And so I would maybe, I mean you could do it a bunch of different ways,

but maybe include some examples of people who are doing well and don't feel like they need.

David: Right, yeah.

So all of them were joined together by the phrase when you've lost.

Peter: Right.

David: When you've lost all hope, when you've lost your confidence, when you've lost your pride, when you've lost your God, but you could deal with, you know, when you've found your dream job.

See that's what I was thinking.

Found your dream spouse.

Peter:

I might go with two or three of the negative ones and then say, but some of you aren't there.

Some of you have found great success.

David: Right, right.

Some of you have found joy.

Right, so when you found your great job, draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

And yeah, I got examples, you know, from my congregation in Chicago of people who had very good jobs and used the benefits of that job for service for others.

I mean it was beautiful, right?

They drew near to God and God drew near to them and used them for the neighborhood, right?

Peter: I think one of the things that comes to mind is sometimes in our aversion to something like the prosperity gospel, we have a hard time addressing prosperity period.

David: Right, yeah.

Peter: This could be a way to take something that goes well and let that be a reason to encourage people to take that thing that went well to the Lord.

David: Right, and so you found, you know, you have like youth that are struggling to figure out

where am I going to fit in, you know, what skill set do I have?
And then when you finally find that you can act or when you finally find that you can do math really well.
When you finally find that thing, draw near to God and he'll draw near to you.
So you could have a, you could title the sermon lost and found, right?
And you have examples of when you've lost, draw near to God, he'll draw near you.
When you find, draw near to God, he'll draw near you.
Yeah, that's good.
Thank you.

- Peter: I like that.
I like the proverbial structure because you can lodge that, even by the end of the sermon you've got people saying along with you.
- David: Right.
- Peter: That just kind of is becoming part of their confession.
- David: Right.
- Peter: And then you're loading it with real life examples and the reality of the Christian life.
- David: And that's the importance of it, right?
Because now you can see it in real life after you leave church.
- Peter: Right.
It's no longer just a phrase.
It's no longer just a proverb.
- David: It's not just a teaching you stick in your head.
- Peter: It makes, it helps you make sense of your life and then live out of that.
So I think that's a great approach.
- Jessica: Thanks, guys.
That's all for today.
We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org.
Check it out.
You can find more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart and our other podcast, Tangible Theology Learned and Lived on any of the major podcast apps.
If you want to see this show continue, please subscribe, share and leave a review.
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: Because Lamby Pie doesn't have anything that would hurt you.
- Jessica: You can't use Lamby Pie as a weapon.