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Jesscia: 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.

David, where are we in the church year?
David: We are at the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost as the church celebrates the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work in our lives and in the world.

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

Peter: The texts are taken from Ecclesiastes 5, Hebrews 4, Mark 10, and Psalm 119.

Jesscia: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about. To determine who goes first, looking at the gospel reading for today, Jesus says that the first shall be last.
So when you go to the church potlucks, do you usually go towards the beginning of the line or towards the end of the line?

Are you first or last?

David: I try to go towards the end of the line, but people usually shove me in the beginning.

Jesscia: Here, pastor, you go first.

David: I know, I know.

David: Right.

Jesscia: Get the people started.

David: By taking all their food?

No.

Peter: Yeah, I like to go early.

I try not to be obnoxious.

I don't want to be the first one, but you just never know what's going to be left.

And so, I mean, you got to be, then sometimes you miss out on the late arrivals, which sometimes are the best.

Oh, but I try not to be obnoxious, but I don't want to go at the end.

Jesscia: All right.

I always cut straight to the dessert table because that clears out first.

I get my dessert, eat that, and then if there's stuff left, I'll go in the main line, but give me my pie first.

I'm going to go with David as the winner because that was most like my answer.

David, you win!

David: Okay, thank you.

So the text I would go with is the Hebrews reading.

And actually, I mean, it's a very complicated reading.

And it's the book of Hebrews.

And that raises the question, as a pastor, am I able to cover this in an intelligible way in a sermon?

And I'm going to say no.

Peter: Yeah, probably true.

David: So I'm kind of going to focus on the last set of verses from 11 through 16. And you know, the other stuff I would work with in Bible class, but particularly I'm interested in verse 12.

Jessica, if you could read verse 12.

Jesscia: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit.

By the way, you're going to explain that one, I hope.

Of joints and marrow and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

David: Okay, so I like this phrase because it's talking about the word of God and what the word of God does.

And it is so powerful and intense and deep, the way the word of God is spoken about here.

And so I'd have some type of theme, like the word of God or God's word goes deep.

And then we would have two parts of the sermon.

One would be it goes deep into your life.

And the other part of the sermon would be it goes deep into the mystery of God.

And so we'd be just thinking about moving from something that's superficial, that's surface to something that's very deep.

And I think my reasoning for that is I think sometimes we can treat God's word in a superficial way.

You know, it's a set of teachings that we may or may not read.

And it's a set of stories that we've heard before.

And we don't really think about how powerful the work of God in our lives can actually be through His word.

And so this opening about God's word being sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division and the division of things that we would say, you know, is there even a difference between them?

I think part of the point is that these are things that are so closely associated with one another that dividing them, you must have a really, really fine-tuned instrument to be able to make a division between these two things.

And the word of God is that sharply fine-tuned, that it can divide between these things and it can go deep into your life.

And I'm thinking about, you know, that division between the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

You know, we watch as God's word goes deep.

Our gospel reading is Jesus kind of continuing a conversation with the disciples about riches and going into the kingdom of God.

And our reading last Sunday was of that rich man who it seemed that he had every intention to follow Jesus.

He's asking questions about Jesus and he's asking questions about the kingdom and how he inherits the kingdom.

So he seems like a prime person to be brought into the kingdom.

And yet Jesus speaks one word to him about his riches and that word penetrates and goes deep into his life and actually his response to that word causes him to walk away from Christ.

And I think sometimes, I don't know, sometimes in my own life I'm on autopilot.

I don't know if you've ever been on autopilot, but you know, you're just kind of doing things and you don't really know why you're doing them.

And you know, sometimes people will say to me, I'll just be doing my regular stuff.

People say, are you angry?

And then the thought is like, you know what?

Now that you said it, yes I am.

So all of the sudden I realize something about myself because somebody else has seen it and has desired to bring it up in conversation and thinking about ourselves before God as we're before that other person who can speak that word into our lives that causes us to really see ourselves much more clearly than we normally do when we're on autopilot.

Peter: Yeah I think that's helpful for a couple reasons.

One is that I always find this verse interesting, the word of God is living and active.

And yet sometimes we just read that as Bible, as living and active.

But what you just said is the words of another person when they speak God's word to you.

You know, you think about Jesus as the word of God who is able to cut through like you did with that rich young ruler.

David: So the first part of the sermon would kind of deal with how God's word goes deep into our lives and also help people understand that that's a good thing.

That that's a good thing.

That there's somebody who is aware of where you're at and is calling you to an awareness of what they already know.

Peter: Well you think about Peter on Pentecost, right?

They were cut to the heart.

David: Right, yeah.

Peter: And Peter speaking the word to them, cut them to the heart, understood what was going on and in doing so was able to clarify for them where they actually stood on things.

David: Yes, yes.

So you can probably think of different examples in scripture of people for whom that word...

So you've got Elijah going to the cave and it's not the windstorm, it's not the thunder, it's not the fire, it's just still small voice.

And what's that voice saying?

And it's basically saying, Elijah, you think you're the only one left.

Duh, you're not.

Go back.

There's all these people that I have, you know, have kept for my...

Peter: And you've got Nathan talking to David.

David: Right, that's another good example.

Peter: He cuts himself to the heart with the story about the sheep.

So yeah, I think there's lots of examples of people who've heard the word and have been exposed.

David: Right, yeah, Peter with Jesus in John's gospel after Easter when he's asking him, do you love me, do you love me, do you love me?

Peter: Right, yeah.

David: And he's kind of cut to the heart by those questions.

Peter:

Another thing I like about this is sometimes we think about God's word in such propositional

terms where we think about just information instead of the impact of the word and the heart impact on our lives and our faith.

This is a really helpful way to get at that.

David: Yeah, it's kind of like a surgeon's fingers, right?

I mean, there's a lot of knowledge in the head of the surgeon, but what we're feeling is his fingers cutting us open, pulling us apart, working inside.

Peter: I don't know who your surgeon is.

David: My mom just had surgery and so that's in my head right now.

But yeah, so it's the visceral nature of this living and active word that's cutting apart and dividing and causing us to recognize the depth and diversity of our being as you're looking at this.

Joints and marrow, soul and spirit, thoughts and intentions, that this is all something that comes out of God's word, oral, in flesh, spoken, written, which enters into our lives.

So God's word goes deep into our lives.

And then the second part would be that God's word goes deep into the mystery of God.

And there I would really just focus on verses 14 through 16, if you could read that, Jessica.

Jesscia: Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens.

Jesus, the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our confession, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize

with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

And I love this verse.

Let us then with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

David: Right.

Why do you love that verse?

Jesscia: Oh, whenever I feel like I'm asking God for too much, or if I'm bothering him with something too little, I'm like, no, Jesus said that I can come with confidence and I can talk to God.

David: Right.

We can come with confidence to God because Christ has taken our humanity with him into heaven.

When He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he took His body with Him.

His body bearing His wounds is now in heaven.

And so we have at the throne of God, someone who has our flesh and who sympathizes with us.

I mean, this is really mysterious, right?

I mean, we've got the mystery of God on a throne in the heavenly realm, someplace where it just seems so distant from us.

And yet the writer is encouraging us to have confidence as we approach that throne.

Why?

Because Jesus, the living word of God is up there.

He's taken our body with Him to heaven and that humanity is with Him.

And now, you know, all things are possible with God.

And He has, you know, He's reigning over us, but He's also reigning for us.

And so we're taken deep into the mystery of God where we're able to bring, like you were saying, the smallest thing that I would think God wouldn't be concerned about.

There's nothing too small.

Peter: It's that phrase throne of grace.

It's such a compelling, you know, you picture this throne, this throne room, the ruler who oversees all things, He's just defeated all powers of sin, death and darkness.

And now He's ascended on high and He sits on a throne.

And what kind of throne is it?

It's a throne of grace.

David: Yeah.

Peter: That cares about every single one of his creatures.

That's such a beautiful...

David: That is amazing.

That's a beautiful image.

I mean, we would think of a throne of power.

You know, a throne of rule.

Peter: A throne of deceit.

David: I know, yeah.

But this is a throne of grace.

Peter: That phrase sympathize with our weaknesses.

I think there's probably a lot of people who feel like it's hard, like nobody sympathizes with them.

You know, you feel kind of like nobody gets what I'm going through.

And of course, nobody does exactly because we're all unique.

But this high priest who's, he's not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

That intimacy and that care that's so strong in this text, that's really encouraging.

David: And we know what that's like, right?

When we've gone through something, we sympathize with somebody else who's going through it.

And Christ has gone through all of us.

So of course He sympathizes with you.

He does more, he empathizes, right?

Good.

Jesscia: Thanks, David.

What about you, Peter?

What would you preach on?

Peter: All right.

I was thinking about the Mark 10 passage.

And it was, like David mentioned, it picks up right after last week's reading.

So in some ways, you know, you might want to think about two Sundays in a row on this text or something like that.

David: Yeah, that could be helpful.

Peter: But this one, so the, I'll start with kind of the theme that I have in mind.

I'm not sure how I'd organize it, but the theme picks up on some adjectives.

Difficult, exceedingly astonishing, impossible.

That's some of the words that come out of this text.

David: It sounds like a text from somebody who's seen something.

Peter: Right, right.

Well, it reminds me, sometimes Jesus' sayings are difficult because they're confusing.

David: Right.

Peter:

You know, he says something like, make friends for yourself by means of unrighteous wealth,

so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwelling.

What does he mean there?

David: Oh, yeah, some of these parables.

Peter: I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

And sometimes we, sometimes Jesus' words are difficult because they're unclear, or we can't make sense of them.

Other times, his teaching is difficult because it's so clear.

And it's so in your face.

And this is one of those texts where I think it's a really hard teaching, and it's because it's so clear.

There's no question about what he's saying here.

David: So what difficulty does that pose for preaching?

When you've got a hard teaching that's really clear.

Peter: Sometimes I think it might be tempting to make it, maybe confuse it a little bit, where you're kind of trying to get away from this clear teaching because it's kind of offensive or it rubs a little bit.

And so you kind of got to just say, okay, this is going to be hard and it's going to be direct.

David: Yeah, and the problem is we don't need more explanation.

Peter: Right.

David: We've got enough explanation.

We all know what's being talked about.

Peter: Right.

Yeah, so it doesn't have to be explained.

It has to be kind of taken to heart.

David: And how do we help people take this to heart?

Peter: So with this one, I would want to tie it pretty closely to last week's text and even pick up on it.

Because if you look at that, would you just read verse 23, Jessica?

Jesscia: And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

Peter: So he looks around right after verse 22.

I mean, you can still see the rich man's shoulders drooping as he's walking away and maybe even still is in hearing distance of Jesus turning to the disciples and making a more general statement about what they just experienced with this man who was rich and was not willing to follow Jesus.

He was sorrowful because he had so many great possessions.

David: You know, I love what you just did.

You helped us see this as a real event.

And I mean, haven't you been in situations where everybody witnesses something horrible happening?

This guy's walking away and you wish he wasn't walking away and nobody knows what to say. And in that moment, Jesus looks around and here's what he chooses to say.

Peter: It was such a promising start with that guy.

He comes up and says, what must I do?

He's eager.

He's willing.

He's anxious to follow Jesus.

And Jesus has a word that's very clear, but very hard.

That's very difficult.

That's exceedingly astonishing.

That's impossible to take.

And so the idea here is these adjectives.

Would you read a little bit further verse 24 to 27A will say, Jessica.

Jesscia: And the disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus said to them again, children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

And they were exceedingly astonished and said to Him, then who can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said, with man, it is impossible.

Peter: Okay.

Stop right there for a second.

Man, this is impossible.

So this is a difficult word.

It's exceedingly, they were exceedingly astonished.

You kind of got to pause right here for a second to take seriously what Jesus says.

Specifically because at least in our culture, there's a lot of people who are wealthy.

David: Oh, particularly when you look at the larger world, right?

Peter: You look at the larger world.

Somebody said one time, I heard, I think Jeff Gibbs say in a, in a, some sort of thing he gave that if you have more than one pair of shoes and you get to choose what you eat for dinner, you're wealthier than 80% of the world's population.

And because wealth is a relative term, you can always find somebody who's wealthier and get yourself out from under this hard word.

But if you look on a global scale, at least Jesus may as well be talking to us.

It's interesting thinking about, he's talking to the disciples and the disciples are distraught by this.

Probably not because they're so wealthy because they've left everything.

David: Right.

Yeah.

Peter: And so they're astonished not because, oh shoot, it might be hard for us.

They're astonished because, wait a minute.

If this guy can't follow and if then, well, what about us and what about God?

What about His salvation for all people?

And so I think it's...

David: And particularly if you were in a culture that saw riches as a blessing from God.

Peter: Right.

Right.

David: So this guy obviously is blessed from God because look at the riches he has.

Peter: Right.

Peter: And now he's blessed by God and yet he can't be saved.

And not only is it hard, it's impossible.

So I think one of the reasons I think I'm kind of drawn to this text overall is because it does bring up money and that's something that's just so near and dear to our hearts. And in a way, I think of this text, especially if you pair it with last week's text, does serve as a warning to those of us who think about money a whole lot and think about wealth.

This is obviously, it's why I think the lectionary committee chose Ecclesiastes, that first verse, he who loves money will not be satisfied with money nor he who loves wealth with his income. And so I think there's just kind of a, sometimes depending on your congregation's budget, it can be tempting to talk about money a lot.

David: Right.

Peter: And so I always found it helpful when the lectionary brings it up, then let's go there then and this is a time where it brings it up. So actually, as I was looking at this, I came across a saying of Augustine from this ancient Christian commentary on the Gospel of Mark. Just listen to what Augustine says about these things. He says, Such O my soul are the miseries that attend on riches. They are gained with toil and kept with fear.

They are enjoyed with danger and lost with grief. It is hard to be saved if we have them and impossible if we love them.

And scarcely can we have them but we shall love them inordinately.

Teach us O Lord this difficult lesson to manage conscientiously the goods we possess and not covetously desire more than you give to us.

Augustine said that just in a sermon.

So I think this text is, like I said, I'm not sure how exactly to put it all together, but it's a chance to in some ways warn your congregation a little bit about the love of money and the dangers of trust in wealth.

Because of course the reason we like money is because it can do a lot of stuff.

David: Right.

Peter: And it can do a lot of good stuff.

David: But it frees us from needing to rely on others and even God.

Peter: I think that's kind of the heart of it here.

That the difficulty, the exceedingly astonishing and impossible thing is that we have to trust in Jesus and his word, not in stuff that we can see and hold.

So I'm thinking about this generally as a warning that I think we could take from the rich young man and Jesus' words to the apostles.

But then I also, if I were going to preach on this text, I think I would include the verses that follow it, verses 32 to 34.

And Jessica, I wonder if you could just read those verses too.

Jesscia: You're going to skip the rest of the sentence with man it is impossible, but not with God?

Peter: We're going to get there by means of verse 32 and 32 to 34.

Jesscia: And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them.

And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.

And taking the 12 again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying,

See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes,

and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.
And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him.
And after three days, he will rise.

Peter:

You know, we didn't finish the sentence earlier with man this is impossible, but not with God.
For with God, all things are possible.
And the disciples are still kind of reeling from this lost convert.
And Jesus says it's impossible, except with God.
For with God, all things are possible.
And then when he goes on to verses 32 to 34, he's almost like he's saying,
You want to know something else that's impossible?
Someone rising from the dead.
And that's where Jesus leads them next is, I will die.
You want to see exceedingly astonishing, impossible, difficult?
I like that.
That's where I'm going.
And yet God will raise me from the dead.
And that's kind of the with God, all things are possible.
What I don't want to do in a sermon like this is kind of give the impression that
kind of just take that with God, all things are possible as kind of a separate
just kind of factoid or maxim.
Instead, help people see that in light of the resurrection.

David:

Oh, that's great.
That's great.
And I like the use of your terms all applied to the death and resurrection of Christ.

Peter:

Right.

David:

Yeah.
That it's exceedingly difficult, impossible that God would die.

Peter:

Right.

David:

Jesus Christ.

Peter:

Right.

David:

I mean, that's and that he would rise.
I mean, these are these are just mind blowing things.
So even as our sin is mind blowing, what's even more mind blowing is God's love.

Peter:

Yeah, that's right.

Jesscia:

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

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David Schmitt and Dr.

Peter Nafzger will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: I try not to be obnoxious, but I don't want to go at the end.