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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. Peter Nafzger and Dr. David Schmitt, 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 year?

David: Well, we normally would be at the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, but we are observing Reformation.
So it would be Reformation Sunday, a time when the church gathers to remember God's work through the servant Martin Luther and the proclamation of the gospel to all the world.

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

Peter: Well, the texts for Reformation Sunday are from Revelation 14, Romans 3, John 8 or Matthew 11, and Psalm 46.

And those are the texts appointed every year for Reformation Sunday, which is why I'm going to suggest you might use the texts from the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost as an additional option, which would take you maybe to Jeremiah 31 or Hebrew 7 or Mark 10 or Psalm 126.
So let me just say a word about that.

Jessica: You are a risk taker.

Peter: I want my cake and I eat it too, because to me, the festivals we've talked about before, festivals are hard, especially when the lectionary readings are the same every year, because people have heard these sermons.
And so I think it's actually kind of helpful, especially if you preach to congregations

that are kind of steeped in Reformation, Lutheran doctrine, and they understand these things.

I think it could kind of be helpful to take an unexpected text and preach it from a Reformation perspective.
And so there's your forecast of what I'm going to be talking about.

David: And if you get the Reformation right about what it's about, the text of Scripture will all do that, because they all somehow are preaching to Christ.

Peter: If you're preaching the gospel and not just preaching about the Reformation.

Jessica: That was a long answer to my question.
I was just looking for some Bible references.
Well, every week I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about.
To determine who goes first, I want you to answer this question.
How could you tell that Luther had really earthy eating habits?

David: I have no idea.

Peter: Yeah, I don't know how Luther ate, except that I suppose he had a lot of sausage.

Jessica: He had a diet of worms.

David: That is a very specific audience for that joke.

Peter: It's not the congregation of the sermon.

Jessica: All right, I will have to choose by random chance.
Peter, will you go first?

Peter: Okay.
Like I mentioned, I'm going to suggest you go with a different Reformation text.
Still celebrate Reformation, but not go with the appointed text for Reformation Sunday.
Instead, stick with the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost.
And the text that I would suggest would be the gospel reading from Mark 10.
The gospel reading from Mark 10 is the story of blind Bartimaeus sitting by the roadside.
So here's what I'd like to do.
I'd like to think about the Reformation from the perspective of Bartimaeus.
And specifically, I want to think about how the gospel sounded to him.
So Bartimaeus was blind.
He could not see.
And so all he could do was hear Jesus coming.
And when I started thinking about that, what the gospel sounds like, what the Reformation sounds like,
it led me to notice in this reading from Mark 10, there's a lot of dialogue.
It's almost all dialogue, actually, which is just kind of interesting to notice.
And so I thought it might be kind of fun to just share the dialogue.

Instead of having you read a couple of verses, Jessica, just share the dialogue and have Jessica, you read the parts that are the blind man.
And Dave, you read the parts that are Jesus.

David: Oh, thank you.

Peter: Yeah, I thought that'd be nice.
And I will read the parts of the great crowd.

David: Okay.

Peter: So let's try this.
Just do all the quotations.
And you're the blind man, Jessica.
You're Jesus, Dave.
And I'm the great crowd.

Jessica: Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

David: Call him.

Peter: Take heart.
Get up.
He's calling you.

David: What do you want me to do for you?

Jessica: Rabbi, let me recover my sight.

David: Go your way.
Your faith has made you well.

Peter: All right.
Well, there we go.
That was a fun, dramatic reading.
So I was thinking about what did it sound like?
There's a lot of conversation there.
You've got Bartimaeus crying out.

But even before he cried out, he had to have heard something,
First of all, he had to have heard of Jesus.
And not just of him as a person, but of what he could do.

David: Right, otherwise he wouldn't be crying out for this.

Peter: And of who he was.
He said, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.
So he's heard things about Jesus in relation to David.
He's heard things about Jesus in terms of his ability
to have mercy.
And the crowd, we didn't read this part,
but the crowd rebuked him telling him to be silent.
So pipe down, Bartimaeus.
And he says, again, Son of David, have mercy on me.
And then you can imagine, imagine,
even just closing your eyes a little bit,
you heard footsteps coming.
That's why he called to Jesus.
And now you hear footsteps stop.
And you're Bartimaeus and you're kind of wondering,
well, what's happening?
There's Jesus stopped.
And then you hear Jesus voice say, call him.
And Bartimaeus then, then he hears the great crowd
with Jesus respond to Jesus and say,
take our, get up, he's calling.

David: Isn't that beautiful that Jesus doesn't call him himself.
He asked the crowd to call him.

Peter: Yeah.

David: And I mean, that's what he's asking us to do, right?
Call people to Him.
Yeah. Wow.

Peter: So he's calling you, they say.
And then verse 50 is just delightful.
He throws off his cloak, he springs up and goes to Jesus.
So you picture, you know, he can't see, but he jumps up,
he sprang up and goes to Jesus.
And then Jesus asks him this question
that's just kind of incredible.
What do you want me to do for you?
And Bartimaeus, rabbi let me recover my sight.
And then Jesus says, go your way.
Your faith has made you well.
And I think about this,
the reason I kind of want to slow down this episode
is I want to think about how this encounter with Bartimaeus
is kind of like what the Reformation is all about.
In our sin and in our fallenness, we don't have a prayer.
We don't have any hope.

We can't see, we're just leaning on the people
who have told us things.
And when we cry out to Jesus to have mercy,
Jesus sends other people and he says, come to me, come to me.
And then he heals us, he forgives us, he restores us.
And so this, I would kind of think you could do
an interesting reformation sermon
by using kind of Reformation language in this story.
So for instance, Jesus says toward the end,
your faith has made you well.
In the Greek, it's your faith has saved you.
And of course, salvation by grace through faith
is central to the Reformation.
This whole thing was done with words.
The word of God was central to the Reformation,
the word of the gospel proclaimed.
And then what I really like toward the end
is Jesus said to him, go, go your way,
your faith has made you well.
And where does he go?
Read the last half of the last verse, Jessica.

Jessica: And immediately he recovered his sight
and followed him on the way.

Peter: So Jesus says, go your way.
And Bartimaeus receives his sight
and he follows Jesus on his way.

David: That's nice.

Peter: And so isn't that the Reformation, right?

David: Right.
The reformers heard the word,
they heard the good news of salvation
by grace through faith.
And how did they respond?
Well, they didn't respond by going their own way.
They went by going His way,
which is to say they followed him, they listened to Him,
they went and told others about Him.
And so I think you could just delight in the Reformation
by thinking about how a church that was in darkness
that couldn't see clearly, couldn't see Jesus,
there were those who heard Him rightly
and who proclaimed those promises.
So that's kind of a Reformation via blind Bartimaeus.

David: Okay.

Jessica: Thanks, Peter.
What about you, David?
Well, I'm going with the traditional
Reformation Sunday texts.

I'm gonna work with Psalm 46.
And my reasoning is that I assume most of the time
most people will be singing a mighty fortress.
And Psalm 46 is the basis for a mighty fortress.
And so it might be a nice way of integrating hymnody
and psalmody into the service and preaching.
And so looking at Psalm 46.
At some point in the sermon, I guess I would,
the background of A Mighty Fortress,
it's often called the Battle Hymn of the Reformation.
1529 in Wittenberg, sometime around there
is when Luther wrote it.
But in one of the broadsheets,
the earliest broadsheets of it, I think from Augsburg,
it's actually called a Hymn of Comfort.
And I think that's, I like that better
than the Battle Hymn of the Reformation,
that it's a Hymn of Comfort.
Because what everybody's fighting about
and why there is a battle is because we wanna bring comfort.
We wanna bring the comfort of the gospel to people.
And so it kind of reminds us of kind of the celebration
of the Reformation is not a triumphalist,
you know, battle that we're waging
as much as it is the triumph of the gospel
and bringing comfort to people.
And that's what should always be at the heart
of our celebrations of the Reformation, I'm thinking.
So anyway, so the comfort in the Psalm,
if you're working with the Psalm,
it's got a refrain that's in verse one
and verse seven and verse 11.
And so I'm thinking that that refrain
is gonna be important for the sermon.
So Jessica, if you could read verse one.

Jessica: God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

David: Okay, so I liked that ever present help in trouble,
very present help in trouble.
And I'm like, you know, I might wanna preach on that.
So I actually looked at the Hebrew on it
and literally translated, literally translated,
it would be help in distress, willing to be found much.
So God is-

Peter: It's a good thing we have some translators smoothing that.

David: I know, smoothing it out.
So God is willing to be found as help in distress.
He's very much willing to be found

as help in times of distress.
And I like that idea of ever present
is really willing to be found.
That the ever present always makes me
just think of eternity, you know,
that God's eternally present,
but willing to be found has some intentionality to it.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, it gets away from like an attribute of God
as omnipresence and gets to kind of the relational.

David: The actions of God, right?
Yeah, so the actions of God is that
he is willing to be found in situations of distress.
And that's the good news.
That's the comfort is that when you're in
a situation of distress, you don't think,
oh man, I am alone on this one.
You recognize that the kind of God you've got
is the kind of God who's willing to be found
in situations of distress.
So when you're in a situation of distress,
open your eyes because God's somewhere,
because he's willing to be found in those places.
And so the Psalm, you know, basically looks at
situations of distress in kind of a global fashion.
You've got situations of distress with the earth giving way
and mountains and seas raging and roaring.
And you've got situations of distress that are
chaotic not in terms of nature,
but chaotic in terms of society.
You've got kingdoms raging and battles being fought.
And so you've got two kinds of big global situations
of distress where God is willing to be found.
And you know, that's what we see in the Psalm,
but I think the Reformation Sunday is encouraging us
to take it a little bit more personally
and to look at places of distress
where God is willing to be found.
And I mean, we could just kind of,
I'd probably take some time to walk through scripture
and think of examples.
I'm thinking of Lazarus' tomb, right?
So that's a situation of distress.
And you know, remember it was kind of that interchange
between Thomas and Jesus.
You know, when Jesus is thinking about going there
and Thomas is like, well, you know,
they just tried to kill you.
And Jesus is like, no, we're gonna go anyway.

And Tom's like, well, let's all go die with them.
You don't know if he's saying that in a sarcastic way
or if he's saying it in a faithful way, you know,
well, we're gonna go, let's go and die with them.
But I mean, it's a situation of distress
that is at great cost to Jesus.
And yet Jesus is willing to be found there.
And by willing to be found there,
he brings about an act of grace
that is a preview of the resurrection.
And you think about the criminal
who died on the cross with Jesus at that man's last breath.
I mean, his whole life has led him to this place
where he's crucified publicly as a criminal
and an enemy of Rome and an enemy of society,
hung up to look like a dog.
And Jesus is willing to be found in that place.
Imagine that, that, you know, when I have got to my worst
and I'm suffering the effects of my entire life,
Jesus is willing to be found in that place.
And then you think about the willingness of God to be found
and the turmoil that's happening at the time of Luther
and the willingness of God to be found
in our own battles and fights today.
I mean, in a sense, we can't choose our enemies.
Our world chooses that for us.
But as we fight our enemies,
we can remember that God is willing to be found
in situations of distress.

Peter: Well, that's such a different idea
than sometimes we are led to think
that when things are in distress, God is not there.
And that's what makes it hard.
You wonder, God, where are you?
And this message is he's willing to be found,
even especially in this time of distress.

David: Yeah, he's hidden himself in those places.
He hid himself in the death of Christ on the cross,
and He's hidden Himself in the tomb
as He rises from the tomb,
and He's hidden Himself in those situations
of distress in our life.
And so the Reformation is, you know, yeah,
it deals with battles that are being fought for the gospel,
but ultimately it deals with comfort,
the comfort that God has not left you alone.
He's willing to be found even in the worst situations
of distress.

Peter: You made me think when you talked about his death,
his being present for his own mom,
his mom on the cross.
And He was willing to be found
by providing gracious presence through His words,
and then through John, providing for His mom.
There's lots of different places in the scriptures
you could go to find that.

David: Right, yeah.
Well, it's a beautiful moment.
And it reminds me of that scene in that film,
The Passion by Mel Gibson,
which is all made up, right in this portion
where Jesus is carrying his cross.
He falls and Mary is watching,
and she has that memory of him falling as a child.
And she runs to Him and she says, I'm here, I'm here.
And she catches Him in her arms.
And this time she sees Jesus fall.
She runs to Him and she says, I'm here.
And then He looks at her and He says,
behold, I make all things new.
I just, I love that scene.
It's so beautiful.
And it's like, you know, she's trying to catch Him,
but He's catching her with a word of promise
that what's happening, He knows what He's doing.
And He's making all things new for her, yeah.

Peter: What I like about this is Psalm 6,
there's a lot of mess going on in that Psalm,
you know, a lot of turmoil, a lot of distress.
And it's not like the Reformation ends that.

David: Right, right.

Peter: The Reformation just reminds us that God speaks there too,
and especially his word of comfort and promise.

David: Yeah, it's out of the whirlwind that God talks to Jesus.
Right,

Peter: Right, yeah, right.
Yeah.

Jessica: Thanks guys.
That's all for today.
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