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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. 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.

Peter: Peter, where are we in the church year?  
We are talking about the last Sunday of  
the church year, when we think about the  
end of  
the season of Pentecost.  
We think about Christ the King, the one  
who reigns over all.  
We think about end times.  
It's a time where we think about the mark  
and the transition of time, so you can  
kind  
of have a couple different emphases on  
this last Sunday.

Jessica: And where are the texts for this week,  
David?

David: Isaiah 51, Jude 20 through 25, Mark 13,  
and Psalm 93.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me  
which text you would choose to preach  
about to determine  
who goes first.  
So in the Mark passage, Jesus talks about  
the lesson of the fig tree.  
Fig Newtons, yes or no?

Peter: No.

David: Oh yeah!  
Why do you not like Fig Newtons?

Peter: I hate Fig Newtons.  
They're always supposed to be tasty, and  
they're dry, and they're crumbly, and the

fig isn't  
like real jelly.

David: You shouldn't leave them out!

Jessica: Where do you buy them?

David: Oh my gosh.

Peter: I don't buy them.

That was my childhood experience.

I hate Fig Newtons.

David: Oh gosh.

David: I like them.

They're sweet.

You get those little seeds in your teeth.

Jessica: No!

David, you win!

I love Fig Newtons.

Well, the lesson of the Fig Newton.

David wins.

The lesson of the Fig Newton.

David: Yeah, well, I am actually going on that  
passage from Mark 13.

Peter, I think you're right though.

The last Sunday of the church year, you  
were listing all the things that could  
be, right?

I mean, it's a...

We don't...

I don't know if...

It just doesn't feel like we have as much  
of a tradition on the last Sunday of the  
church

year as we could have, right?

Because Christ the King would be a great  
Sunday to celebrate the rule, but then  
there's also

the transition from one year to another.

I knew a pastor once who on Advent said,  
Happy New Year, and people were like,  
what is going  
on?

Peter: And you kind of got to be careful if you  
go that move because it kind of makes a  
point,  
but it is a little bit detached from  
normal life.

David: Right, yeah.

So it's a struggle and the texts are  
somewhat difficult also, I find, right?

So we're in that apocalyptic discourse in  
Mark.

So Mark 13 is the one that I would look

at.

And Jessica, if you could read just verse 27 and 28.

Jessica: And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree, learn its lesson. As soon as its branches become tender and put out its leaves, you know that summer is near.

David: Okay. I just chose those two verses, but I could have basically chosen any two verses from this text. I chose those two verses because to me they are so completely different from one another. The first part of the verse is about the angels and the four winds and from the ends of the earth and gathering the elect. And it's this cosmic vision that is really hard to picture or understand. And then the next thing you get is this mundane fig tree that, you know, everyone's supposed to understand this, right? I mean the fig tree is something common. It's from daily life. And so we've got this mixture in the text of things that are way beyond our understanding, that we're not going to comprehend. And then it's punctuated by these very small glimpses into an everyday reality that we're quite comfortable with and we immediately get. And that juxtaposition is something that I think puzzles me, makes the passage difficult because it seems to be jumping around. But it's also something that I think I would lean into in preaching. Because when I read the text and I thought, I immediately thought of you Jessica.

Jessica: Okay good, because I have a list of questions.

David: Yeah, no, I thought Jessica's going to say, oh, well I was hoping you'd cover this.  
I'm hoping you'd cover this because there's a heck of a lot in this passage.

Jessica: I'm glad that my voice echoes in your mind as you prepare sermon.

David: It does.

Jessica: It is a favor to the people in the pew.

David: So I mean like what are the things that you're raising questions about?

Jessica: Yes, you said that the first verse was something you couldn't understand and the second seemed very earthy and understandable.  
I don't understand the earthy and understandable part because right after that Jesus says that when you see these things taking place you know that it's coming, this generation won't pass away until all this takes place.  
What does that mean?

David: I know.

Jessica: They all died.

Jessica: We're still waiting.

David: That's what I'm saying is it goes from one to the other so quickly.

Jessica: Yes.

David: Right, so you understand the idea of a plant puts forth a bud when it's about to bloom.

Jessica: Sure, yeah.

David: Right, so I mean there's nothing strange, hard to understand about that.  
But then all of a sudden you're told, you know, these things will happen before, you know, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.  
Well, what things?  
Are we talking about the destruction of Jerusalem?  
Are we talking about the second coming of Christ?  
Oh, it could be the destruction of Jerusalem.  
It could be the second coming of Christ.

What's this, you know, what is it where  
Jesus doesn't know but God the Father  
knows?

So I thought Jesus is God.

How does he?

I mean it's just like the text is filled  
with these conundrums, these small  
statements that  
are not fleshed out.

They're visionary.

It's apocalyptic.

And it's kind of challenging your  
imagination and kind of blowing up your  
worldview for  
a second there as this cosmological  
change is occurring.

The heavens are changing.

The sun is dark and the moon doesn't give  
light.

You know, you've got angels flying around  
gathering the elect.

It's the end of times.

It's the destruction of Jerusalem.

It's all of this weird stuff.

But then, oh, we've got a fig tree about  
to bloom.

Oh, we've got a person who's keeping the  
house ready for a master who's coming  
back.

I mean those are really simple things.

And so to me, I would describe this  
juxtaposition as a certain mystery or a  
mysterious certainty.

That we've got certainty.

You know, we know about fig trees.

We know what it's like to keep a house.

You know, we've got the certainty of what  
it is we're supposed to do.

And yet it's surrounded by the mystery of  
when is all of this going to happen and  
what

is it going to look like when it takes  
place.

And so we're invited by these words in  
this last discourse of Jesus to find  
ourselves

living in a certain mystery.

Jesus will return.

How, when, where?

Don't know, but we do know He will

return.

And so our lives are always going to be living in this certain mystery.

Peter: I think that's really helpful because the temptation is, I think, the temptation is try to explain everything.

David: Right.

Peter: When you come to a tough text and you want to make it clear, make it certain. But there's a mystery here that you just, you can't do that.

And so you've got to think, is the goal of the sermon to just explain everything?

David: Right.

And people try.

Peter: Right.

David: Right.

I mean, they go into the visions in Daniel, the visions in Revelation. They create this timeline and, you know, oh, this is the 50-headed beast and, you know, all of this stuff.

You know, because we think that that's the point is being able to nail exactly when it's going to happen.

And that is not the point.

Peter: And sometimes we think the point of a sermon is to just explain.

David: Right.

Peter: But the problem is not, for your ears, is not always that they don't understand. There's a different problem you're working with, which I assume you're going to explore.

David: Right.

Peter: Yeah, well, it's this issue of living in the certainty of Christ's return when there's hardly anything I can point to that validates that, aside from the resurrection.

Peter: Right.

David: The resurrection of Jesus, the promises that God has spoken that always come true, and the promise that He will return. These are the things I hold on to, but I can't prove it.

I can't give you the timeline.  
I can't explain, you know, the wars and  
the rumors of wars.  
Are these earthquakes?  
Is that hurricane?  
Is all of this stuff the end times?  
I mean, you know, every generation people  
are asking, you know, is this the end  
time?  
Is now what's going to happen?  
And it's not a matter of figuring out  
when it's going to happen.  
It's a matter of being prepared for when  
it happens.  
And to be prepared, you live in a certain  
mystery or a mysterious certainty, right?  
You hold on to the truth that this is  
going to occur, that Christ is Lord over  
all things,  
even though it sure doesn't look like it  
right now in our lives, right?

Jessica: I think a sermon like that is really  
helpful.  
Like the paradox maintained tells me that  
it's okay that I don't get it.  
That two things can be true.  
And for me to hear you say that, to sit  
in the pew and be like, oh, good, I don't  
understand  
it, but it's okay.

David: Right.

Jessica: Because sometimes you think I need to  
understand all of this for it to be true.  
Like how can I base my life around  
something that just is just confusing?  
It seems like it's contradicting itself.  
But if you tell me that it's okay that I  
don't understand everything about God,  
but I can  
still have faith in God, that's  
wonderful.

David: I mean, it's kind of, now I shouldn't,  
boy, I really, really, really shouldn't  
say this.

I'm going to talk about pregnancy.  
I know nothing about pregnancy.

Jessica: Yeah, since you're the expert in the  
room, go ahead, David.

David: I know, I know.

Peter: I'm not saying anything.

David: I'm not saying anything.  
Don't leave me alone here, Peter.  
I'll give you a Fig Newton.  
So you think about pregnancy.  
You know the child is coming, but you  
don't know the exact time.  
Is it going to be an 18 hour labor  
without an epidural?  
Is it going to be a quick birth?  
Is it going to be two weeks ahead of  
time?  
Is it going to be two weeks late?  
You don't know the time unless you're  
scheduling a cesarean, right?  
I mean, you don't know the time, but you  
know what's going to happen.  
You live in the certainty that a baby is  
going to be born.  
You buy the stuff, you decorate the room,  
you tell everybody, you do all of that  
stuff,  
preparing your house and your lives for  
bringing this new child into this world,  
but you don't  
know exactly when it's going to happen.

Jessica: Yes.  
I remember rocking in my baby's room,  
very pregnant, just being like, okay,  
everything's  
ready.  
This is the chair where I'm going to rock  
you.  
When are you going to come?  
I'm waiting.

David: It was probably had four months still to  
go, knowing you.  
But no, I mean, I think it's that type of  
a thing that there are certain things  
that  
we know are going to happen, but we don't  
know when.  
And we don't let not knowing when prevent  
us from preparing.  
We prepare anyway, because that's how we  
live in this kingdom.  
Okay.  
So for me, that would be kind of what I  
would lean into, is this way of life that  
doesn't  
have all of the answers in terms of when



Christ returns and how it's all going to play out,  
but is definitely a way of life where we are living in the certainty that He will return,  
that He will raise the dead, that we will bring about the kingdom and the new creation.  
And so we are people who live in light of that second coming, even though we can't always explain it to everybody.  
We can live in the way of those who believe it.

Jessica: That's absolutely comforting.

Peter: Yeah, that's a lifestyle response instead of kind of a logical or a cognitive response.

David: Yeah.  
That's kind of what I would shoot for.

Jessica: Thanks, David.

Peter: Okay, I was thinking I would maybe preach on the Psalm, Psalm 93.  
I do continue to find Psalms so helpful in terms of naming and articulating the emotions and the struggles and the challenges of being a follower of God.  
And I also am a sucker for Psalms that are short.

David: Okay.

Peter: Because you can kind of treat the whole Psalm without going on too long.  
So I read Psalm 93 and I thought that would be a good one to go with.  
So maybe I'd start, Jessica, with having you read verses three and four.

Jessica: The floods have lifted up, O Lord.  
The floods have lifted up their voice.  
The floods lift up their roaring.  
Mightier than the thunders of many waters.  
Mightier than the waves of the sea.  
The Lord on high is mighty.

Peter: All right.  
I'm noticing, kind of like the fig tree in Mark, the scriptures are so full of connections to creation.  
And you get the biblical authors look

around and they see things that help them understand  
who God is and who they are.  
And this is one of those times that,  
especially those verses you just read  
about the floods  
and the waters and the pounding of the  
sea, makes me think of when I was at the  
ocean.  
You guys have been to the ocean when  
there's big waves and they just, at least  
for me,  
I always feel like, okay, when's it going  
to stop?  
And the waves just keep pounding and the  
waves just keep pounding and the roar  
just does  
not end.  
And so I think about, I always feel very  
small when I go to the ocean just because  
the sea  
is so deep.  
So you've got this image of the  
thundering of the waters, the waves of  
the sea.  
You've also then got in verse three, the  
floods have lifted up, they've lifted up  
their voice,  
they've lifted up their roaring.  
And you think about the connotations of  
flood and chaos and destruction.  
And you have this relentless escalation  
of, I would say, chaos here.  
And so of course what's on my mind right  
now is, it wasn't too long ago that the  
hurricane  
season was going on with the hurricanes  
in Florida.  
And you think about the national chaos  
that always seems to accompany elections  
and what  
follows from them.  
And then of course people have their own  
lives that are, sometimes life is going  
pretty smoothly,  
sometimes things are going just fine.  
But oftentimes it's kind of this  
escalation of the wheels coming off and  
chaos and struggle.

David: And you feel very small.

Peter: Yeah, you feel very small.  
David: Does God even see this happening to me?  
Peter: You feel in relation to God small, you also feel like you just don't have much control.  
David: I can't do anything with this.  
Peter: I was actually looking at, for another project, I was looking at images online of the aftermath of Hurricane Milton. And the images, the Atlantic has kind of a photo collection. And the images of the, one image that stood out was they had this aerial satellite view of the hurricane kind of approaching through the Gulf. And this thing was like the size of half the United States moving toward, and all the chaos and the flood and the destruction that that brought. Mightier than that. Verse four, mightier than that, mightier than the chaos, the ecological, the ecological chaos, the personal chaos, the national chaos, mightier than the floods, mightier than the pounding of the seas, the Lord on high is mighty. And I look at how small I feel compared to the largeness of the chaos. And I think, oh man, that's nothing compared to the smallness I feel before God who is mighty and all that. And yet God has found it good to value me and to care for me. And so the Psalm gives us this contrast or this comparison, I guess, between the floods and the oceans and the Lord. And all of this would be kind of just frankly kind of terrifying if it weren't for verse five. And so, Jessica, would you read verse five?

Jessica: Your decrees are very trustworthy; holiness befits your house,

O Lord, forevermore.

Peter: Especially that verse, that first half.  
Your decrees are very trustworthy.  
And so you've got this situation where we  
as humans recognize how small and how  
vulnerable  
and how helpless we are.  
And the Lord is mighty, but more  
importantly for us than his might is his  
trustworthiness.  
And so his decrees, his commitments, his  
word is trustworthy.  
It is faithful.  
It is sure.  
And so I think if I were to kind of  
preach on this Psalm, I would invite the  
hearers  
to recall some of God's decrees.  
And you could go a couple different  
places.  
You could choose one of the other  
readings.  
The passage from Isaiah 51 talks about  
the salvation of the Lord is coming.  
So that's a trustworthy decree.  
The Mark 13 talks about the return of  
Jesus.  
Jesus is the Son of Man is coming back.  
That is a trustworthy decree.  
Jude 20 and 21 and 22 talks about the  
mercy of Jesus Christ, mercy that leads  
to eternal  
life.  
And so that decree of God's mercy, you  
could go with any of those.  
The one, though, that stood out to me is  
not one of the other readings.  
But as I think about how small and how  
helpless and how vulnerable we are, I  
thought of Jesus  
words in John 10 where he's talking about  
his people and he says, my sheep hear my  
voice.  
I know them.  
They follow me.  
I give them eternal life.  
They will never perish.  
And no one will snatch them out of my  
hand.  
I think about this decree that God has

made to each of us.

He's made to all of us in our baptism  
that no one will snatch you out of my  
hand.

That is a trustworthy decree.

David: It makes me think of that one in John 16,  
I think it is.

You know, in the world you have trouble,  
but fear not, I have overcome the world.

Peter: Yeah, yeah, the tribulation

David: The tribulation, the trouble and then the  
promise of God.

Peter: What do you have any promises, Jessica,  
that just come to mind that you find to  
be so comforting?

Jessica: I like that comparison of chaos to water  
to things being out of your control.

Right, because I couldn't control the  
waves.

There's nothing I could do about it.

But sometimes that is like if you're in  
the midst of something in life and you're  
like,

I can't do anything.

I can't make a plan to get out of this.

I don't have anything to do to change it.

I just have to wait till the waves are  
done.

I just have to try not to die until the  
storm is over.

You know, and that God would promise to  
be stronger than the waves and that I can  
trust

him that he's mightier than the waves and  
that he's going to hold me.

That is very comforting.

And sometimes that's the only comfort you  
have.

Peter: Yeah, I think that's the life by faith is  
to trust that God has you, that God is  
mightier,  
that he is stronger because the floods  
and the sea is pretty powerful.

Jessica: And that he's good.

Peter: Yeah, he's good.

He is a good, faithful, trustworthy Lord  
overall.

David: What I like is that contrast to the sea  
or the floods have a voice and they're  
roaring.

But a roaring voice is not communicating anything.

It's, you know, I mean, I'm sure people remember the sound of Hurricane Milton or the sound of a tornado that's coming.

You remember what it sounds like, but it's not saying anything.

So you've got this chaos that's making this noise that's a roaring and a thunder.

And then you've got God who's mightier than the chaos and his voice actually means something.

It's a decree and it's a promise and it's trustworthy, right?

So you've got that nice contrast there.

Peter: And that just opens up the opportunity to proclaim any of the comforting promises of

God in Christ that are either important to your congregation or that are personally very significant for you.

But that contrast, I think, would be where I would go with the sermon.

Jessica: Awesome.

Thank you, Peter.

That's all for today.

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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: Boy, I really, really, really shouldn't say this.

I'm going to talk about pregnancy.

I know nothing about pregnancy.

Jessica: Yeah, since you're the expert in the room, go ahead, David.

David: I know, I know.