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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.
Alright, let's get started.
Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We're talking about the third Sunday in
Advent as we get closer to Christmas and
we prepare
for our celebration of Christ's coming in
the flesh and we remember the promises of
his coming and his promise to return on
the last day.

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

David: Zephaniah 3, Philippians 4, Luke 7, and Psalm 85.

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 last week was the feast day of St.
Nicholas, otherwise known as St. Nick's
Day.
Did you guys celebrate St. Nick's Day?

David: No.

Peter: Nope.

Jessica: Neither of you?

David: Neither of us did.

Jessica: Oh man, growing up, every kid I knew would get a stocking full of candy on St. Nick's Day, we'd go to school and say, what candy did you get? Neither of you.

David: Sorry. Did you live like in Alaska or something?

Jessica: I lived in Milwaukee. Well, my kids got candy. Sorry that yours didn't. Peter, you can go first because you were not as rude in your response.

Peter: Alright, I am going to stick with the prophets, thinking about all the things that God promised long before Jesus ever came as a way of preparing for our celebration of Jesus coming at Christmas. And so this week, the prophet is Zephaniah.

David: Oh, that's a hard one.

Peter: A hard one? Why do you say that?

David: The book of Zephaniah is devastating. It's like we have this one little passage of joy and then if you go and you read the whole book, you're like, oh my God.

Peter: Yeah, I mean the first two chapters.

David: It's terrifying

Peter: Yeah, the first two chapters are pretty awful. So of course the lectionary gives us the happy part at the end.

David: Right, there we go.
So as we've been talking about, it'll be important to take this text in context.
But the verses that the lectionary has given us are incredibly beautiful.

David: Oh, they're beautiful.

Peter: They're beautiful.
And they're just filled with promises.
In fact, it was really Zephaniah that kind of made me think about wanting to do a series on the prophets.
You could really have done all through Advent, you could have preached on this one text actually and drawn different promises out of it.
It's that full.

David: And it's a text that is kind of the signature text for the third Sunday in Advent.
You know, Rose Sunday, Rejoice, the Gradual, the Intro, everything.

Peter: Okay, so Jessica, maybe would you start by reading, I'm going to have you read all the way from 16 to 20.

Jessica: On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
"Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.
The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."
"I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you.
At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you.
I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles.
I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame.
At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home.
I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,"
says the Lord.

Peter: Do you notice
how many I will, I will, I will.

Jessica: Yeah, that's kind of a cool text.
That's exciting-sounding.
But what God will do.

Peter: There's so many promises there that you,
in some ways you just kind of meditate on that
whole set of verses and think about all
these things that God's promising that
He's going
to do for His people.
And so as you think about a sermon on
this text, I think there's a couple ways
you could
go about it.
You could kind of preach on all of the I
will so many things and just the
abundance and
overabundance of all the promises of God
here.
That would be a little bit harder to
stick with a single metaphor.
You could choose a single one of these
promises, one of these I will do this and
lean into
it, or you might select a few to address.
And to be honest, I'm not even sure which
of those options I would take, although
if
I were going to do either one or a few,
I'll share with you the ones that I would
focus
on.
But so I want to have a sermon on this
one that is very future oriented, that's
God 600
years before Jesus was born through the
prophet Zephaniah after two chapters of
judgment against
God's people for their unfaithfulness,
against the nations for their
unfaithfulness.
Then comes this just basket full of
promises that are so comforting.
And so what I would suggest, like I said,
I'm going to think about three different
of
these promises that I think are kind of
captured my attention that you could

explore either
all of them or just one of them.

David: So you're thinking that preachers going to contextualize which promises they select on the basis of where his people are at.

Peter: Yeah, I mean you figure out which promises would be most helpful, would be most necessary for your congregation. It might be the kind of thing, which promises have you not preached on, have you not addressed? Because you get a text like this where there's so much to draw from, you don't kind of reflect on your own preaching the last months and the last year. How have you proclaimed the gospel? How have you not proclaimed the gospel? And then maybe let that provide some direction for your selection here. But the three that I find most compelling, the first one is in verse 19. Would you just read the first half of verse 19 one more time, Jessica?

Jessica: Behold at that time I will deal with all your oppressors.

Peter: I will deal with all your oppressors. I love that. God's saying I will deal with them. When do you have somebody say that kind of language? I'm going to deal with, you know, you get a bully at school and the teacher, the principal, you know, a beloved principal says, well, I will deal with him. Let me deal with him. You worry about this. You have somebody says that who has the authority and the might that is greater than the oppressor. And that person will say to you, you

don't worry about this.
I will deal with that.
And I love this idea of God dealing with
the oppressors, those who oppress the
people of God.
And so I'd want to think a little bit if
I were to go down this path, I'd want to
think
a little bit about who are the
oppressors.
I want to be a little careful not to get
too kind of national political kind of
oppressor
in that sense.
You could take a cue from Luke where
Jesus tells John the Baptist, you know,
when John
the Baptist says, are you the one who is
to come?
And Jesus says, look around.
The lame are walking, the blind are
receiving their sight, the lepers are
cleansed.
And so you could look at the oppressors
as being the brokenness of creation, even
sin and death and sickness.
That could be the oppressor.
Of course, you could look at the devil as
the oppressor, the one who's behind all
oppressions.
But this would be a chance to spend some
time reflecting it, naming actually.
There are oppressors out there.
There are oppressors in here.
And God will deal with them.

David: Well, I kind of like the I mean, I'd be
interested to study the Hebrew on that
verb is right,
because it's it's interesting.
I mean, maybe God will deal with them in
a way that you wouldn't deal with them.
So you know, maybe he'll convert them.

Peter: Well, this does go back a little bit to
chapter at the beginning of chapter three
in Zephaniah.
So there's chapter one is against Israel.

Chapter two is primarily against the nations.

And then the beginning of chapter three, it's God will judge both the nations and the people of Israel, but he will judge them to purify them.

And so you deal with them by sometimes the scriptures talk about dealing with the oppressors by destroying them.

The sense, at least earlier in Zephaniah, is that he's going to deal with them by purifying them.

Which is a different, different approach there.

So I, you know, I think about God being the heavy, God being the protector, the defender.

And that would be one way you could go with that.

Jessica: I think it's really helpful that you pointed out that the oppressors are not necessarily groups of people with whom we disagree. Because I think sometimes when we are afraid of the declining position our church has in society, right, we feel like we're being attacked and oppressed. And so when God says I'll deal with the oppressors, we might misunderstand it to saying God is dealing with the people who disagree with me. Ha, they're going to get it. Instead of dealing with my sin or sickness or the devil, the things that you named, I think that's really helpful.

Peter: Yeah, and that's where I appreciate both that and what you said, David, about, you know, looking at this is one time I haven't looked in the Hebrew, so I'm not sure what it says.

But to see if there's a connection between dealing with the oppressors here in verse 19 and what comes previously in chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, there might be something there where God is dealing with the nations that there could be something to connect there. The other one that I would, well there's three, the second one that I would look at exploring would come in verse 17. Actually, read all of verse 17.

Jessica: The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing.

Peter: Okay, the ones in that verse that capture my attention is the rejoice and the exalt. And you could even just focus on the rejoice because what's interesting about this verse is God is the one who is rejoicing. Not, I mean, at the very beginning of this text, sing aloud, O daughter of Zion, shout, rejoice and exalt with all your heart. But this is a promise, a promise that God is going to rejoice. And so you think about God being one who delights in and takes joy in and laughs with and celebrates. The promise is that God will rejoice over you with gladness. He will exalt over you with loud singing. I love that image of God as one who takes joy in his people. And of course he takes joy because of what he is doing for them and through them in Jesus. But so that would be another one of these promises that you could kind of chew on.

I think about kind of an example of this in our lives.
You know, when you've got kind of a proud parent who just rejoices at, you know, their kid is in the band and, you know, middle school bands, those are awful, awful. So that kind of paternal image.

David: Of course, verse 17 says he will quiet you in His love.

Jessica: That one was my favorite because it reminds me of rocking my babies and trying to quiet them by singing to them.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, that's another one you could explore.

Jessica: Can you imagine God being that gentle with you and just trying to calm you down by stroking your head and singing to you?
I don't know.
That's pretty sweet.

Peter: Yeah, so I will rejoice over you.
You could also go there and explore that I will quiet you.
He will quiet you, it says there.
The last one that I would consider addressing would be in verse 20.
Would you read the first half of verse 20, Jessica?

Jessica: At that time I will bring you in.
At that time when I gather you together, for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth.

Peter: Alright, the emphasis there, bringing you in, gathering you together.
When I gather you together.
That's actually a theme that comes up in a couple different places in this prophecy.

Earlier on in verse 18, it says I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival.

In verse 19, it says I will gather the outcast.

Then in verse 20, when I gather you together.

This gathering that God will do through his son Jesus.

We're getting close to Christmas and we're preparing to celebrate sometimes alone or

without loved ones and those who mourn, those who are outcast.

If you were going to explore this one, you could emphasize the communal part of what

God is doing in Christ.

That he is gathering Jews and Gentiles, he is gathering all peoples, the lame, the sick,

the mourning, the outcast and he's gathering together as the people of God.

You could explore that one too.

Maybe even have a combination of these.

I'm not sure how I would put it together.

These different promises of God in this text to me provide so much, so many images and

ideas of what God is doing in Christ.

That it could be a gaudateia, a joyful Sunday in Advent.

Jessica: That's probably the most time I've spent in Zephaniah.

Thank you, Peter.

What about you, David?

What would you preach on?

David: Well, I would go with the Philippians text.

And actually, I'm really interested in just working with one verse from the text.

And so it would be one of those Sundays where we would just read one verse and lean into it and slowly unpack that verse.

So Jessica, if you could read verse seven.

Jessica: And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
I love that verse, by the way.
Good choice.
Thanks for picking it.

David: Okay, why do you love it?

Jessica: I'm asking God to guard the two most important aspects of my faith.
To me, my mind and my heart.
And if he can guard both of those, I'm good.

David: Good, good.
Have you heard that verse said frequently or not?
Is it just my childhood?

Jessica: Oh, at the end of sermons.

David: I know, right.
At the end of sermons, the pastors would say, now I don't do that.
Do you do it, Peter?

Peter: I don't think, not normally.

David: Right, but I mean, when I grew up, every sermon would end with that particular verse.
And I was thinking to myself, it's kind of interesting, you know, every service ends
with the benediction, right?
And we have this threefold blessing, the Lord has said three times and the things that
the Lord does for you.
So we've got a threefold blessing at the end of the service.
And for me, the tradition of having this at the end of the sermon was also a threefold blessing.

And so I would have a sermon on the threefold blessing of this verse.

And so I'll just kind of walk through the three different blessings that I think are there.

The first blessing is precisely what you were pointing out, Jessica, that our hearts and minds are in Christ Jesus.

The verse reminds us that God has joined us heart and mind to Christ and that our hearts and minds are in Christ.

And I think for me, often my mind is not where my heart is or my heart is not where my mind is.

I'm doing something and I'm like, my heart's not in this.

And to know, to know that God has placed my heart and my mind in Christ, in baptism, I'm joined to him and that's where it's at.

Even though in my world and my perspective on things, that doesn't seem to be the case.

To me, that is, that's good news.

And you take a verse like, you know, the signature verse of this text, verse four, rejoice in the Lord, always again, I will say rejoice.

And people, I've known people who kind of, I don't know, are frustrated with that verse

because they say to themselves, how could I always be rejoicing?

You know, there are horrible things that happen in our life.

There's horrible things happening in the world.

How can I always be rejoicing?

And then the question is, well, you're always in the Lord.

When are you not in the Lord?

And if you're in the Lord, there's always a cause to be rejoicing because He has you.

And so good news there, the heart and the

mind are in Christ.
That's the first blessing.

Peter: What's nice about that is it gets more,
just rejoice in the Lord.
There's just, it's a little bit more
abstract, but here your hearts and your
minds, like
you said, Jessica, kind of both your
thinking and your feeling, you might say,
in the Lord.

David: Right. Yeah.
So God has joined us.
The Father has joined us to his Son in
heart and mind.
So that's the first blessing.
The second blessing is that God is
guarding that.
Right?
God is protecting it.
So that tells us one thing, that God
cares about it.
That us being heart and mind in Christ is
very important to God.
And it's something that God himself is
going to guard.
And Paul would have known something about
guards.
I mean, he's in prison when he's writing
this letter.
He has guards who are watching him.
Right?

Jessica: That's right.
I didn't think of that.

David: Yeah.
Yeah.
And so he's kind of talking, I think
Philippi was a Roman colony.
Right?
And so they would have had the presence
of guards there, keeping the peace of
Rome right.
So that Paul is kind of looking around at
the world and recognizing that even
though

he's filled with guards for another reason, that he has a God who is guarding his heart and mind in Christ Jesus. And so I think that's a, you know, I think of that image. Remember that story in the Old Testament of Elisha and his servant? And they're in that city and they're surrounded. And Elisha prays that God would open the servant's eyes so he could see all of the angel armies that are surrounding the city. There's a situation of God guarding, right? God guarding in ways that we don't understand. And to think that the Apostle Paul, who is in prison, would be encouraging people that God is guarding their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus is just, I don't know, is comforting to me.

Peter: Well, you guard things that you care about. That you want to keep safe or keep secure. And it is interesting thinking about, you know, Paul writing this himself and that's just a...

David: Yeah, I mean, in Philippians, I think it's in Philippians where he's talking about, you know, whether I live or I die. Well, that's in Romans, right? I live or I die, I'm the Lord's. But in Philippians, he's also, you know, I don't know which better for me to be here or to be gone, but, you know, it is better by far. Philippians 1:21, I think, you know, that if I were to die, it's better by far to

be
in Christ, that type of a thing.
So, yeah, so Paul is kind of seeing
himself as a drink offering that might be
poured out,
you know, so his death is kind of on his
mind and yet he recognizes that even in
the turmoil
of this world, he has nothing to fear
because God is guarding his heart and
mind in Christ Jesus.
And so then the third one is that God is
guarding us with a peace that surpasses
all understanding.
And so it is God's peace that is guarding
us.
And it kind of makes you wonder, you
know, like if I was afraid I was going to
be attacked
by enemies who had power, then I would
want God's power or God's strength
guarding me.
If I was afraid I was being attacked by
enemies who were smarter than I was or
who were more
crafty than I was, then having God's
wisdom guard me would be good.
But if I'm afraid of being attacked by
those that create anxiety or create
disorder in
my life, then having the peace of God
guard me is a wonderful thing.
And I mean here the peace I think is not
just kind of an internal peace, but we're
talking shalom.
We're talking that well-being, that
well-ordered world that is fruitful and
fertile and just.
That is the promise.
I mean, you think about coming Christmas,
that one of the names of Jesus, this child
will be born, he'll be called the Prince
of Peace, right?
And so this God of peace, this God of
shalom, he is using that to guard our
hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus.
And it's a peace that surpasses all human

understanding.

I think there's two ways you could take that.

Maybe it's a peace that we don't understand, could be one way of thinking of it, but you could also think of it as surpassing in terms of being better than.

It's a peace that's better than all human understanding.

And you know, there's a peace.

I was just in the ICU with my mother, right?

And so she's being diagnosed.

We don't know what's going wrong.

There's this tightness in her chest.

She's having difficulty breathing.

We think it might be a heart attack.

And they discover that it's blood clots in the lung, which is really bad.

She's okay now, thanks to the Lord, but it's really bad.

And I still remember that the minute they actually identified what it was, there was this sense of calmness.

I mean, it's a horrible critical crisis, but at least you know what it is, right?

And so there's kind of human understanding can provide some sense of peace, but God's peace is even better than human understanding because this peace of God is from the one

who knows all things and who, you know, his thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

His ways are higher than our ways.

And although we live in a world that is disordered and that disordering of the world may at times

make my heart and my mind struggle with things, that my heart and my mind are in Christ Jesus.

And God values that and he guards that.

And not only does he guard it, but he guards it with his peace that is better than any

human understanding.

And so I think there's just a beautiful
threefold blessing in this verse that we
could celebrate.

Peter: I agree with that, the way of thinking
about peace surpassing understanding,
because all
of us can relate to the difference
between, you know, we say, if I just
understood things,
I could handle it.

David: Right.

Peter: So the not understanding to the
understanding, we know that jump.
And to say, that's kind of like the jump
from the understanding to this peace
that's even
better than understanding.
So it kind of takes it the next step.
And that would be the kind of like, man,
if that's the kind of peace we're talking
about,
then yeah, I can not only can I handle
whatever it is that's going on, but I can
take comfort
and rejoice and rest ...

David: And rest in this.
That's right.
That's cool.

Jessica: That's so comforting, because when you
are in an anxious time or a time of
crisis, you
need to sleep.
And it's so hard, at least for me
sometimes then, to be peaceful enough to
fall asleep
because your mind is racing.
There's all these things you're like, oh,
am I going to do?
How am I going to handle this?
But when I think of this verse, that his
peace will just surpass all my
understanding.
I can still sleep.

I can just put it there.
So I have peace enough to rest for a
while because it surpasses my
understanding.

David: And that peace is guarding, guarding you.
And what is it guarding?
It's guarding your heart and your mind
being in Christ Jesus, which is God's
gift to you
to begin with.
Right?
It's a beautiful thing.

Peter: Yeah, that's cool.

Jessica: Oh, that sounds good.
Thank you, David.
Well, that's all for today.
We have more free resources to guide your
next step in planning at
ConcordiaTheology.org.
I think you should check it out.
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.
Um, Peter, you can go first because you
were not as rude in your response.