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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're pretty good preachers.  
All right, let's get started.  
David, where are we in the church here?
- David: We are at the third Sunday after the Epiphany, a time when the church celebrates the revelation of Jesus Christ to the nations.
- Jessica: And Peter, what are the texts this week?
- Peter: The texts are from Nehemiah 8, 1 Corinthians 12, Luke 4, and Psalm 19.
- Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would preach on to determine who goes first.  
So the 1 Corinthians text describes when one part of the body gets hurt, the whole body suffers.  
It's making the analogy with the body of Christ.  
So which hurts more, stubbing your toe or your finger?
- Peter: Jammed thumb is the worst thing you could possibly have.
- David: Really?
- Peter: Yes.  
Okay.  
I used to get jammed thumbs when I was playing ball as a kid, baseball or basketball or something.  
And every time when you have a jammed thumb, everything you do hurts. It affects almost everything you do.  
So I would say jammed thumb is the worst.
- Jessica: All right.
- David: I'm going to go with you.  
I've only stubbed my toe.
- Peter: So you're just trusting what he's saying instead of going on your own.
- David: Because it didn't hurt too bad.
- Jessica: Stubbing your toe hurts, but I shut my finger in the car door once.

And it's such a small thing and I thought I was going to die.  
So that hurt really bad.  
So I would have said finger too.  
So I'm going to say Peter wins because you just went along for the ride, David.

David: I did.  
Well, I know.  
Do you wish me to have injury or something?  
So I have something to talk about.

Jessica: I'm glad that you have not experienced the pain that Peter and I have.

David: Thank you.  
Good.

Jessica: So you win.  
You get to go first.  
I changed my mind.  
There we go.

David: Okay.  
Thank you.  
So I decided that I would go with the 1 Corinthians text.  
And actually on our last episode, Peter, you had talked about diversity and unity.  
And I just thought that this text from Corinthians has a really  
important message for us in the  
church today about the ways of God and diversity and unity.  
So Jessica, could you read verse 12?

Jessica: For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members  
of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ.

David: Okay.  
So Paul is revealing to us unity in diversity.  
And I think this is really a surprising moment in the letter, at least for me.  
Because if you think about 1 Corinthians, it starts with the problem of diversity.  
Right?  
I mean, you've got the church is fragmented.  
People are following Peter.  
Some are following Apollos.  
Some are following Paul.  
Some are saying, I want none of that.  
I'm following Jesus Christ himself.  
I mean, you've got this church that is so divided.  
And so you would think that the apostle Paul would argue for unity in terms of uniformity.  
Unity and uniformity.  
And so and yet what Paul does is he chooses this analogy of the body  
and the diversity of the body, and yet it's all one.  
And so there's unity in diversity.

And I just think, I think we can sometimes fall prey to that trap where we want unity to be uniformity.

And I mean, you know, Paul could have chosen, you know, other illustrations.

He could have chosen, you know, a Greek building with all of the columns.

And the columns all have to be the exact same so that the building is level.

Right?

So that the roof is level.

Or he could have chosen a set of stairs where every stair is exactly the same so that you have this uniformity as you're moving along the way.

And yet he chooses something that is diverse, that has all of these different parts.

And he's saying this is what the church is like.

And so the diversity that they had in the opening that was fragmented and contentious, there's still room for diversity.

It's not unity is therefore uniformity, but unity, there's unity in diversity.

When you've got unity in diversity, your task of mission is not establishing conformity.

Your task of mission is actually confessing the faith in the appropriate way for the context in which you're located.

Peter: Yeah, I'm thinking about how much the word diversity is such a third rail in our context.

David: Maybe variety, unity and variety?

Peter: No, I think diversity is actually not a bad thing.  
In the beginning of 1 Corinthians you've got division.

David: So instead of division, diversity.  
I like that.

Peter: Or you get kind of a diversity as the world approaches it or diversity as, you know, you get at it a couple different ways.  
But I think, I don't know, what do you think, Jessica?  
It seems like that's maybe something that we need to talk about head on more rather than avoid.

David: Right.

Jessica: Absolutely.  
Especially because we're so fragmented.  
As a community in a church, we might feel like we're all the same on Sunday morning, but we're not.  
They kind of pull you apart.

David: So take something like, you know, raising your children in the faith.  
Christian parents can raise their children in the faith by sending their children to parochial school.  
They can raise their children in the faith by homeschooling them and they can raise their children in the faith by sending them to public school.

Jessica: And yet those things kind of divide us a little bit.

Maybe not on purpose.

David: Right, but they do divide us because for the parents it's such an important choice on their part.  
You take baptism.  
Some churches baptized by sprinkling water, others baptized by immersion.  
Other people are going to be baptized.  
It's still baptism.  
It still does the work of God, but it's a quite diverse situation.

Peter: Well, part of this is, did you guys catch in 2024 at the end of the year what the word of the year was for 2024?

Jessica: What was it?

Peter: Merriam-Webster's word of the year was polarization.

David: There we go.

Peter: And it was interesting.  
I saw this just on a news clip at one night.  
And the polarization was defined as, along a spectrum of positions, the middle has completely disappeared.  
And so people have fled to the poles.  
And what that means then is diversity of practice or diversity of ideas, that kind of stuff that's healthy, that goes along with it.  
And so you're either on this end or you're on that end.  
And if you're on that end, you're on the wrong end.  
It's generally the way we interact.  
And we're kidding ourselves if we think we as Christians are not shaped just as much as the rest of our culture is by that.

Jessica: We think if we can get people to think the way that we do about other issues, then they're going to also think the way that we do about our faith.

Peter: Absolutely.  
And that's where I think where the sermon could go is that Paul's not in any way saying diversity of saviors or diversity of theology.  
He's not talking about that at all.  
He's talking about the manifestation of the Christian life.

David: Right.

Peter: In particular context.

David: Yeah.  
How the Christian life is going to be led is going to change depending upon where you're living.  
And the context in, how do I confess the faith in this context?  
That's the question we're asking.

You are confessing the faith.  
You're part of the body of Christ.  
You've been variously gifted.  
All of the variety of gifts in the church, not everybody is the same.  
And you don't want to make it look like, well, the only way you can serve the church is if you sing in the choir.  
Or the only way you can serve the church is if you do this or that.  
Right?  
I mean, there's a variety of gifts.  
And it's this fear of, when we start, it's so weird, isn't it?  
We just have this way of taking, we have this God who gives us all of these gifts.  
And so rather than just open our arms and celebrate all these gifts, we grab one and start fighting with them.  
And this one's better than that one.  
And it's just so crazy.  
And so I think there's a good message for us that as we approach other believers and their practices may differ a little from ours, we want to know, why are you doing it this way?  
Because unity, there is unity in diversity.  
And unity is not necessarily uniformity.

Peter: And that's where the text is really helpful.  
We were in one spirit, we were baptized into one body, made to drink of one spirit.  
I mean, our unity is in the spirit that God has given us in our baptism, and this one Lord to whom we cling and trust in.

David: Yeah, and Paul kind of pictures, like your question about stubbing your toes, you know, near him.  
You know, when part of your body hurts, the rest of the body comes to care for it.  
The rest of the body is concerned about it.  
And so there's this very beautiful...

Peter: But not in Corinth.

David: I know, I know.  
And not in Corinth they weren't doing that.  
And that was the problem.

David: I know.

Peter: And so the question is, is your congregation a congregation that is actually doing that or not?  
I think Paul's leading us there.

David: Right, right.  
And he's kind of revealing that with that diversity there's a different...  
You know, there's this close connectedness between all of these various parts because they're all part of one body and they all care about one another.  
They don't just say, well, you go do your thing over there, we'll do

our thing over here.  
No, we care about one another.  
We're part of the body of Christ.  
We're being led by the Spirit.  
We're serving God and the world.  
And we care about how people are doing it, but it doesn't all look the same.  
We're not all an ear.  
We're not all a mouth, right?  
I mean, we've got these different things.

Jessica: You know, and it starts by hurting with each other, right?  
And hurting when they hurt.  
Then you put yourself in their position and you think about, maybe I don't agree with them and they're just a foot, but if they hurt, I need to hurt too.

Peter: Well, and you're talking about love, and that's where Paul goes at the very end.  
I'll show you a more excellent way, and that goes right into Chapter 13.

David: And then we're back at the wedding in Canaan.

Peter: And then we're back.

Jessica: Great, thank you, David.  
Peter, what about you?  
What would you preach on?

Peter: I'm looking at the Luke text, Luke Chapter 4, and I was just noting last week we read kind of the introduction of Jesus through his actions, his first sign, and so we learn about Jesus last week through what he did.  
And then last week, this week, we're introduced to Jesus and Luke's gospel with what he says, what his claims are.  
And so, you know, there's a little symmetry even between last week and this week with the gospel reading like there is with the epistle reading.  
So I thought we'd start maybe just by looking a little bit more carefully at how he introduces himself.  
Jessica, would you start by reading 16 to 21?

Jessica: And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read.  
And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.  
He enrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Peter: All right, and we could keep going.  
You know, it's such a great moment where it's interesting.  
I mean, you look at these verses and it's almost like slow motion, verse 16 and 17.  
You know, as was his custom, he stood up to read and the scroll of

the prophet was given to him and he unraveled the scroll, found the place.  
So it's really slow motion.  
And then he reads from Isaiah and then in verse 20, it's like slow motion again.  
He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.  
And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed.  
I mean, just kind of this.

David: Yeah, so the narrator is really slowing down the pacing.

Peter: Right.  
Right.

David: Giving us more details so that we slow down.

Peter: Right.  
So I would, as I'm telling this, however I tell it in the sermon, I'd want to try to recreate a little bit of that slow motion because it really does heighten then what he says.  
Because both the beginning and the end, it's focused on, well, who is he claiming to be?  
And that's where you get these claims from Isaiah.  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me.  
And then he says, this is fulfilled in your hearing.  
And so I want to take seriously, I think in this sermon, the anointing of the spirit on Jesus.  
We often highlight that at his baptism.

David: Right.

Peter: The dove, because there's no dove here.  
But this is actually a really important text.  
I think you had a podcast not long ago with Dr. Sanchez on the Holy Spirit.  
And the relationship between Jesus and the spirit is actually something that's really important and not in some sort of abstract Trinitarian.  
Sometimes the debates of the early church on the same substance of Jesus and the Father and that kind of stuff, it got a little bit theoretical and philosophical and still really important.

Jessica: Dr. Sanchez said we need to land the dove.

Peter: Yeah, you need to land the dove.  
And the dove is landing.  
I mean, metaphorically here, not literally landing this time, but you've got Jesus talking about the Spirit.  
And so I'd want to maybe do a little bit of a, if you don't go the route of the first Corinthians, which you could also highlight the Spirit there, the unity.  
But the Spirit's relationship with Jesus, I think, could be really interesting to explore here and also helpful because if we understand Jesus' relationship with the spirit and that is the Spirit that's given to us, then we're going to understand who we are as followers of Jesus a little bit more fully.

So as I thought about kind of a theme or a way I'd start to think about titling a sermon like this, I might even just bring up the concept of inspiration.  
And what does it mean to be inspired?  
Divine inspiration, the divinely inspired one, something like that.  
When you think about being inspired, do you guys ever use that word kind of in a non-Christian context?

Jessica: Sure, something that motivates you to do something creative.

Peter: Okay, so inspiration as inspire or as motivation.

David: Yeah, the arts, right, that inspiration, it seems to set something apart that it's more than simply the person who's doing it.  
There's something more there.  
It's inspired.

Peter: Yeah, something could be inspired.  
That means it's different, it's unique, it's maybe creative.  
So I would maybe think about how we use the concept of inspiration inspired in our culture.  
We also, of course, talk about inspiration often in the church and usually we're thinking about the Bible, right?  
The Bible's inspired.  
But in this inspired text, the inspired one is not the book, the inspired one is the person.  
And so I would even back up just a little bit in Luke chapters one through four, where if you look at the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit leading up to this, you've got Jesus is conceived by the Spirit.  
That was the message to Mary in Luke chapter one.  
And then Luke chapter three talks about He's anointed with the Spirit, that's the dove thing.  
But then right after that, at the beginning of chapter four, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness.  
And so you've got this intimate relationship between Jesus and the Spirit already.  
And so when He shows up to the synagogue that day, he's basically just letting people know what was, I mean, there's nobody there to witness the wilderness.  
Most of them were probably not at the baptism.  
They weren't there, of course, at the annunciation.  
And so now Jesus is making explicit what the reader already knows from the first three chapters, and that is that Jesus himself is inspired from the very beginning.  
So that would be maybe a first thought would be Jesus is the inspired one.  
But then the message that he has or the words that he says here in chapter 18 especially is his message is inspired.  
So Jesus is inspired.  
Jesus is the one.  
You mentioned the Christ, the word Messiah Christ, the anointed one.  
So He's the anointed one and His message is also inspired.  
And so I would think about, well, what was He inspired to say?  
If the Spirit is upon me to do what?



Well, to preach good news.  
And so you could dwell in this language from Isaiah a little bit.  
A couple of things about the text in Isaiah.  
The good news to the poor.  
And you could think about, well, who are the poor?  
You could think of it economically, which is maybe a little bit reductive.  
You could think of it spiritually, which is sometimes where we go,  
which is a little bit maybe allegorical or maybe a little bit ethereal even.  
Or you could say, well, who are the poor?  
And pick up on who Jesus talks about later on in the text.  
The two examples that he uses, Elijah and the widow of Zarephath,  
Elisha and Naaman the Syrian.  
What did the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian have in common?

Jessica: They were not Jews.

Peter: They're not part of the people of God.  
They're not the chosen ones.  
And so if Jesus goes later to these people who are outside, then the  
poor, the good news to the poor  
is not just the people who are on the inside who are hurting or who  
are suffering or something.  
It's also the people who are on the margins, people on the outside.  
And so you kind of think about that a little bit.  
There is this interesting, twice in verse 18, we read from Isaiah,  
liberty to the captives, liberty to those who are oppressed, release, freedom.  
I just took a quick look at a commentary and he pointed out, the  
commentator pointed out  
that release in the Gospel of Luke is often associated with forgiveness.  
And so you've got the, of course, when we as Lutherans preach, the  
forgiveness of sins is essential to what the Gospel is all about.  
And this, you can conceive of liberty in terms of freedom from sin,  
freedom from guilt, freedom from that kind of oppression.  
So notice what you've got here.  
You've got in this quotation from Isaiah a way to talk about, and  
two, the people who are there  
preach good news, the forgiveness of sins, and also preach good news  
toward those who are on the margins.  
The same commentator, Joel B. Green, is the one who I was looking at.  
He pointed out how forgiveness in Luke's Gospel also always draws people into community.  
It restores them to the community.  
And so you've got this message is one that's for the people of God, forgiveness, freedom.  
It's also for those who are outside to bring them in.  
So you've got kind of that move.  
And then, which would lead me then, I guess, if I were going to have  
kind of three moves in the sermon,  
from Jesus being inspired to His message being inspired to the people being inspired.  
And that's where I'd maybe point toward the 1 Corinthians passage.

Because especially from last week, it talked all about the Spirit.  
We've been given one, this week's text also said that you've been given one Spirit to drink, made to drink of one Spirit.  
So you've got a Spirit-filled people, and this Spirit-filled people have been forgiven.  
They've been brought together.  
And now they are sent out to share that forgiveness, to bring others into the community.  
A little bit of a, you almost have a little bit of Pentecost here in Epiphany, with the Spirit of the Lord going forth on Jesus, through Jesus, to His people, through His people, to all people.

David: So what would you want to do with people being inspired?  
Because the text kind of ends on a negative note, right?  
With the people not being inspired at all.

Peter: Well, the people who heard him and Luke then took offense.  
And I think they took offense at the fact that Jesus was saying, pointing out the non-Israelites were included.  
The widow and Naaman.  
And they're getting the message that it's not just for them.  
And that He is, His message is going to go beyond them.  
I think you can, I mean you'd have to read this a little more carefully to see if that seems to be the source of the wrath that they experience.  
But I think that would lead to the people then, what kind of people are we?  
Are we inspired as Jesus was inspired to go to all people?  
Or are we inspired sometimes just to stay a little bit more insular?  
So I think you could have that be, you could even acknowledge that the people in the synagogue were offended by that.

Jessica: Some cultural context would be helpful, because I think we forget how anti-Gentile the Jews would have been.  
Because they were God's special people, and the other people were dogs.  
And now Jesus is saying, look who God has picked, and it wasn't you.

Peter: Yeah, and that's a really, it's a little bit different than last week with John 2, where everyone was, you know, just as the disciples believed. Everything seems to be, this Jesus is great. Now it's, whoa.

Jessica: Before he said that about the Gentiles, they said his words were gracious.

Peter: Yeah, right.

Jessica: They liked it until he said that, then they want to throw him off the cliff.

Peter: Right, and this sets the tone for the whole Gospel of Luke.

Jessica: Thanks Peter. That's all for today.  
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While you're there, you'll find episodes of our other podcast,

Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived.

Peter talked about that podcast today.

We did a whole episode where I talked with Dr. Sanchez and Dr. Oswald about the Holy Spirit and Spirit Christology.

It was great. You want to learn more? Check it out.

Tangible: Theology Learned and Lived.

You can find more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart and Tangible on any of the major podcast apps.

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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.

Jessica: That's when Jesus said, not today boys, and he kept walking.