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Jesscia: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart, where 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. David, where are we in the church year?

David: It is the first Sunday in Lent, a time that the church sets apart for solemnity, repentance, and preparation for Easter.

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

Peter: The texts are taken from Deuteronomy 26, Romans 10, Luke chapter 4, and Psalm 91.

Jesscia: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would preach on. It's the first Sunday in Lent. It's the time we focus on repentance and awesome hymns, beautiful, haunting melodies. What's your favorite Lenten song?

David: I like O Sacred Head Not Wounded.

Jesscia: Nice.

Peter: Yeah, I like that.

David: And I like the meditation upon the head of Jesus. I think that's a beautiful hymn.

Peter: I've always liked My Song is Love Unknown. That's a real pretty reflection on this incredible love of God in Christ.

David: Samuel Crossman, I think, or something like that. That is beautiful.

Jesscia: Now each of you will sing that song. Peter, go!

Peter: Nope!

Jesscia: That's awesome that you said My Song is Love Unknown, because that is my second favorite Lenten hymn.

David: What's your first favorite?

Jesscia: I really like Come Though Fount of Every Blessing. It doesn't need to be Lenten, but some people consider it Lenten. I love that song. But my second one is My Song is Love Unknown. Good choice. Peter, you win! You get to go first!

Peter: All right. I am going to suggest, well, as you read these and you think about Lent, when you choose the first Sunday in Lent, you're kind of setting the tone for the whole season a little bit, or you can. I suppose you don't have to. But I was reading through the text, and I was a little surprised. The Deuteronomy text seemed a little odd at first, so I thought I'm not going to go.

David: It did to me too.

Jesscia: Good! I thought that too. Explain it to me. Great.

Peter: Oh no, tell me why you think it was odd.

David: Well, I thought it was going to be about Israel being tested in the wilderness, which would makesense, because then Jesus is Israel reduced to one, being tested or tempted in the wilderness. So I was, and I read through it, and I'm like, this isn't about Israel being tested in the wilderness so much. So that struck me as odd, and I'm like, it almost looks like a Thanksgiving text.
Okay. What about you, Jessica?

Jesscia: I was reading about the first fruits that the people were bringing, and I thought it was a tithing text.

David: Oh, there you go.

Jesscia: And so I didn't know how that would...

David: Stewardship Sunday.

Jesscia: Right?

David: Wow.

Jesscia: So how did that fit in?

Peter: Okay, so those were kind of the thoughts I had at first, and then I read through their text, and then I went back to the Deuteronomy passage, and I actually think that's the text I would preach on. And here's why. Season of Lent, which is a long season, and if you ask Lutherans about church years, seasons of the church year, often Lent is kind of prominent. Of course, we preach Christ crucified, all this leading up to his death and his resurrection. But sometimes I've grown a little bit less satisfied with Lent recently, because how much it leads us to focus on ourselves and to think about what we're doing, our self-reflection, our repentance, what we're giving up. And in kind of an unintended way, certainly, sometimes Lent can lead us to think more about ourselves than I think is actually all that helpful. So when I thought about this text, I

thought, well, it's not leading me to think about myself.

David: Right. Yeah.

Peter: What is it leading me to think of? And the heart of the text, Jessica, I'm going to ask you to read verse seven to nine, which I would say is kind of the heart of the text that leads us to think about this.

Jesscia: Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our reflection, our toil and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into the place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Peter: OK, so of course, Moses is talking here about the exodus and the deliverance, the mighty acts of God, the wonders that he did to deliver them and to usher them into the promised land. And I'm thinking to myself, that's not a bad way to think about Lent. Instead of thinking about myself, when I need to give up, what I am doing in my sin, to think about God's act of salvation, God's deliverance, God's work for us, the good gifts that God gives us. And that's going to lead me to frame Lent more like the Thanksgiving and the joy and the gratitude, the celebration that we have because of God, what he's done for us. I would think, I think I might organize the sermon around the logic of cause and effect and have the cause be God's mighty acts of deliverance. And I would invite the Hearers to recognize His work and the salvation in Israel as His work for us, too. We're part of this people that go all the way back there, all the way back to those days. And of course, we go back to when the same God who delivered Israel delivered all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus and live in this long train of people who have been remembering and thanking God and praising God for His continual acts of salvation, even to the present day as He brings individuals into His family through forgiveness and salvation. So the cause would be these mighty acts of deliverance. And then I would suggest there's three things in this text that are effects of this cause. The first would be because of what God has done, we rejoice. I would like to make Lent a season of joy rather than a season of sorrow.

Jesscia: Whoa, put your seatbelts on, this is crazy.

David: Repentant joy.

Peter: Yes, repentant joy. And so let me give you an example of repentant joy. I was at a conference a long time ago and it was one of these interactive things and everybody was

supposed to write on a sheet of paper their sin or something like this. And then they were going to be collected in buckets and then people were taking these buckets up to the front and they were dumping these buckets of sins into this thing. And the person up front probably burned him or something like that. Light him on fire. But what was striking about this experience was as we were writing these things down and then as we started to put them in buckets, the music that was being played was upbeat. And it was this joyful, it wasn't like a full on celebration, but it was it had a little bit of a pop to it and it was positive tones. And as the people were gathering these sins to come up to to confess to repent, there was kind of the joy of repenting to someone you know is going to forgive you. When we repent, we know who God is. We know His character. And so we can repent with joy, with anticipatory gratitude and joy. I don't repent to God scared to death. Is He going to forgive me or not? I know He's gracious because I've heard that proclaimed. You've preached that. And so we repent with even a joy and even an excitement. Does that make sense? Is that you think that's helpful? Does that work against the grain with Lent too much?

Jesscia: No, it sounds great.
I think you're right about Lent being a time where I think about myself too much and trying to give up chocolate for 40 days. And so then you get all focused on that and my own sinfulness and turning in and looking at myself. Oh, I think I need to look at Jesus more. And it's like and you're right. I don't think you can fully confess your sins unless you are sure of forgiveness. Otherwise, why would you do it?

Peter: Well, that's what the Confessions Article 12 in the Augsburg Confession talks about the definition of repentance is contrition or our sin and faith in the promise to forgive. So even the nature of repentance itself is filled with faith and faith produces love, joy, peace, all these things. And so, I mean, I get this from verse 11. You shall rejoice in all that the good the Lord has given to you and to your house, you and the Levite and the sojourner who is among you. So this remembrance in Israel and Deuteronomy leads to joy. And as we remember God's work, not only for Israel, but also for us in Christ.

David: Well, it reminds me of that passage in Hebrews, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

Peter: Yeah, right.

David: So that Jesus, His mission, His journey to the cross was done for the joy set before Him to bring about salvation to you. And so approaching, you know, approaching Lent through the lens of the work that Jesus is doing for you, for the joy of having you, which has been set before

Him. I like that idea. I think that's a helpful way of approaching the whole Lenten season.

Peter: So the first effect of remembering God's works would be to rejoice. Another idea that's important in this text is the idea of giving firstfruits. You mentioned stewardship earlier. And so the idea of not just rejoicing, but it's a time of release. Where we release our grip on things that are important to us. The whole concept of firstfruits is that you're, I mean, you're giving firstfruits because that's your job and that's your livelihood to grow crops and what's very important to you. But you release the first, you release it, trusting that God will continue to provide. And so instead of giving up chocolate, which you should probably do anyhow, Jessica.

Jesscia: Thank you. Thanks. I appreciate that.

Peter: I should do it. Instead of giving up something that we all, I mean, it always kind of rubs me the wrong way when, when you give up stuff in Lent that you really should be given up all the time.

Jesscia: I gave up doing the dishes one year. That was the best Lent.

Peter: But if you give up something that's actually important to you, that's a good thing, but you give it as a first fruit. And so I think about, you know, whether you do stewardship of your finances or stewardship of your time or stewardship of your energy, releasing something that's important to you out of gratitude to God and out of love for the people that you can serve with those things.

David: So do you want to, do you want to focus on the, you're choosing the word release because you want to focus on how we take ownership of such things? Is that, and we need to release them or, cause I was, I would think return might be another word.

Peter: You could return, but I've got return for a third.

David: Oh, there we go. Okay. Well that makes sense.

Jesscia: Don't mess up the Rs.

Peter: So again, this is, you know how this is with preaching. I know. You know, you try to find some alliteration. If it's too much of a, if a force don't do it. Uh, but return would work and I actually had that as one of them, but then that was the third one I was going to have as return in a different way. Uh, so, uh, but that's the idea is, you know, giving up something important. Let's not just give up something that we should probably give up anyhow. Uh, but let's, let's, let's follow this lead in terms of first fruits.

Jesscia: That's great. I had a friend who for Lent did a weekly volunteer

service. And so she was kind of releasing her time.
Yeah. So that's just, it would be a second effect of remembering or thinking about God's, God's acts of learning. So we rejoice, we release, there won't be, we return, but I would say return to worship. Um, now this, again, this might be a stretch. You could probably just do two, uh, in a sermon and that'd be fine, but the return to worship would be, I, I thought about that with the language in verse 10, you shall set down before the Lord, your God and worship before the Lord, your God. And I'm thinking about if you're, this is the first Sunday in Lent. And if you're trying to encourage people to return for. Midweek. You mentioned Maxwell's series. Um, this would be a way to say, to encourage the people of God to, uh, in light of God's wonderful acts, we return together regularly. We return every week. Of course you don't preach the choir to people who are there. You don't tell them to go to church, but maybe this would be a way to an extended invitation to return, uh, for this life together that we share, uh, either Wednesday or, you know, next. I mean, I think if you look at statistics from what I've heard, regular worship nowadays is, uh, like once or twice a month for most people. And so maybe invite them to return on a regular basis or something like that. So maybe return would be better for the giving one and just leave that out. I don't know. Uh, but these were kind of some first, first thoughts and ideas.

Jesscia: Was there another R? I thought you said there was four R's.

Peter: No, there was three, but I suppose you could say.

David: Return regularly.
Return regularly. But, uh, you could also say, uh, but I mean, you could, you could frame it and we're all remembering the works of the Lord and that leads us to rejoice, to release, to return. Um, so, and all preachers can figure out the best way to use that language, but the idea is there is I really want to set the tone for Lent.
That's a season of joy and Thanksgiving and sharing and gathering together as the people of God. To me, that would be a much more helpful approach to Lent than kind of an individualistic, what are you giving up or how bad are you? Uh, I just think it might be a refreshing approach to Lent.

Jesscia: That's wonderful. How encouraging. I focus on my sins too much the way it is. That's a long time to only see yourself.

Peter: Yeah. And if, if people are going to spend time thinking about anything for 40 days, I want them to think about Jesus, not themselves.

Jesscia: Sounds good. David, what about you?
What would you preach on?

David: Well, I was, uh, I'm going to go with the gospel reading, the temptation of Jesus. Right? So we have that every year. Lent one is the testing of Jesus or the temptation of Jesus. And for me, um, I'm not so interested in the individual temptations, which, you know, Luke gives us a listing of the three of them, but I'm interested in the dynamic that is present and it's in the first two verses. So, uh, Jessica, if you could read verse one and the beginning of verse two.

Jesscia: And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil.

David: Okay. I just find that dual motion really intriguing that Jesus is being led by the Spirit and led into a place where he's being tempted by the devil. So you've got the Holy Spirit leading Jesus, and you would assume that the Holy Spirit's going to lead Jesus into places. I don't know. Uh, wonderful places. That's what I would expect. But the Spirit instead takes Him to a wilderness and leads Him into the wilderness and there in the wilderness, He's being tempted by the devil. And so you've got kind of, I mean, you've got a Holy Spirit who's leading us and you've got the devil who's trying to mislead us. And so you've got this dynamic tension that's present in all of the temptations. Every temptation is an opportunity for Jesus to reveal to us the Holy Spirit's leading or an opportunity for Jesus to reveal to us how He's being misled by Satan. So for me, my sermon would basically be laying out those two dynamics that are present in the exact same situation so that we kind of see our lives as followers of Jesus, as always walking on this path where we're being led by the Spirit. But we could be misled by Satan. And by the grace of God and by the work of God, we're able to follow the leading of the Spirit and avoid being misled by Satan. So, for example, I think of the Apostle Paul in the thorn in the flesh, right? That this is a, this is a messenger of Satan to buffet him, right? So that Satan is involved, seeking to mislead Paul, to cause Paul to question the work of God in his life. He begs three times that God would take it away from him. And then God says, but my grace is made perfect in weakness. God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is actually using this as an opportunity to lead them deeper into the mysteries and the wonders of God's kingdom. So like if you took Stephen, right, and his sermon and the response to his sermon in Acts when they're stoning him for blasphemy. And this is an opportunity to be misled by Satan and believe that God has abandoned you. And yet it becomes an opportunity of being led by the Spirit when the heavens open and Stephen sees the vision of the resurrected Christ and prays for the forgiveness of the very people who are stoning him.

Peter: Right? Yeah, I mean, you could look at Peter when Jesus said, who do you say that I am? And he says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And he says, you've been led by the Spirit. The Father is real to you. And then he says, but don't go suffer and die. Now you're led by Satan. Right, now you're being misled by Satan. Yeah, I think any one of those that where somebody went through a difficult situation, and of course, you know, you see that in our lives too then.

David: Right. That's the whole point, right? So you've got these events in Scripture where it's the same thing happening, but it could be for evil or for good. And so it's kind of this walking this tightrope. But I think for me, then that's the issue is that we recognize that as followers of Christ, the Spirit of Christ is leading us, leading us out into the world, leading us in our relationships, leading us in our vocation as a father, as a mother, as a husband, as a wife. As a child. And the leading of the Spirit does not necessarily mean everything is going to be beautiful. The leading of the Spirit can sometimes be into those wilderness areas where we could easily be misled by Satan. And yet, this is the place where the Spirit himself works. And the Spirit can bring us through those temptations so that we have a better sense of the way in which God is at work in our lives.

Peter: I like how this could help people, you know, some people, probably me, is convinced sometimes that God is leading. And I'm just following God. I'm following his leading and I'm very sure of myself and we're going this way because God is leading me.

David: Right.

Peter: And this kind of sermon could help me check that just a little bit and say, I should be cautious because there's also potential that I'm being misled. And so I think it could lead to a certain amount of humility where we take seriously this dual nature of the Christian life.

David: Right. Yeah, and then even think about, you know, our own life where we're, sometimes we're hesitant to say things that happened in our lives because they're rough. And we're, you know, not sure how they're going to be received and yet to trust that the Spirit is leading us. The Spirit leading us in the wilderness, we can be led through a place where we're tempted, I guess. I don't know. Jessica, do you think that would resonate with people?

Jesscia: During the service that you're preaching this, they're going to say, and lead us not into temptation, right? Because it's in the Lord's Prayer.

David: Right.

Jesscia: So it's something that they say at least once a week. And I think that means it'd be helpful.

David: Yeah, and actually in that prayer itself, you know, we say God tempts no one to sin, but then we pray that Satan, the world, and the devil do not mislead us, or the devil, the world, and our flesh do not mislead us. And so that language of leading and misleading is even present in our explanation of that petition.

Peter: What I like about this, and actually I think you could do with either this one or the idea from the Deuteronomy text, is you could probably set the tone for the whole season of Lent and even choose future texts and explore them according to this framework. So if you look at the words that were coming to my mind were Lent misleading and misleading or something like that.

David: Right.

Peter: You go through a whole season of Lent where you're thinking about the leading and the misleading. I haven't looked at the text for the next couple weeks, but I bet you you could find texts that help you use this frame, leading and misleading.

David: So that we have that tension.
So there's that tension for the whole season of Lent. Likewise, you could probably find a way to have some rejoicing or remembering in a way release things. That could be something, could be a frame for all that leads us to the Sundays. I always felt like in the parish that if you didn't go to Wednesday night, it was hard to get a coherent Lenten experience because there wasn't something necessarily tying the …

David: Sunday mornings together.

Peter: So I really tried to find a way, especially later on in my ministry, to find a way to tie the whole season of Lent for Sunday worshipers as well. And I think either one of these could be a theme for the whole season.

Jesscia: Great. Thank you, David.
That's all for today. We have more free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org. We also have a new resource available just for Lent. Lent is a busy time for church workers and it's hard to take time for your own Lenten meditation. So we have a free resource to help you stay connected to God's word. Dr. David Maxwell, one of our systematic theology professors, he preached a number of sermons at my church during Wednesday Lenten services a few years ago, and they were incredible. They were so good that I asked him to preach them as part of a video production so they would be available to others. Those videos are also available for

you at ConcordiaTheology.org. I personally recommend them. Trust me, he's a pretty good preacher. I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau. Join us here next week at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: Instead of giving up chocolate, which you should probably do anyhow, Jessica.

Jesscia: I gave up doing the dishes one year. That was the best Lent.