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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 most of the time. All right, let's get started. Peter, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We're talking about the fourth Sunday in Lent, a time where we continue to make our way with Jesus to Jerusalem to remember and to celebrate His passion and his suffering and his death and His resurrection from the dead.

Jesscia: And what are the texts for this week, David?

David: The texts are Isaiah 12, 2 Corinthians 5, Luke 15, and Psalm 32.

Jesscia: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach about to determine who goes first. So, the gospel reading, we have the story of the prodigal son and the father running out to meet him and giving him the best robe. Describe your favorite coat.

Peter: So I am today wearing a coat.

Jesscia: That's your favorite coat?

Peter: It's not my favorite coat, but it's on today. But it's a coat, it's a jacket that my dad wore back in the 60s. And when they moved into a retirement community, they were getting rid of a lot of the stuff and he showed me all the things and Katie said, you can pick that one. Well, and I like it because it reminds me of my dad.

David: It's nice. I like your coat.

Jesscia: Very nice.

Peter: 60s.

Jesscia: Awesome.

David: Well, my favorite coat is Peter's coat. I love that coat and I want it. So, I don't know. There's a leather coat I like simply because it's really heavy. It's kind of like a weighted blanket. So, that would be my favorite.

Jesscia: My favorite coat is right there. It's black. It has a hood. There are lots of pockets. It's rain resistant and I can wear it like three seasons of the year. I'm going to go with Peter.

David: Oh, I knew that from the beginning.

Jesscia: You win. You get to go first.

Peter: Well, that's actually, your question fits kind of with the direction. I'm going to go because I'm suggesting that, at least I would preach, I think, on the Gospel reading from Luke 15, which of course is the parable of the prodigal son, which is probably among the most familiar, don't you think, of the New Testament stories and parables?

Jesscia: I hope so. I love it.

Peter: And it's one of these that, you know, every time this would come up in the lectionary I have two thoughts to myself. One would be, it's so familiar, I should go somewhere else. Two, it's so familiar, I got to lean into that.

David: I know. I know.

Peter: So that's kind of the...

David: Well, the thought you didn't have, and I'm glad you didn't have it, is that it's so familiar I have to find something nobody has ever heard before and say it about this parable.

Peter: Oh, yeah.

David: Because I think, you know, when a really familiar text comes up, I love that text. It's so comforting and I want it to still mean what it has always meant. And there's value in that.

Peter: You don't want someone completely undoing what you hold dear.

David: Or going in some weird direction with it, a way I've never heard before. It's kind of like, you know, no, Psalm 23 should always be Psalm 23. Everything else in my life is up in an upheaval and I've got this beautiful text. Now, you know, continue to make it beautiful for me. That's kind of how I think.

Peter: And that's kind of the tension. And what I'm going to suggest is that I think there is a way to get at the wonderful good news of a text like this, but to get at it in a fresh way in kind of almost through a different medium. And so what I mean by that is, well, let me first start before I get to that. A couple of things I think we should keep in mind when you're preaching this text is I think it's pretty important

to keep in mind who this parable was told to and the context in which it was spoken. These familiar parables, sometimes we kind of yank them out of the context. And Jesus was talking to or he told this parable in response to Pharisees who were grumbling about who he was hanging out with. So this man receives sinners and eats with them. And so in a way, I think it's helpful to keep in mind that he's the occasion for this parable is were those religious people who didn't like Jesus interacting with people who were of low esteem or people who were sinners, who were the tax collectors. And so there's some connections I think to have when you're talking to people in a Christian church. Sometimes, some congregations are not quite as welcoming or maybe look down on those who aren't, who don't know when to stand and when to sit and how to say everything. And so this is a chance to maybe to push a little bit on these congregations who maybe aren't very welcoming. The other thing to keep in mind is that this is, of course, the third of three in a row. You've got the parable of the shepherd and his lost sheep. You've got the parable of the widow and her lost coin. And then you have on the heels of that this familiar parable of the father and his lost son. And I think that's kind of helpful to keep in mind. If we focus just on the son, then we're kind of missing that the story is really about the father. So you'd want to have that there. So at any rate, the way I'm going to suggest you get the sermon is by through the use of an image. And I came across a painting when I was in the parish that I just love. You're familiar with it? Probably the Murillo, the Bartolome Esteban Murillo painting. So I'm going to suggest, here's what I did. I printed off pictures for Dave and Jessica. And I'm going to suggest, if you're listening to this, that you Google Bartolome Esteban Murillo. You've got to spell that. There's no way. M-U-R-I-L-L-O. He was a Spanish painter. And the name of the painting is called The Return of the Prodigal Son. And it was painted, I guess, for the church in Seville in 1670 or so. And just a little background about this painting. At least from what I read, he intended this to be a painting that captures forgiveness. And so what I'm going to ask the two of you to do as we're talking here is, as you look at this painting, again, if you're driving and listening to this, please don't Google it. Wait till you get back to your office. But just look at this painting, Dave and Jessica. What stands out to you when you look at this painting?

Jesscia: So the father's wearing this big, billowy robe. And the son is half naked with rags on him. And the father, it looks like he's just encompassing the son because his arms are around him, but like his robe looks like it's covering him. I think that's cool.

David: I like the way in which behind the father, you have all of these gifts, right? You have the new clothing for the son. You have the ring that's going to be put on

his hand. You've got all of these servants that are ready to welcome the son and clothe him and give him a sense of authority within the father's household. And so that's great.

Peter: When I look at this painting, what stands out to me are the clothing. You've got the tattered clothes of the son, no shoes on his feet. I mean, look how grimy and dirty his feet are. If this were a scratch and sniff painting, there'd be some problems there. You've got the father with this robe. It's almost like this huge carpet. It's just over-encompassing. It's this big, huge thing. And then you've got these fresh, silky, you've got the clothes, the ring, and the sandals that the servant is bringing to the son. So with this picture in mind, Jessica, would you read verses 21 and 22 in the text?

Jesscia: And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe, put it on him, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.

Peter: OK, so notice to me, it's striking when you look at this, that he doesn't actually forgive the son. He doesn't say anything to the son. The son comes home and says, Father, you know, I'm not worthy to be called your son. And the father welcomes him not through direct speech to him, but through what he says to the servants. And there's a couple of things about this that I find just interesting to ponder and to think about. He's enacting what forgiveness looks like and he is restoring him to the family. He is clothing him. I mean, in this picture, you can't feel it, but those clothes just look like silky, smooth clothes that are fresh and that are new. You've got the one servant holding up the ring that is kind of a sign of his restoration to the family. You've got the sandals that he's got no longer walking barefoot for who knows how long. And so you have this enacted forgiveness.

David: Well, it makes sense because you can't hear a painting.

Peter: Yeah. Right.

David: And you're right. It's not in the text. And, you know, the painting is trying to show us, well, what does forgiveness look like?

Peter: Yes. And here's what I want to get away from. I want to get away from the idea that forgiveness is always words. It's not just words, though. It's words that restore its relationship. And I love that the servants are involved in this. And restoration is the key that I want to think about. And I want to preach a gospel promise in this text that highlights the restoration that forgiveness brings. So forgiveness is not just, OK, you say it's OK and you move on, you

wash your hands of it and then whatever. It's a restored relationship. It's a whole new life. It's a welcoming that includes all the people around you, not just the two that are involved here, the father and the son. And so I kind of I want to if I were going to use this image in a sermon, either through some sort of projection or something or some sort of bulletin insert, I would want to contrast the rags and the tattered clothes that the son is wearing with the new robe, ring, sandals that the father is having the servants bring to him and that whole new life. And I'd even maybe imagine what it would be like. And now this would be taken beyond the parable just a little bit. But imagine what it would be like for the son after he's had a bath and he's been cleaned up and has put on the new clothes and is back at the next morning at the breakfast table with his father restored. And so I really want to think about the effect of forgiveness, the impact on our relationships with one another and with God.

David: I think the detail of the painting I would look at in talking about forgiveness is that the contrast between the father's hands and the son's shoulder. I mean, the son's shoulder is a deathly pail and the father's hands are full of life. And you've got this this one little detail that kind of sticks out when you when you look at it, you see how that glows, that portion glows. And it's, you know, God, the father, who is full of life, who created everything, receiving us back into the kingdom and into the family.

Peter: Yeah. And there's I mean, there's so much one of the values I know you've talked about and spoken and written about this, David, but what images can do for helping helping people imagine the love of God in Christ. I also like the guy who's holding the ring, the servant. He's looking at the other servant like, are you serious? This guy's he's actually being restored. Look at the father. He's not condemning him. He's actually welcoming him. And so you have this observation of the and that's what we're doing. We're observing the restoration here. And then, you know, this is where you get to proclaim that this is God, the Father and and his restoration of you and me when he sends His Son to forgive us and to restore us. This is what it looks like, at least one way to imagine it.

Jesscia: This would be a great image during the children's message. Have a copy of this picture in color, print it out in color and show it to the kids. And you can talk about look at those rags he's wearing, like our sinfulness. Look how the father's welcoming him back. And that'd be a good image for the kids.

Peter: Well, in like Bible class, too, or Sunday school, you could just show this picture and ask people to share what they see. You know, one of the things that I

appreciate about the lectionary this week is that the the Second Corinthians five text is all about the ministry of reconciliation that God has given to His church. And the Luke text kind of gives you a picture of what that reconciliation looks like. So if you're preaching, for instance, on the Second Corinthians text, this could be a nice way to tie the two together.

Jesscia: Thanks, Peter. What about you, David?

David: Well, I'm going to work on the prodigal son as well. I are the prodigal father, however you want to call the parable.

Peter: Right.

David: I think the I'd like to talk about the father's love, and that would be kind of the whole idea is to lay out what the father's love is. There's a saying that we have that home is where the heart is, right? That it's not a physical place that makes a home. It's definitely not living with the same people under the same roof. That doesn't make a home. It's the presence of love. And in this parable, we have a home that is broken apart. And we have a younger son who has left it. We have a father whose heart is broken, that one of his sons has left. And we have an older son who's resentful. So we've got the tragedy of a home that's fragmented and broken apart. And I think the theme is how the father's love can restore a home. And so the three things that I would say about a father is the first is that the father gives all. That's that first part of the parable. The son asked for the inheritance early. He's basically saying, Dad, I wish you were dead. And his dad says, OK, here you go. And so we have a father who gives all in love to his son. And it wouldn't be hard to talk about how God the father has given all when he gives his beloved son for us. And so you kind of have a proclamation of the gospel there in relationship to the sinful actions of the younger son. We have a father who gives all.

Peter: So now maybe what I thought you were going to say was if you were to emphasize the father gave him all in a way that was, you know, he abused that. So in some ways, even maybe before gospel, I would think you could also go somewhere you say, you know, God gives us all things, not yet Jesus. He gives us kind of all that we need for this body and life, kind of all the creation.

David: We misuse it. We claim it as our own.

Peter: Yeah, that kind of right. So that would just be a different way to get out. That would be your way. Wouldn't be more kind of straight to the gospel.

David: Right. Yeah.

So my three points are going to be positive.

Peter: OK, good.

David: So we have three points. First one, the father gives all. The second one would be that the father forgives all. And we have that beautiful image that you have of a younger son coming to realization of what he has done. And I think it's interesting that, you know, the son doesn't come back to be a son. He's hoping that he can possibly be a servant. Right. So he doesn't see himself as being restored to the family. But he basically says, well, my father's servants receive better than I'm getting here. And I'm going to go back and see if he can make me a servant. And so that whole confession of the son is a little bit complicated because is it really a confession or is it a strategy for being treated like at least a servant? Right. So when the son comes back and he's like, you know, make me a servant and the father as you said.

Peter: Bargaining.

David: Right. It's kind of a bargaining. And the father doesn't even engage in a conversation with it. The kingdom that the son tried to create is not as good as the kingdom the father created. And there's that passage that I was reminded of in that Psalm, Psalm 84, better to be a doorkeeper at the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. Right. And so the son has been dwelling in the tents of the wicked and he's come to the realization that it would be better to be just a doorkeeper, not really dwell in the household, but just be a doorkeeper at my father's house than be where I'm at. He goes home and what the father does is the father forgives all. He not only gives all, but he forgives all. And he brings the son into the family, gives him the ring, clothes him as a child and welcomes him home. And then the last one would be the father invites all to come home. And that's that image of the father leaving the party to go out and invite his older son home. And so the father, you know, if you have a fractured home, the father is doing everything he can to bring that household together again. So all the fractures are being repaired. And so he's got the son who took the inheritance early. He forgives all, brings him back. He's got the older son who's resentful of that. He reminds the older son that, hey, it's all been yours since the very beginning. The father gives all. And then he brings the older son in because the father invites all to come home. So for me, it's just a matter of the father gives all, the father forgives all, and the father invites all to come home would be kind of how I would work with it.

Peter: It seems to me that that's, you know, everybody knows what broken homes are like. Most people deal with some sort of brokenness in their

home. And the state of homes today, a lot of people are really hurting. I would think that could resonate a lot with a father who does all these things for his people to bring them home. That's I like that.

David: Yeah, there's a, La Sierra University in California has three bronze sculptures for the three parables. It has the lost coin, the lost sheep, or the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. And that if you look at La Sierra University, the lost son, you'll see the sculpture. And it's really beautiful because you've got a door lintel. And on one side of that door lintel, which would be the inside of the house, you have the older son who's kind of turned away from the father. His hand is over his heart, but his head is kind of turned back and watching what's happening. On the other side of the portal, you have the father stepping out of the house and you have the younger son on the ground. And the father is in this very precarious position where he's running and it would almost look like he would fall over. He doesn't because he's bronze, but it looks like he would fall over to greet the son. And so you've got what is a fractured home. You have an inside, you have one that's inside and yet resentful of what's going on. You have one who's outside, repentant or suffering. And you have this father who's trying to bring the younger son in and trying to turn the older son to face him and the family. And it's just I think it's a nice sculpture that you could work with to kind of lay out the three ways in which the father's love is there. And that'd be kind of how I would work with it.

Jesscia: Those sculptures sound awesome. Tell me again where to find them.

David: OK, so the image is on Wikimedia Commons, which is a collection of images that are freely accessible and able to be used in the public domain. And so if you go to Wikimedia Commons or Wikimedia.org, you can then look up Bartolome Murillo, The Return of the Prodigal Son, and you'll find a downloadable image. And you can find the Prodigal Son sculptures at La Sierra University there on Wikimedia also.

Jesscia: Great, David. Thank you. That's all for today. We are in the middle of Lent. It's a really busy time for church workers. It's hard to take time for your own Lenten meditations and devotions. In order to support you, we've produced a free video series. It's called Honest Repentance. It offers devotional sermons, one for each week of Lent. They're like 12 minutes long. They are written and preached by Dr. David Maxwell, professor of systematic theology here. They are very good sermons. They are a great way to help you focus on the cross during the season. You can find them all on Concordia Theology.org. You can find this free resource and Lectionary Kick-Start and episodes of our other

podcast all on that website, Concordia Theology.org. If you'd like to see the show continue, please subscribe for free. Share, leave a review. 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: You've got the guy who's going to kill this fatted calf and you've got this little kid who loves the calf. Yeah, that's going to be killed, right? I mean, this is for the feast, right? So you see you see the preparations. I mean, the whole the whole…

Jesscia: He doesn't look like he loves the calf. He looks hungry. Look at the look on his face. He's like, oh, that's going to be a burger.