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Jesscia: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart. We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon and 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, where are we in the church here?

Peter: We're talking about the text for Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, the most important week of the guest of the Christian calendar as we think about the revelation of God and Christ through suffering and death and then resurrection.

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

David: Deuteronomy 32, Philippians 2, then John 12 for the Palm Sunday Procession, and Luke 22 through 23 or John 12. And then for Psalms, you have Psalm 118 or Psalm 31. So we have a lot of texts.

Jesscia: There are a lot of choices for today.

David: Which is what makes Palm Sunday so hard.

Peter: Yes. Well, it's one of the things that makes it hard.

Jesscia: You guys say that every time. Christmas, oh, it's hard to preach on Christmas. Oh, Easter, it's hard to...

David: These festival services.

Peter: I think the festival services are hard. And of the festivals, I think Palm Sunday is among the hardest because there's so much packed into Christmas and Easter that are, you know, there's a hundred different ways to look at it. Palm Sunday is kind of like the lead up to Easter. So it's even harder, I think.

David: And so important.

Peter: Yeah. Yeah. But I think, you know, I think one of the reasons festival Sundays are hard is it's kind of like it's hard giving a birthday gift to the same person every year. Because you know what you're supposed to do at a birthday. You're supposed to give a gift that's meaningful and thoughtful. And yet someone's just now another year older. And you have to come up with some way to do it that honors the birthday and also is somehow fresh. And I just feel that kind of pressure when I

think about the festival services, especially Palm Sunday. What's a fresh way to tell the same story that leads to the same important week? And I just it's just a challenging.

Jesscia: Katie, if you're listening, tell him what you want for your birthday. Don't make him have to guess.

Peter: This year she bought her own earrings and then told me, here's what you're giving me for my birthday.

David: You said, could you wrap those?

Peter: That's right.

Jesscia: All right. So as always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you choose to preach about to determine who goes first. So Palm Sunday, it's a parade. When you were a kid, did you go to parades?

Peter: I don't like parades, really. I didn't when I was a kid. I don't like them now. I find them incredibly boring.

David: You know what? I've never liked parades either.

Jesscia: Oh, man, I went to parades all the time. They throw candy at you. You just sit there and they throw candy.

Peter: It's usually not good candy.

Jesscia: But it's free candy.

David: That's true.

And you would just fill your baseball cap with all the candy you could run out and you grab it and

Jesscia: stuff.

Oh, so you both hate parades. So neither of you win.

David: But I recently have discovered the joy in them.

Jesscia: All right. David, you win. You get to go first.

David: Thank you. So I decided that I'm going to go with the Philippians text. Philippians 2, this beautiful hymn, early hymn of the church about Christ Jesus. And particularly, Jessica, could you read verses eight and nine, which is kind of the turn right in the middle of the hymn.

Jesscia: And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

David: Great. And so here we have that major turn. Christ humbles himself to the point of death on the cross. And

then God the Father raises Him up and exalts Him and places Him, gives Him the name that is above every other name. And so I don't know what I'm thinking is, have you ever watched movies with the director's commentary? Jessica, you love movies.

Jesscia: I do. I have listened to those.

David: And why? Why do you listen to the director's commentary?

Jesscia: Oh, because then you find out what was going on to make the movie. The first time you watch it, you shouldn't do that. You should be engaged in the narrative. Oh yeah, how did you make it and why did you make these choices? It's fascinating.

David: And once you've seen the movie and then you listen to the director's commentary, sometimes you see things you didn't see before. You have a much better sense of the story that's going on, all that kind of stuff. So for me, I think kind of the metaphor that I would be using would be that this Philippians 2 is the director's commentary on the Passion of Christ that is happening in the major Gospel reading. And I might even think about doing something creative in the sermon, so the Passion reading is long. It's so long that you almost wouldn't have a sermon or wouldn't have time for a sermon if you did the Passion reading from Luke 22 and 23. And what I think I might do is I might have a lector prepared to read the Passion reading and then the sermon would be kind of like the director's commentary. And so we would have, I'd divide the reading up into portions and there'd be places where the reading would stop and then I would, as the preacher, kind of offer a little bit of director's commentary on did you see this, what is happening here, why is this happening, or something like that, and then go back into the Passion reading. Because we're dealing with a reading that people are familiar with and yet the director's commentary can often take you deeper into the story. And for me, this passage from Paul is actually the director's commentary on what is happening. That if you just look at the events, it looks like Jesus is helpless and He is powerless and He is completely out of control and God, his Father, is not intervening to do anything for Him. He's praying to God the Father and nothing's happening and it just looks like the entire world is kind of off its, you know, off kilter. And yet when you read the passage that you read, you find that this entire thing is the obedience of Jesus to the will of God the Father, being obedient to that will in humility until the point of death. Jesus, you know, has been obedient to the point of dying on a cross and so that's like the lowest that you could possibly go. And then the turn is not, you know, he died, you know, the point of death even death on a cross, but God has

highly exalted him. It's not but, it's therefore. On account of this, because of this, God has exalted him. And so the death of Jesus is not the world gone out of control. It's Jesus being completely in control as He is accomplishing the will of the Father for salvation for all people. And so as we read through the passion narrative, I think we could kind of play on that picture of it looks like things are out of control, but actually Jesus is in control and He's willingly suffering for the sake of salvation. And so I think you could just kind of take different scenes. You know, you've got the Palm Sunday entrance where it looks like, you know, the Messiah has finally come to Jerusalem and all of the crowds are excited about Him. You might talk about what were some of the ideas, some of the promises of God that people would have been expecting to come true now that Jesus, you know, so this is kind of the director's commentary. These are the promises that might have been in their mind. This is why they're singing. This is why it's such an important entrance. And yet deep down in Jesus, his point is to come to Jerusalem to die for these people. You know, how often would I have gathered you under my wings? But you would not. And He has come for rebellious people to die for them. And so we've kind of got the two pictures of what's going on, what we see going on, and yet the willingness of Christ to suffer. I think you could do that with almost any of the events.

Peter: Yeah, I think this is a good way to... So it's always hard on Palm Sunday to know how much to lean into the whole Passion Week and how much to lean into the triumphant procession.

David: And why would we lean into the whole Passion Week on Palm Sunday? What's the argument?

Peter: Well, you know, people say most members don't come back for Thursday and Friday.

David: Right. So if they don't come back to Thursday and Friday, you want them at least to know that something happened.

Peter: What do you think? What's your perception, Jessica?

Jesscia: I think if I was sitting in church on Sunday and it was Palm Sunday and then you did the crucifixion in the service, I might be like, okay, see you Sunday. I might be tempted not to come back. I might be more likely to come back if the preacher said, all right, this is the end of Palm Sunday. There's more coming. Come back on Friday to find out. You know what I mean? If you actually wanted to make the narrative of the story like a play in your life where you are part of each step that's going along.

Peter: Well, I think that's the argument. And, you know, when I was in the parish, I usually leaned into that perspective more. And I had a small congregation, so I kind of knew I could really

encourage people to come. And so I think it is nice to have Palm Sunday as its own thing.

David: As separate, right.

Peter: But the reality is, especially, I think, in bigger congregations, sometimes when you're looking at how many people just don't come back. But it is a chicken and the egg, you know, which comes first? What do you encourage? So I think it's worth thinking through. But I think if you're going to go the route that you're talking about, having this director's cut type of move, especially with the language from Philippians, I was picturing as you were describing it, like, I don't know if you happen to have something like a screen where you just have the Philippians passage up there the whole time. And then you could, during the readings, kind of, you know, sometimes you can kind of have a little bit of a graphic that highlights certain phrases and words.

David: Certain words.

Peter: That could be kind of meshing these two together. That'd be kind of a different way to do the director's cut that would always be drawn back to Philippians.

David: Right. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, because you've got so many interesting moments, you know, that the inscription above Him is King of the Jews, you know, and yet you have a crucified king and you have a thief who believes in Him. And so this criminal who's suffering the results of his actions is suddenly now being welcomed into paradise. I mean, just so many of these moments of transformation, you know, it is this and therefore God brings about this transformation because of what Jesus is doing. And so you kind of highlight, you know, the perspectives of, highlight the perspectives of other people in the narrative and then always come back to the perspective of Jesus and the Father and what's being worked out in our midst.

Peter: Well, and that's where the turn that you highlight in the text is key. You know, that turn could be, you could consider that in a variety of different ways.

David: Yeah. Yeah. Well, and I mean, even, you know, with the arrest, you know, you've got, you know, you have a moment where Peter brings out his sword and, you know, in our world, we're like, yeah, that's an appropriate response. They're arresting Jesus, defend Him, fight for Him. Don't just let Him die. And then you have Jesus not just tell Peter to put away his sword, but then make this a moment of healing. So you've got this transformation from hurt to healing that's going on because of what the mission of Jesus is. You know, it's not to conquer his enemies, but to convert them and heal them. Right. And so you just have like these small moments where you point out

a scene, you know, it's almost like it would be even better if we actually had a visual of the passion itself. And then you stop the movie and you talk about what's happening, but you know, you're reading it and then you're stopping and just, I would try to highlight an image of something that's happening and then just kind of pause and said, you know, kind of think about this, what's going on here? And then you move on. So you don't cover the whole thing. You give people a taste and then you invite them back on Monday, Thursday, Good Friday for a much deeper dive.

Peter: It seems like if you're going to go this route, having some conversation with and even hand selecting a reader would be really helpful. We've got a member of our congregation who's got a career in acting and when he reads, the thing comes alive.

David: And so for a thing like this, man, have somebody who really can read well. And then if you share what you're going to say with that person. They know what to emphasize. They know how to slow down and pause as they're telling the story and they're already prepping people for focusing on that moment.

Jessica: But don't skip the palms. As a kid, that was so exciting that they would hand palm branches to us and sometimes you'd have the kids process in and it told me it's something big is happening. This is some kind of a big deal going on at church, something starting. And so I think it leads up to Holy Week and Easter in a way that kids can feel the excitement and then you got to be part of the service. You got to walk in with the palm branches and you got to go home with this. I don't know. It set the mood to me for that whole week that something is different about this week.

Peter: Well, and that's not a bad way to, if you're trying to shift a culture big picture wise to having Palm Sunday be its own thing, what better way than to encourage the children to make it a big thing for the children? Then that kind of sets that tone.  
Peter, what about you?

Peter: Well, I also would preach on Philippians 2.

David: Really? Okay.

Peter: But I would give it a little different, I would lean more toward the Palm Sunday celebration and so there's a couple of different ways.

David: Because you like parades.

Peter: Because I love parades, that's right. No, actually I wasn't really even thinking about parades as much as I was thinking about what Palm Sunday as kind of Jesus entry onto the stage for what was to come later on in the week.

And so to prepare the hearers for Holy Week without going the whole Passion reading route,  
I would talk about Jesus kind of introducing himself or being introduced to the week in a way that acknowledged what's coming but didn't go through all the details of it.

David: So it's giving us a lens or a framework to tell.

Peter: Kind of a lens to look at this. And the reason I find the Philippians 2 passage compelling is it's in Holy Week where God makes Himself known to us most clearly and explicitly in Christ. The Gospels, most of the Gospel count, I mean the majority of it is through his Passion and his Resurrection. And so I think this is just a good time to think, well who is this God that is our Savior? Who is the one who has created us? How has He made Himself known? And I think Philippians helps us consider that. Now when I first looked at this text, what came to mind was this comedian who did this bit called The Young Lutheran's Guide to the Orchestra. The idea is he spent like 20 minutes talking about if our Lord were to play an instrument, what instrument would he play? And kind of the following thing was, well what would a Christian play if they were going to play in the orchestra and be faithful still? He walks through all the different instruments, so would he play a French horn? No a French horn is too pretentious. Would he play the bassoon? No I mean seriously, can you take the bassoon seriously? That wouldn't work. How about the oboe? And he goes on this bit, oh the oboe is a little bit too risqué. The oboe scenes in movies are not the kind of thing you want to draw on. You can alienate all of our musician listeners. Then there's the flute, he says well should it be the flute? No the flute is kind of a show off, they just kind of draw attention to themselves. So then he goes to the string section and says well maybe He should play the bass. And he'd say yeah, you could think maybe the bass is very reliable and sturdy and yet there's a darkness to the bass that kind of not quite sure is appropriate. Then it could be the first violin, but the first violin is the one who thinks the whole orchestra is really about them. And they think the conductor is actually taking their cues from the movement of his bow. And they say well maybe the second violin, but then the second violin is serving the first violin. So that's not really good. And then he goes to the brass and the trombone is too goofy, the trumpet draws too much attention to itself. And so it's really a delightful thing and I won't spoil it because he kind of lands on there's two instruments that maybe the Lord would play. And I'll only share one of them and if you want to watch it you can find it online probably. The percussion. And he said percussion players in the orchestra are endlessly patient.

They will wait and they will wait and they will read the measures and then they get their one little ding.

And the idea here is that the percussion delivers precisely what is needed at just the right time and they're always in the back. It's a humble place to play. It's not the showy person. And so I think that came to mind especially reading the first half of this Philippians text talking about what kind of God do we have. And these verses 5 through 8, maybe Jessica you could read those.

Jesscia: Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Peter: All right so this is all about the humiliation of Jesus right? We have this God who set aside his divine prerogative, set aside his equality with God and was the two words I would pick up on would be humble and obedient. He humbled himself by becoming obedient. And what I would do is I think emphasize this whole week as a week of humble obedience of Jesus. I mean this is where you could pick up on as much as you want from the Passion. These images of Jesus obeying His Father, images of Jesus experiencing and displaying humility in a way that really shapes the way people think about who God is. And then I would also pick up on this is, you know, when Paul writes this Philippians he begins the whole thing by saying have this mind among yourselves. And so it's not like this reflection on Jesus and who he is is just a nice reflection just to think about God and then we'll go home. But this is the mind that we're called to have. And so I think I would have maybe a movement in the sermon back and forth from Jesus to us. Jesus the one who is humble and obedient and images of humility and obedience. And then what does it look like for a Christian to have this mind? And so you might back up to Philippians 2 verses 1 to 4 where it talks about in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. And so maybe I would look for some instances of that in my congregation or in the community. This is where the whole orchestra thing, you know, looking to the interests of others, count others more significant than yourself. And then so that would be kind of a comparison Jesus and His humility and His obedience to us and the call that God has given us to be humble and obedient. And then back to Jesus. So be a little bit of a comparison contrast type of movement in the sermon. Then the verses 9 to 11, the exalted, the raised, the glorified. And then when we think about our lives, the exalting and the raising that will happen when the Lord returns. And so we



kind of live in this moment, this time of humble obedience now as we trust in the promise that when the Lord returns he will raise us and exalt us and bring us together with Christ to himself for all eternity. So I would have it be a sermon that reflects on the humility and the obedience of Jesus and what that means for the Christian life.

Jesscia: Great thank you Peter. That's all for today. We are at the close of Lent. It's a really busy time. You are planning Lenten dinners for your youth group and devotions for your family, extra services and you're planning music for Easter Sunday. You might not have time for your own personal Lenten meditations. In order to support you, we've produced a free video series, Honest Repentance. It offers devotional sermons for each week of Lent for you. The sermons were written and preached by Dr. David Maxwell, Professor of Systematic Theology here at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. They're really good sermons. I highly recommend them. Find them at [Concordiatheology.org](http://Concordiatheology.org). You can find this free resource and more episodes of Lectionary Kickstart and more episodes of Tangible at [Concordiatheology.org](http://Concordiatheology.org). You can also find them at any of the major podcast apps. If you'd like to see this show continue, please subscribe. It's 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: The dress up your dog parade. They had that downtown. What? Yeah, yeah. People come up, they put costumes on their dog.