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Jessica: 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're pretty good preachers.
Okay, let's get started.
Peter, where are we in the church year?

Peter: We're talking about the text for the first Sunday in Advent.
Happy New Year, December 3rd.

David: That's right. We're starting a new church here.

Peter: We're starting a new church here. That's right.

David: Yeah.

Jessica: The green is gone, the blue is here.

David: Or purple.

Peter: Or purple.

Jessica: What? You guys are purple?

Peter: Some have purple.
Our church didn't have it.
In Minnesota we didn't have blue, we just had purple.

Jessica: I thought that was Lent.

Peter: And Advent.
Yeah.
And some congregations.

David: Because they're both penitential seasons in a sense.

Jessica: Oh, sure. You're both waiting.

David: Right. Advent does have the hope theme.

Peter: That's right.

Jessica: Well, what are the texts for this week, David?

David: Well, we have Isaiah 64 as the Old Testament text,
First Corinthians 1, Mark 13, and then Psalm 80.
And then there's an alternate text,
the historic reading for Advent, Mark 11.

Jessica: As always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would
choose to preach on.
And the person to go first this week is,
whosever socks are purple or blue, since those are the colors
of Advent.
Whose color socks?

David: Oh, Peter's got blue.

Jessica: It's all you, Peter. What would you preach on?

Peter: I'm going to think about preaching on Isaiah 64.

David: I love that text. All the imagery and...

Peter: There's lots of imagery and the text itself,
there's a movement to the text that caught my attention as I
was reading through it.

David: And I am interested in that, Peter, because that's my issue
with poetic texts,

is that I think sometimes we just reach in and take one word out of the text.

And I think it's really helpful to think about what's the movement.

So that you can kind of share with people, well, this is kind of the big picture of what's happening here.

Peter: Right.

David: Cool.

Peter: Yeah. So as I was reading through this text and kind of reading in the context a little bit, this text describes, I think at least you could preach this way, it describes the experience of a people who cry out for help, who then kind of are forced to take a closer look at themselves and then have kind of a chastened prayer or conception of who God is and who they are. And so kind of this movement from what we want from God initially to thinking about that just a little bit more deeply and then kind of where we come out on the back end.

David: It happens all the time to me in prayer when God doesn't answer my prayers. Then I start thinking, well, maybe you shouldn't have prayed that day.

Peter: So, yeah, I mean, that's a very realistic experience, right? Yeah, I think it is.

I mean, we kind of have these conceptions of God, no matter how many times we've been shaped by the scriptures in a way that's healthy and good and right, we still kind of expect things from God and think things about God that are kind of warped sometimes.

And I think this text actually gives you an opportunity to think about that. So maybe we could start, Jessica, by would you read this the first three verses, Isaiah 64, one to three?

Jessica: Oh, that you would run to the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence, as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil, to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence. When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

Peter: All right, now I read these verses and I think about this image of God. These are the people of God praying that God would come down, be mighty,

you know, kindle the brushwood, boil the water, make known your name to the adversaries, and kind of this calling down for God to be mighty. And of course, at least to my thinking, you know, this recalls images from the Exodus, from God's might on Mount Sinai, perhaps, the kind of the terror and the wonder of a God who is overall. And so there's this initial prayer that God would come down specifically to, what does it say in verse two, to make known your name to your adversaries, to the nations that they might tremble. And so it's kind of this prayer that God would take it to them, kind of.

David: Right, yeah.

Peter: Which, I mean, I think is a natural prayer for the people of God to say, Lord, take care of your enemies.

David: Right.

Peter: Take care of your enemies.

David: Number one, we know you're up there.

Peter: Right.

David: We know you're up there.

Just tear the heavens apart and come down here.

Peter: Yeah, would you please come down and take care of this? I know, take care of this.

David: I love it.

Yeah.

So it's a very, I could see you preaching that part with a lot of, perhaps, anger, frustration.

Peter: Right.

And a little bit, even in the tone, I would have a little bit of self-righteousness.

David: Right.

So we're right.

Peter: So we're right.

David: And we know who the adversaries are.

Peter: Right.

Jessica: Yeah, who are the adversaries?

Are there nations that are God's enemy?

That doesn't make sense.

Peter: Well, this is, you know, the time of exile for the people of God.

And so the adversaries would be Babylon, would be the enemies that have taken God's people captive

and kind of a call to, I mean, you'd have to do some of the background historical work,

how much you want to get into that in a sermon.

It wouldn't be hard to make the connection, I think, for today.

Anyone who is oppressive to God's people or anyone who's opposed to the gospel,

we're very good at kind of pointing out who our enemies are.
David: Right.
And then you're, you know, kind of the memory of the Exodus,
right?
So there, you know, when we're in captivity, when we were in
captivity in the past,
this is what you did.
Peter: Right.
David: You came down and you delivered us with plagues and all that
kind of stuff.
So we're in captivity again.
Let's call on this God that we remember from the past, these
mighty acts of God.
I want to see some of those.
Peter: Yeah.
So it's a cry for God to show up and deliver.
But then there's a change in these verses.
And the change begins in verse, I think, in verse five.
Would you read verses five through seven?
Jessica: First, I have a question, though.
As Christians, our enemies aren't people.
Satan is our enemy.
People aren't our enemies.
Peter: Well, I mean, you can think about Luther's The Devil, The
World, and Our Sinful Flesh.
And, you know, any one of those three, when they're opposed
to Jesus and the gospel,
are enemies of God and our enemies.
And it could be ourselves.
It could be the world that, you know, when there is
persecution.
So I think you can say that.
I mean, the devil's behind it all.
But we certainly have enemies, internal and external, enemies
of the gospel, I think.
David: There is a way of speaking to God, calling upon Him to help
you and deliver you,
when you feel that you are being oppressed by enemies.
And Isaiah's tapping into that.
Peter: Right.
David: But I think where Peter's going is that this is a, the stance
is not necessarily
the one that we should be taking.
Peter: Well, and this is where the movement of the passage here is
really significant, I think.
And so we start there in verse one, but that's not where we
go.
And so we get to verse five to seven.
Would you read those?
Jessica: You meet him who joyfully works in righteousness, those who
remember you and your ways.
Behold, you are angry and we sinned.
In our sins, we have been a long time and shall we be saved?

Peter: Okay, just stop there for a second, then I'll have you read on.
But so first half of verse five, you meet him who joyfully works righteousness.
And we're thinking, yeah, we do that.
Those who remember you and your ways, yeah, we do that.
And then at the second half of verse five, behold, you are angry and we sinned.
And there's that move to the first person plural.

David: And there's an awakening, behold.
Behold.
Right.

Peter: Yeah.

David: All of a sudden, boom, I'm seeing something for the first time.

Peter: So almost, you'd almost want to pause there between those.
Behold, you are angry and we sinned.
In our sins, we have been a long time.
Shall we be saved?
And then verse six and seven, we have all become like one who is unclean.
Our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We fade like a leaf.
Our iniquities take us away.
There's no one who calls on your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you.
You have hidden your face from us, have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
And so you have this mood change, I think, where it's like I've been calling God to come down and deliver for us against our enemies and all of a sudden you're faced with the reality that, wait a minute, we're sinful, we're broken, we're part of the problem.
And this repentant turn, I think, would be kind of a wake up call.
I like how you said that, Dave, with the behold.
There's this wake up call that maybe we're not as righteous, self-righteous as we are.

David: Mm hmm.

Peter: As we think we are.
And so now this fits to me with you mentioned earlier, David, that Advent is a penitential season like Lent.
And, you know, of course, every season is a penitential season in the sense of the daily life of repentance.
But this is one time where you could kind of set the tone for Advent with a recognition of our need to repent and in our supposed self-righteous indignation toward other enemies of God.

David: And desiring the kingdom to come and to come right now.

So we've got that emphasis on the coming of Christ or the coming of God.

And yet there's also a self-accounting that needs to happen.

Peter: Right.

David: As you do this, right?

Yeah.

Peter: So I would invite the congregation in this part.

So if you're going to have a sermon that kind of walks through this text, the first one, I'd invite them to be angry with me.

And then the second kind of move, I would invite them to have a moment of honest repentance, reflection, confession.

David: Yeah.

It's almost like, you know, you start out saying, you know, man, you look at this world and you just wish Jesus would come.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, I just wish Jesus would come and fix everything. And then all of a sudden you're like, but if he comes, you know, he's got to fix some stuff in me.

Peter: Right.

David: Right.

Peter: Right.

So it really is an opportunity for some introspection.

I mean, some healthy and repentant introspection, kind of our own need for God's mercy, even as we're calling on judgment on others.

David: And the beautiful thing is, is it doesn't basically, I mean, I think the out that we would take now would be, you know, well, at least I'm better than they are.

At least I'm trying, God.

Peter: Yeah.

David: You know, but it doesn't do that.

There's no room for that.

Peter: Right.

David: There's no room for that here.

Peter: But what I really like about the reading is then it doesn't leave us there yet either, because then it goes on to, would you read verse eight, Jessica?

Jessica: But now, O Lord, you are our Father.

We are the clay and you are our Potter.

We are all the work of your hand.

Peter: So it moves from this kind of view of God as this boiler of water and kindler of brushwood who makes everyone tremble to, oh, shoot, I actually tremble a little bit.

And it comes on the back end, this kind of cry of faith and of kind of fatherly kind of confession of who we are.

But you are our Father.

You know, we are the clay, you're the Potter, we are all the work of your hands.

And so it kind of comes out on the back end after this repentance of calling God our dear Father, as Luther talks about in the Catechism. We are his dear children and we are, instead of God kindling and destroying and shaking, now there's this image of molding and gentle hands on the potter's wheel.

I wish I had learned how to do pottery at one point, because I think that'd be really cool to see images of a potter whose strong hands are, they're firm and they're shaping definitely, but they're gentle.

And so it comes out in this view of, at the end of God is a gentle shaping God.

And I think that actually prepares, could really prepare a congregation to begin to celebrate Advent and the coming of who is this God who is coming to us.

Well, he still is mighty and he still is wonderful and he still is terrifying in some ways, but he is our Father and he gently molds and shapes us.

David: And isn't it beautiful at the end where you have another behold?

Peter: Yeah, in verse nine.

David: Right.

Behold, please look, we are all your people.

So now, instead of asking God to come down and take care of the adversaries, you're asking

God to come and take a look and remember that we are your people.

Peter: Yeah.

David: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Peter: Yeah, verse nine.

Verse nine is really the invitation, I think, to make sure Christ is central here.

Be not so terribly angry, O Lord.

Remember not iniquity forever.

We are your people.

And of course, Jesus comes to forgive and to not remember our iniquity.

And so you've got this.

I also like how it's kind of the we.

This is not an individualistic thing.

This is we are your people.

We are the work of your hands.

David: And that confidence, right?

Because we've got places in Scripture where God comes down to look at.

Peter: Mm hmm.

David: His people, right?

He comes down at the Tower of Babel and, you know, let's come down and see what they're

doing.

Right.

They're building this tower to the heavens and God's like, I have to go down there to

see what they're doing.

You know, and you're listening to the voices, the outcry of sin at the time of the flood

and God is coming down.

So you've got these these frightening images of God coming down to visit.

So God coming to visit his people in a way of wrath.

But then you also have the divine visitation that's one of love.

Peter: Right.

David: And that's where you kind of end up in this as you move from this divine visitation of

wrath in the in the front and to this beautiful invitation, you know, for God to come.

Please come and look because we are your people.

Peter: Yeah, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and then in Christ at the

incarnation.

David: That's nice.

Peter: So I think this kind of text could set the tone for the whole season of Advent a little

bit and have some introspection to begin the season.

David: And you've got a nice flow.

I mean, you've just got a three part flow.

Peter: And you could really work with some images here, too, because you've got the boiling

water, you've got the kindling brushwood, you've got the

trembling mountain and kind

of these images of terror.

But then you've also got this image of the potter and the clay that's so familiar and

so comforting.

David: That's good.

Jessica: David, what would you preach on?

David: Well, I decided to go with the gospel reading from Mark 13, which is filled with a lot of

second coming of Christ, you know, because part of that

movement in Advent, if you don't

use the traditional reading of the entry into Jerusalem, so

if you use the other reading,

your movement in Advent is going to be from the second coming

of Christ through John the

Baptizer in Advent 2 and 3 to the first coming of Christ in

Advent 4.

And so you've got that larger flow of the Advent season.

And so if I'm acknowledging that flow of the Advent season,

I'm going to start with this

picture of the second coming of Christ that you get in Mark 13.

Peter: So bigger picture, then you're working kind of backwards.

David: Right.
Peter: The season of Advent would be kind of a backwards move.
David: Right.
Right, from the second coming of Christ to the first coming of Christ.
And so, and the text itself has a lot in it.
And so it's one of those texts where I think you just get overwhelmed with questions.
So I would kind of move away from the desire to pinpoint the day and the time and rather say, well, if we're not going to invest our time trying to figure out when Christ is coming again, what should we invest our time doing?
And that's where I really like the last parable that is present there.
So Jessica, if you could read verse 32 through 37.
Jessica: But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.
Be on guard, keep awake.
If you do not know when the time will come, it is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servant in charge, each with his work and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.
Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or when the rooster crows or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.
And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake.
David: Okay, so in this parable or this comparison, Jesus pictures us like his servants in charge of his household.
And he as a master has gone away, and we need to keep the household running until he returns.
And you just think about that.
You would be preparing meals, you would be sitting the table, you'd be turning down the bed, I mean, if you're kind of just imagining what is the work that servants would do to keep a house ready for the return of the master, rather than going to the bars and living out in the streets because nobody's coming here.
You're just constantly doing the work that you would normally do for the master.
And it reminded me of a time in my life, I worked for a long time at a French restaurant.
Peter: Oui, oui.
David: Yeah, I know.
We get jete d'honne en pomme de terre.
I give you a potato.
I know.
By the extent of my French.

We had, there was the maître d' who I always thought had the coolest job because basically all you did was greet people, check their name off of the reservation sheet, and put them at a table.

Right.

And so that's, I was always like, well, you know, this guy doesn't work at all.

And you know, I'm the one who's a waiter is really working.

Well, one time the maître d' was away.

And since I had been there so long, they asked me to be the maître d'.

I had no clue how hard that job is.

So I did the maître d' thing for one night and it was disastrous.

But it was eye opening for me because I began to see how difficult the job is.

You're kind of brought closer to their heart because you're doing their work.

Right.

And so I know it sounds silly, but if we were going to take this and turn it to being Christians

waiting for Christ to return, if we do the work that Jesus wants us to do, our waiting

for him is going to be filled with thoughts about him and the kind of relationships he

has with people.

You know, how do I wait for Jesus to come?

Well, keep doing his work.

Keep doing his work.

And what happens if you keep doing his work?

Well, you'll slowly discover the priorities that Jesus has, the desires that Jesus has,

and so that your life then becomes shaped by your master.

This idea that, you know, servants keep doing the work, keep the household going, it has

two effects, right?

On the one effect, it makes us appreciate the one who has left more because we see in

greater detail the kinds of things that he does as we're engaging in them.

And then second, it causes us to desire him to return.

Peter: You know, that made me think of there's that line in Les Mis, you know, Victor Hughes, you know, it's kind of a line that's haunted me for a long time.

But there's a line in one of the songs that toward the end that says, to love another

person is to see the face of God.

David: Yeah.

Peter: And I'm still not sure what to make of that line entirely.

But in this context, I'm thinking about to love the people of God.

David: Right.

Peter: Is in a way to stand in God's shoes.
David: Right.
And if the face of God is the face of God that shines upon us, right?
Peter: Right.
David: You know, make your face shine upon us.
If that's the face of God is that his blessing, his favor that he grants to people to love another person is to actually see his face in a sense.
Peter: Right.
And that really, there's an intimacy there where you're, which I think is, you know, when the master goes away, he's entrusting his home with the servant.
And that's what God has done incredibly.
In Jesus, he has entrusted his work here on earth to his people.
David: To us.
Peter: Right.
David: To us.
Yeah, to his people to do.
And then the more we engage in that work, the more closely we're drawn to his heart and his mission, and the more desirous we are of him returning.
Because it always strikes me, I don't know, there's always some types, sometimes for me, there's this artificiality about the second coming of Christ that, you know, I need to somehow get myself pumped up for awaiting his return.
I don't know how to say it.
I think because it happens every year.
And I'm like, okay, now's the time of year when I have to expect Christ to return.
Right.
And it shouldn't be that way.
But if I immerse myself in doing the things he's called me to do, it draws me to closer to him.
It draws me closer to an appreciation of what he's doing in this world now.
And it gives me an even greater desire to see him come.
And I think that's kind of where I would go with this.
Peter: Yeah, that would be kind of facilitating and kindling a longing and a love for Jesus to come back.
David: Right.
Peter: So as you proclaim the promise of his return, you're helping the hearers long for that.
David: Right.
And because the text itself is filled with such frightening images, you know, the sun being darkened and the moon not shining and stars falling out of heaven.

People can capitalize on those frightening images trying to scare people into the faith.
And I think this closing parable just does some strange work in my heart that would cause me to focus on that and think about, you know, what happens if I actually do the work of a servant in the household and how does that prepare me?

Peter: I like how that last line then just, you know, and what I say to you, I say to all stay awake.

It's not at least I'm hearing it not so much as a stay awake.

David: Right.

Yeah.

Don't fall asleep.

Right.

Peter: As much as stay awake.

I'm coming back.

And, you know, kind of it's there's a hopeful note there.

David: Yeah.

And, you know, when you're doing somebody's work for them, you know, there is that I want

to keep this going.

Peter: Right.

David: So that when they return, this is still happening.

Peter: Right.

David: Yeah.

Jessica: That's different than sitting on the porch waiting too.

David: Right.

Jessica: Like, oh, he's coming.

I think I'll just let him fix it all.

Just sit here and let the house go to pot.

Peter: Right.

Jessica: He'll be back soon, you know.

David: Yeah.

Because he does care for this world and he does care for the people who live in this world.

Peter: You know, this is a nice way to prepare people for the season of Advent.

You know, here we are at the third of December and there's so much stuff that gets busy and work to do, but it would kind of help refocus what is the work that the church has been given to do.

David: Right.

Peter: I like this.

Jessica: Well, that's all for today.

We have free resources to guide your next step in planning at ConcordiaTheology.org.

We have more episodes of this show and we have episodes of our new show, Tangible Theology Learned and Lived.

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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordeleau.

Join us next week here at Lectionery Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger will spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

David: Je t'aime un pommes d'etre.

I give you a potato.

Peter: Oui, oui.