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Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart! We're sparking your thoughts for Sunday as you plan your sermon or teaching lesson.

Jessica: I'm your host, 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. Peter, where are we in the church year?

Peter: Today we're talking about the Sunday of July 16th. We're in the seventh week of Pentecost.

We continue to think about God's work in His church for the sake of His creation.

Jessica: And what's the text for this week, David?

David: The texts for this week are from Isaiah, Romans, and Matthew, and you can access those texts on our website.

Jessica: David, which text would you choose to preach on this week?

David: I'm going to move more toward a thematic sermon that works with two texts.

Peter: Ooh, risky.

David: I know, I know, risky. I mean, why do you say that? Why do you say that? Yeah.

Peter: Well, I say I'm not risky because there's a danger, but to me, I always found if I tried to do two texts,

I often, and it probably just shows my inability, it was hard to feel like

I treated both texts sufficiently.

David: Yeah.

Peter: And so you got to, you said thematic, so you have to lean more into the theme and not imagine yourself focusing on preaching a text.

David: Right, right. So there's going to be some things about the text that don't get covered.

And you know, you're right. I think that's, I think, and as long as you know you're doing that, and you have a good reason for doing that, I think it's more of a teaching sermon.

Peter: Right.

David: Right, more of a teaching sermon and less of a close study of a text.

So we've got the Old Testament reading from Isaiah, and then we've got the familiar parable of the sower from Matthew.

And Jessica, if you could read verses 10 through 11 from the text from Isaiah.

Jessica: This is from Isaiah 55.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth,

making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.

David: Okay, so this is really good news, right?

I mean, it just, it gives you confidence in the work that God is doing.

He takes an illustration, Isaiah takes an illustration from the natural world, the way the natural world operates, and so too it's going to be with the Word of God, that it will not return to him empty, but will accomplish what he purposes.

And then you've got the parable of the sower.

Peter: Well, you said it's good news, except that assumes that his purposes are good.

David: Right, yeah.

And that we understand him as good.

David: Okay, well you see this is, well so you might be challenging me then.

So I'm assuming that the Word's going to accomplish what God has sent it to do.

So you have a sower who goes out to sow.

Now is God purposefully sowing so the devil can steal the Word?

It would seem, in my opinion, that the sowing is done so that the Word bears fruit.

So to me, your Old Testament reading and your Gospel reading have kind of a conflict between them.

The Old Testament reading gives you this confidence that, you know,

God's going to send his Word out

and it's going to accomplish what he purposes.

And using the imagery from the Isaiah text, we would expect bread for the eater.

But instead what happens is three of the soils, the Word does not accomplish what it was sent to do.

It almost sounds like a contradiction, right, that God says I'm going to send out my Word, it will not return to me empty, it will accomplish what I purpose.

And then we've got Jesus sharing a word and telling a story about sharing the Word, and then it doesn't always accomplish what you would expect it would do.

And so to me that is not a contradiction, but it's actually a paradox.

And so I would articulate the paradox this way.

I would say that God has an all-powerful Word that is able to be resisted.

So it's an all-powerful Word, it does what God desires it to do, it has the ability to bring life where there is death and, you know, change things and create a world.

God is an all-powerful Word, but it is able to be resisted.

And so in your case with the soils, even though God's Word is all-powerful, I can resist his Word.

So we've got this paradox. You would say an all-powerful Word means it can't be resisted, or you would say if I can resist it, it's not all-powerful.

But these are two truths that are present at the same time when it comes to the Word of God.

Peter: Yeah, I mean that's taking seriously these two texts for what they say.

And our desire, our inclination is always to resolve these paradoxes.

David: Right. And how can we resolve them?

What are some ways that we could explain this away or fix it or resolve it?

Peter: To put the reception of the Word, or to put the power of the Word dependent upon the person who hears it, or to suggest that those who hear it have more ability than they do.

David: Right, right.

Peter: Because, I mean, in a way, not only is it resistible, but it will be resisted.

David: Right, right. And so in that case, you're denying that the Word is all-powerful and instead emphasizing that something needs to be added to it.

You know, the person who receives it needs to add something to the Word in order to actually make it work.

And if you don't add something to it, then it's not going to work.

And so you kind of fall into that trap in that way. The other way...

Peter: Or another version of that could be if you don't see it working, then it's not working.

David: Right, right.

Peter: Sometimes, you know, it takes a little while for the seed to sprout, at least in the garden.

Sometimes it never comes up. But to recognize that it's still powerful, even if you don't get to see the fruit right away.

David: Then the other way would be to emphasize that it is all-powerful, but

God just doesn't want to save that person.

You end up in false doctrine either way if you try to fix it.

The reason this is important to me, it's not just an intellectual thing.

Right.

David: I had a friend, I don't play racquetball as much as I did anymore,

but I had a friend, I used to play racquetball with him all the time.

And he told me one time, he said, if I was anything, I would be a Buddhist.

He said, but I was raised Baptist and had the religion beat out of me by my grandmother.

So he had a bad experience with Christianity.

And so I always saw our playing racquetball as an opportunity for me to witness to him.

So, you know, I mean, not like I, you know, every time I served, I gave a Bible passage or something.

But you're playing and talking about life and you kind of, I saw it as an opportunity to witness to him.

And nothing, nothing ever changed. Right.

And so there was one Sunday when I was at church, played racquetball with him on Tuesdays.

I was at church, we had this festival and we sang Thy Strong Word.

And it was just, it was just beautiful, such a confession of the power of God's word.

And then on Tuesday, I'm faced with a situation where I've been

preaching this word and nothing's happening.

And it made me realize that if I didn't have this paradoxical tension, that I would try to solve that situation.

I would either say to myself, well, God really doesn't want to save my friend because I've been witnessing to him all this time and nothing's ever happening.

Right. Or I would say, my friend needs to add a sinner's prayer.

Or maybe I need to add some pyrotechnics and make the word.

Peter: I'd like to see that. I know, yeah.

David: I know, yeah.

Make it really, really interesting and snazzy.

But you see, the paradox, recognizing that there's a tension, normalizes that situation for me.

It helps me live faithfully knowing that God is an all powerful word and my friend can resist it.

And so I just continue doing what I'm doing. Does that make sense?

Peter: Yeah, it does. And to me, it reminds me of the challenge of dealing with paradoxes is that you really have to proclaim two contradictory truths.

David: Right.

Peter: And they both stand. Right.

David: Right.

Peter: And I think specifically with this paradox, one of the things that I would want to be careful with when, I think it's with this text and when we talk about the word of God.

That we don't just talk about it

David: Right.

Peter: The way to, I think the way to address this paradox in a sermon is to name the paradox, to confess the paradox, but then to proclaim the word to the hearers that then creates the faith in them instead of letting them stay by just thinking about others.

David: Right.

Peter: Because I think we're, anytime there's a text, I think on the word of God, it's tempting to talk too much about the word of God and not actually preach the word of God.

And so you deal with the paradox by naming it, teaching it, helping people understand it, living that tension.

But you come out of that by proclaiming the word to them, to the promises of God, to the people.

And that's where the desire of God for not just all people to be saved, but for you.

David: Right.

Peter: Yes. So the first, second person result of the paradox, I think is where a sermon should go.

David: Right.

Yeah. Yeah. And then that being saved brings us into a kingdom where until the last day we'll live in this tension.

Peter: Yeah. Right. What I like about your approach, Dave, is that it focuses our attention on the sower.

I think sometimes with this text, the temptation is to focus on the soil and to draw attention to types of soil and these parts of it.

David: Right.

But really, the good news is found in the sower. Right.

And so you draw attention to the one who is powerful and the one who desires all men to be saved.

Peter: You and all around you. Right.

David: And even in a world that's resisting Christianity.

Peter: Right.

David: Where the church is saying, oh, we got to, you know, circle the wagons and shut the doors. Right.

Because we're under attack. And no, it's resisting Christianity.

Well, God is an all powerful word and go out and preach it, even though it's able to be resisted.

Peter: So I'm thinking about Romans and I'm thinking about Romans 8 for a very specific reason.

And that is I'm looking ahead to the lectionary the next two weeks and they're all on Romans 8.

Romans 8, 12 to 17 this week, Romans 8, 18 to 27 next week.

And the final week, Romans 8, 28 to 30.

David: And that is such a beautiful chapter.

Peter: Well, see, this is where this is this is what I'm thinking.

And it's something I did in my congregation back in Minnesota that was worked really well.

So what I'm going to suggest is that you start this Sunday and maybe even back it up, depending on when you're listening to this, and preach a series of sermons on Romans 8.

We had a member of our congregation who always said, all is great in Romans 8.

David: Oh, I like that.

Peter: And there's so many I mean, if you look at there's so many well-known verses in that chapter.

David: Right.

Peter: And so what we did as a congregation, I challenged the congregation to read Romans 8 every day that month of June.

And then on the Sundays, I preached on parts of Romans 8.

And what was really neat about it was the congregation took me up on this.

And most of the congregation, I think, at least those who were there, effectively immersed themselves in Romans 8 for an entire month.

David: Wow.

Peter: And the way it worked in my home, I said, I'll lead the way.

I'm not asking you guys to do something I won't do. And every morning at breakfast, my family were going to read Romans 8.

And it was really neat around the dinner table because my kids were between eight and two.

And I would read Romans 8. And then after three or four days, we did this every day, I would start leaving out words here or there.

And the kids would start filling the words in. And then four or five more days, I'd leave more words out and more words out.

By the time we got to the end of the month, I was only saying a few words and the kids were reciting Romans 8.

David: Wow.

Peter: And then each Sunday we would reflect on these specific verses as kind of the focus for the week during this month of Romans 8.

And maybe even challenge your congregation to study, live in this text with

you for a month or so.

I'm going to suggest a three-part series that's something around the lines of being all in.

All in.

David: Okay.

Peter: Because the one for this week, and we'll get to this in just a second, is I'd say all in the family.

We perceive this adoption. I would want to work with an adoption metaphor.

Next week is all of creation. All of creation is groaning.

And then the final week is we are more than conquerors in all things.

David: Okay.

Peter: And so I think you could tie kind of a big picture thing with these three sermons.

But so I would for this week's, I would focus on the adoption metaphor that we are adopted.

We're all in this family. We're all in this together as those who have been adopted, adopted by the Spirit through the work of the Son into the Father's family.

And we cry out, Abba, Father. And so maybe, Jessica, would you read?

Jessica: Romans 8.15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

Peter: I just really...

Jessica: Okay, wait, wait. What does Abba mean? It's a great band from the late 80s.

David: Oh my gosh.

Jessica: But I'd like to know more.

David: Oh man, Mamma Mia.

Jessica: I did not listen to them when they were popular. I wasn't born yet.

Jessica: Well, Abba's just, you know, Hebrew for father, right?

Peter: So there's different forms of father. There's dad, there's father, there's daddy.

Jessica: What is Abba?

David: It's what Jesus uses when he addresses his father in the prayer in Gethsemane.

Peter: Just a term of being close. I'm close to you. I have a relationship with you.

Jessica: So like dad instead of father or sir.

Peter: Yeah. I don't make my kids call me sir. They probably wouldn't anyhow.



David: Yeah, you're right.

Peter: Oh yeah, dad. So, but this image of adoption to me is, it's just such a captivating metaphor because those who need to be adopted are orphans.

And to be without a loving father, without parents, is such a tragic and kind of heart-wrenching image

that when we talk about the gospel and when the scriptures use the metaphor of adoption, that always is something that captures my imagination.

And it gets to this, you know, our father, our dear father, he invites us to speak to him as dear children.

And so this adoption, but here's what I'm going to do with the sermon, Dave.

I'm thinking about doing an expository thematic sermon.

And I'm going to follow the logic of cause and effect.

And the cause is going to be our adoption.

We're adopted into Christ.

And so what is that? What's the effect? What's the impact of our adoption on our lives?

And I think you can draw some interesting things out of this text.

Verse 14, all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

So to be adopted is to be led by the Spirit.

And so that's going to help the congregation think about who's leading us.

And is it our fathers? Is it our spirit who's leading us?

Or are we being led by others who aren't?

Or our own desires.

Our own desires that are inconsistent.

And so in that first rhetorical unit, you can think of a little bit about the competing leaders in our lives.

But to be adopted is to be led by the Spirit.

And then I'm going to think about, okay, what's another effect of being adopted?

Well, in verse 16, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And it's interesting there, he goes from the you to the we.

And so now we've got a first person plural.

We are the children of God.

And now I want to help the congregation think about us being together.

So you're a daughter, Jessica, Dave, you're a son.

I'm a son, that makes us siblings.

And so now you kind of emphasize the community of the family.

David: So that's the family part, all in the family.

Peter: That's all in the family.

And that would be kind of the...

And maybe you could rearrange that, start with that, and then lead to where as a family we're led by the Spirit and kind of grounded in the family.

And then the third effect of our adoption would come in verse 17.

Would you read verse 17, Jessica?

Jessica: Romans 8:17, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Peter: Okay, so I would think about one who is adopted becomes an heir.

And this would be an interesting kind of part of the sermon to reflect on.

Of course, when you think about being an heir, you think about what you get.

You get part of the inheritance.

But Paul isn't going to be Pollyannish here.

He's saying, provided we suffer with him.

And so we are heirs to his suffering, even as we are heirs to his glory.

So I want to consider in that last rhetorical unit, both the challenge and the difficulty of being an heir,

but that's overcome by the glory and the promise of eternal life.

David: That's going to come up later in Romans 8 when we're conformed to the image of the Son.

So it'll be that whole idea of being conformed to the image of the Son,

and you think to yourself, well, what is the image of the Son?

Well, in this world, it's rejected and suffering.

And that's a big, that beautiful passage on all things,  
God working together for good in all things.

More than conquerors.

So right, yeah. So even you're setting the stage here about being in the family.

So you've got three effects. What order do you want to put them in?

Because you can follow the order in the text if you want. That's easiest for people.

Peter: Right.

I kind of think now that we're talking about it, I had put the led by the spirit,  
the children, and the heirs.

But I think I might, especially if I'm going to think about all the family,  
if I'm going to try to have that be a theme, then maybe I'd start with we're  
adopted into this family.

David: Right. So it brings us all into the family and then leads us.

Peter: And then leads us. We are led by the spirit as sons and daughters who've been adopted.

Now we're led, maybe I would think a little bit about what does it look like  
for us as a community to put to death the deeds of the body.

To be led by the spirit together. I mean every congregation has its own particular  
struggles and personality challenges and issues that they're fighting over.

And so maybe I'd try to help us think about the way we exist together. There's  
certain things we need to put to death. All of us need to.

David: Right.

Peter: And that's repentance.

David: Right. Yeah.

Peter: You lay down all the sins and the...

Yeah.

David: Well, I kind of, I mean, it's interesting, you know, whenever I hear led by the  
spirit, for some reason I always think of Jesus as baptism.

And then the first thing the spirit does is lead him out into the wilderness.

But it's kind of interesting, here, you know, your communal emphasis is that

the spirit doesn't lead us out into a wilderness where we're isolated and tempted.

But we can actually be surrounded in community and tempted and tested, right?

And so thinking about issues within a congregation and congregational life,

and are we truly living as the family of God that bears one another's burdens and supports one another in the activities of the faith?

I mean, that is a testing.

Peter: Yeah.

And it's a testing that, you know, this is the daily repentance thing, that we always have reason to recognize that we're not living as the children of God as we should, not thinking that way.

Jessica: I like your idea of asking the congregation to read Romans 8

every day during that series, because that seems reasonable to me.

It's something that I could accomplish. It's not overwhelming, but it's really specific.

Peter: And what I like about that, it's kind of a side issue, but I've never loved memorizing individual verses because it takes them out of the context.

And I think memorizing is a wonderful thing. This is a way to memorize kind of the context.

And I thought of that, especially when we first did that, because there are a lot of confirmation verses that are taken out of Romans 8.

There's a lot of really...

David: Yeah, there are.

Peter: All things work for good.

David: What was that? Romans 8 is great? Is that what it was?

Peter: Yeah, all is great in Romans 8.

David: All is great in Romans 8. I like that.

Peter: So this will put them all in context.

Jessica: That's all for today. You can find more free resources to guide your next step in planning at [ConcordiaTheology.org](http://ConcordiaTheology.org).

I'm your host, Jessica Bordeleau.

Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt

and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

Peter: You're a daughter, Jessica. Dave, you're a son. That makes... I'm a son. That makes us siblings.