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Jessica: Welcome to Lectionary Kickstart. 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, 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. David, where are we in the church here?

David: We are at the 17th week after Pentecost, a time when the church is celebrating the life of the Spirit among God's people.

Jessica: And Peter, what are the readings this week?

Peter: The readings are from Isaiah 55, Philippians chapter 1, Matthew 20, and the psalm for this week is Psalm 27.

Jessica: All right, so as always, I ask each of you to tell me which text you would choose to preach on. And this week, David, will you go first?

David: Sure. So we just finished a series in Romans, right? This is the jump into Philippians. So if you wanted to do a sermon series on Philippians, now would be the chance to do it.

Peter: Yeah, there you go.

David: Yeah.

Peter: That's nice because it's a shorter letter and you can do it in just a number of...

David: It's a happy letter.

Peter: Yeah, it's true. It's a joyful letter.

David: It's a joyful letter, even though it's coming out of suffering. Right? I mean, Paul's in prison, writing to the Philippian Christians, trying to send them... Well, he's sending them thanks because they've sent him gifts and he's trying to encourage them because it may be that they're gonna start undergoing persecution like he's undergoing. And so the opening of the letter in that Thanksgiving portion of the letter, Paul meditates in a way on suffering. And it just kind of struck me. In Romans, we've got a lot of meditation on suffering. But Romans, he's writing to people that he doesn't really...

I mean, he's got a whole list of names at the end, but he's writing to congregations that are not necessarily known by him. Here he's got deep relationships with the Philippians. And so how he talks about suffering is a little bit different, I think.

Peter: More personal.

David: Yeah, more personal, more concrete.

I think you could actually talk about the power of suffering in our lives in a positive way, just by walking through the text.

So we're gonna read a verse and then talk a little bit about what I see there and then

read another verse and a little bit what I see.

Peter: Dave, the expository preacher.

David: I know, I'm like, this is so rare.

Peter: Verse by verse.

David: This is so rare.

Okay, so Jessica, if you could read verse 14.

Jessica: And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

David: So one thing that suffering does is it causes our witness to be emboldened.

And I thought this was really interesting because I think the normal reaction would

be if somebody else is suffering for something, then I'm going to keep quiet.

Because I don't want to share in that suffering or I'm going to be embarrassed about whatever it is that's going on.

But Paul has found that his suffering, which has been known to be because of Christ, has caused other people to become more emboldened in their witness.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, I guess you see somebody who's willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel and it encourages you, you know, if he's willing to suffer and if he's still able to remain faithful, then maybe I am too.

David: Right.

I think that's, yeah, and it's possible to do it.

Peter: Right.

David: Right.

I mean, you know, you're doing it, you're suffering for it. And so all of the sudden I'm seeing what my faith is worth in a very real way because there's somebody that I love who's undergoing suffering for this and I'm not going to let you be alone.

Peter: Just that whole idea is really helpful because sometimes it's, you know, we tend to share our joys with each other and celebrations and that kind of stuff, but sharing burdens

and suffering is harder.

David: Right.

Peter: Because you don't want to burden somebody with your own suffering.

David: Right.

Peter: But if you don't do that, you deprive them of the witness they give to you and you can give to them in suffering.

David: Yeah, and then when some, I mean, like in the congregation, you know, when suffering does happen to you, particularly if you're informed by our cultural prosperity gospel ideas that, you know, your life should be going well because you're going to church and therefore everything's going to be good and something bad happens, you know, your children get divorced or something happens, you know, you kind of hide, you hide out. And instead, like you're saying, you take that opportunity, you share that burden and you'll be amazed at the way other people will tell you things about their life you didn't know about.

Peter: Right.

David: You know, and so there's this beauty thing here where Paul's imprisonment is making other people emboldened. And so our witness is emboldened when suffering happens. And so, you know, if we are engaged in some kind of public witness to the faith and suffering happens, it's kind of counterintuitive. It's not a time to be scared, a time to hide out. It's just to share it with others because we will find that it emboldens people. So that's the first thing. So, like the first part of the sermon, we kind of set up the Apostle Paul, what's going on with Philipians.

Peter: Well, especially if you're going to, if you're thinking about doing a couple of weeks in a row on Philipians, since that's the appointed readings, then it is a good time to give some of that background information.

David: Right, and if you're in a church and you've been sending aid to this guy who founded your church who's now in prison and you're kind of wanting to hear from him what's going on, and instead of a, oh, woe is me tale, he kind of writes and says, you know, hey, things are great. I'm in prison. And it's causing people to be more bold about preaching Christ.

And so God is at work through suffering, making the witness bold.

Jessica: The second thing, Jessica, could you read verse 20?  
As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

David: I like that reference to in my body, and here Paul meditates on being in the flesh.  
He's thinking about the possibility of death and he's thinking about, you know, do I continue to live?  
Do I die?  
If I die, I'm with the Lord and that's better by far, but my life has value here.  
But for me, what I see here would be that, you know, the power of suffering causes our witness to be emboldened.  
The power of suffering causes our faith to be embodied.  
I think sometimes faith can become an intellectual belief that you hold on to, and particularly in context where there is suffering or where there's going to be argument.  
What Paul is finding is that that suffering brings the faith into the flesh.  
It lets people know what you believe, but it also reveals, you know, how you respond to belief, what faith does in your life.

Peter: Yeah, and I think that's something we can always benefit from thinking a little bit more concretely about because it is so easy to keep your faith just as a cognitive thing and not consider what it looks like to live that out.

David: So you've got suffering making our witness emboldened, making our faith embodied, and then the last one would be verse 27.

Jessica: Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you, and that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.  
So the last thing that suffering does is it causes our community to be embraced.

Peter: I knew you were going to have an M.

David: You knew I was!

Peter: I was trying to think to myself as I was listening to that, what's he going to say?

David: Embolden the body, embrace, there we go, okay, there we go, good.  
Embrace.

Peter: Which is, I just want to say a thing about that too, because sometimes, you know, sometimes

homileticians get a little bit of a bad rap for making things rhyme and alliteration, that kind of stuff, and you know, in a sense, sometimes it's overdone.

But it really does help people remember things. You remember that kind of thing, and it lingers for a lot longer, and it lingers so that you can recall it and repeat it to others.

So this is, in my opinion, not a cheesy one, this is a good one.

David: Okay, thank you.

But the emphasis upon being side by side, firm in one spirit, all of you together, firm in one spirit, one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

So often suffering can create disunity, suffering can break communities apart, and here Paul

kind of reveals the mystery that God's work and suffering can create community.

And as you had mentioned earlier, we bear one another's burdens.

Peter: It's a struggle, but we're in this struggle together.

David: Yeah, it's not like, you know, the suffering where it's the, you know, like the lone antelope that is weak and is left behind.

Quick, get away!

Back that one and we'll go this way instead.

Instead, you know, we're side by side, even though we're suffering.

And that unity is a beautiful thing.

So that'd be kind of how I might go with this text and be a slow walk through the text and just meditating on those things and talking about how it was true for them and then thinking about is it possible for us to be true for us today?

Peter: Yeah, kind of each rhetorical unit spends a little time with the text and a little time with the people.

Yeah, that's good.

Jessica: What about you, Peter?

Which text would you pick?

Peter: All right, well, I'm kind of wrapping up this reflection on Matthew's gospel.

You know, for the last month I've been thinking about Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16, 23.

This, you are not setting your things in the, you're not setting your mind on the things of God, but the things of man.

And so that's just been kind of a lens I've been thinking about for a while.

And when I read this text, it almost, it ramps it up even more, I think, if that were possible.

The last couple weeks talk about forgiveness, talk about suffering, talked about, what was the other one?

The last couple weeks we're talking about suffering and then greatness and then forgiveness.

And then this week's, to me, captures the way humans think about justice as opposed to God.

David: Oh, yeah.

Peter: And so maybe we could start, I'd like to read a couple of verses.

Would you read 10 through 15, Jessica?

Jessica: Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house saying, these last worked

only one hour and you have made them equal to us.

We have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

But he replied to one of them, friend, I'm doing you no wrong.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

Take what belongs to you and go.

I chose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity?

So the last will be first and the first last.

Peter: Yeah, I read these verses and the whole parable is such a contrast between the way we think

of justice and fairness and what is right and what this master of the house is doing

and what Jesus is saying about how God operates.

And I want to just take seriously how offensive this parable would be, especially, you know,

we live in a culture that is so market driven, so economic, and it is simply not fair.

It's not fair that these people who worked all day through the scorching heat, through

the burning sun, don't get anything more than the people who worked for one hour.

That mindset of fairness and justice and rightness is so fundamental to us.

I think this parable just bristles from the start and just even our sense of rightness

and wrongness and these kind of things.

Every kid at the snack table sees how big the pile of chips is in front of him and sees

that the other little girl there has an extra chip at the table or an extra M&M.

Did you ever count M&M's growing up, Jessica?

Jessica: I might not have counted M&M's, but I definitely compared everything that my siblings got.

My kids do this.

They are very concerned about fairness.

And so I feel like I have to be fair.

Peter: And I think so why is that?  
Because you want people to, you want your kids to know that you love them all equally.

Jessica: Yeah, I would hate for them to think that whoever got the most presents is the kid I love most.

Peter: And this is what this parable is, I think, playing on, trading on.  
Jesus is, he knows this about us and he's saying, you guys will get this.  
This is how it works.  
And then this turn at the end where they don't get what they should get for their work, that just is highly offensive.

David: And it's deliberate.  
He should have paid the first guys first and have them go away and then paid the last guys and no one would have known.  
But instead he reverses it.  
Makes them watch it.  
Right, it makes them watch it.  
So it's not only offensive, but it's deliberately offensive.

Peter: Which of course, Jesus does that.  
He's not hiding these things.  
He's kind of put it all on the table.  
And so you've got this parable that is offensive.  
And you can understand these people who've worked all day, how much they've grumbled.  
And so as you're thinking about this, I'm thinking about how do you address this.  
I think it's helpful to back up just a little bit and look at the context in which Jesus tells this parable.  
So you look in chapter 19, immediately preceding this parable is Jesus' interaction with the rich young man and then the disciples' reaction to that episode.  
So the rich young man of course comes and says, you know, what should I do to be saved?  
And Jesus says, you know, what are the commandments?  
And he says, I've kept all these commandments.  
And then the guy goes away.  
It's a tragic tale.  
And then in verse 27, Peter speaks up and he says, Lord, we've left everything.  
What then will we have?  
And I think a real key to this is verse 29.  
Would you read verse 29?  
It's part of Jesus' response to Peter's question about, well, what about us?

Jessica: And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children

or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Peter: All right.

So Jesus introduces this parable by saying, anyone who has followed me will receive a hundred fold, a hundred times eternal life, even eternal life, this incredible good gift, incredibly good gift.

And then he says, it's like this.

And it's almost like he goes right after the heart of a human sense of fairness.

That we hear this parable and our sensibility of fairness and justice and rightness demands that there's differences.

But Jesus has told this whole parable in the context of anyone has eternal life.

And it's not like some eternal life is better than others.

It's all, it's all.

David: So is his eternal life longer than my eternal life?

Right.

Peter: Instead of seeing eternal life as a gift that's as good as it gets, that is available to all people.

And so how I'm thinking about, so this is kind of the general idea I think I might work with.

But I was thinking about how to do this and I might steal a trick out of your book, Dave, and walk through some specific verses.

I mean, you want to tell the story.

And so I was picturing having a text of these verses out, but you could have people have either the bulletin or the Bibles.

And circle it.

And circle it.

And so there's a couple of words that I thought you kind of walk through, especially verse 10 to 15, as we read earlier, there's some words that stood out.

David: I like this idea.

You're having to actually tangibly do something.

Peter: Yeah.

David: To the text, which helps them think about it and see what you're trying to get them to see.

Peter: Right.

And so there's a couple of words.

So verse 10.

Now, when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more.

And I see more, ding, kind of light up.

David: I even like the noise.

You need a bell.

You need more, ding.



Peter: But they thought they would receive...  
Jessica: Finally the bell choir gets to help out the sermon.  
David: I know, they can help out with the sermon.  
Yes.  
Peter: I see that huge big bell.  
David: I know, the big bell.  
Peter: So they thought they would receive more.  
And you think about this desire for more.  
I don't care how much you get, if there's someone who has a  
little bit more, you're  
not satisfied, right?  
More recognition, of course, more money, more opportunity.  
But this desire for more that comes from this incessant need  
we have to compare ourselves  
to others.  
David: Right.  
Peter: So you take the kid with the M&Ms, comparing is my pile as  
big as your pile of M&Ms.  
But we just can't not do this.  
We constantly compare ourselves to others and we notice when  
we don't have as much as  
they do.  
David: Right.  
Peter: And so this more is part of the problem.  
Of course, that leads to verse 11, on receiving it they  
grumbled.  
Now I'm not suggesting you necessarily follow the order here.  
Maybe start with the grumbled and then go back to the more.  
But this grumbling and the grumbling that is a result of when  
you don't feel like things  
are fair.  
And I don't know what the word in Greek is for grumbling  
there, but I'm pretty sure lots  
of people grumble the New Testament.  
So I would probably want to look and see.  
David: Probably in the Old Testament too, the people of Israel  
grumbling in the wilderness, I can  
imagine somewhere.  
Peter: And then the key then I think is verse 12.  
Now I'm kind of these first three words that light up are all  
kind of focused on the setting  
minds on the things of man.  
Okay, so you've got more, you've got grumbling.  
Verse 12, these last worked for only one hour and you have  
made them equal to us and equal  
lights up there.  
The expectation for being equal.  
And when it's not equal, we grumble because we want more.  
David: But we're actually grumbling because you made me equal to  
somebody else and I'm not equal  
to anyone else.  
Peter: Well, equal.  
David: I should have more.

Peter: Yeah, I mean, in this sense, you made these people equal and they didn't do the equal amount of work.

David: They didn't do it right.

Peter: And so this is not fair.

This is not right.

This would be an interesting exercise just to read this parable to an adult Bible class

or a council and just ask for them to respond to what they think of this.

And my hunch, my bet is you'd have people say, well, that's not right.

That's not fair.

I can kind of see where these servants are upset.

So you've got these, this all kind of falls in the category of the human way of thinking.

Then Jesus.

David: And so the topic is justice and this is the human way of thinking about justice.

Peter: Right.

David: Right.

Okay.

Peter: So you could do a compare contrast if you want.

I mean, I've kind of been suggesting that in a way for the whole last couple of weeks,

but this would be pretty easy to do here.

But then look at what the master says.

Okay.

And I want to highlight a couple of these.

And again, I don't know, I haven't thought through which order I would do this in, but

the things that I'd want to highlight, I think, are the word in verse 13, he replied to them,

to one of them, friend.

Friend.

I am doing you no wrong.

And that word friend, of course, that makes me think immediately of Jesus saying, I no

longer call you my servants, but my friends.

And this, I don't know, but I don't imagine masters would talk to their hired hands that

way.

David: It is odd.

Peter: It struck me as a little odd.

And even if maybe they would, it wouldn't be as a genuine.

These are employees, not friends.

David: Right.

Peter: Servants, maybe.

But so friend struck me as, you know, these grumbling people, the master says, friend,

I'm doing you no wrong.

And then verse 15, am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me and

belongs?

And that's maybe highlight.  
I also thought maybe choose what I choose.  
But that gets to more God's kind of absolute authority, which you could highlight too.  
But belongs to me, all things belong to him, of course.  
And so that would that kind of stuck out to me.  
And then the last thing, or do you begrudge my generosity and generosity would light up  
as this master who all things belong to him and he is good.  
That's what I did look this up.  
Generosity is simply the Greek word for good.  
And so it's basically that he's saying, are you thinking badly because I'm good?  
And then the friend would be kind of central there.  
So I think I would set up a contrast by looking at these specific words.  
Now, I don't think this makes it necessarily easier for us today to get over our need for justice and fairness.  
I think it's still a struggle, especially if you stay in this, if you think economically, if you think market wise, then you're always going to have that problem.  
But that's where I would kind of somehow circle back to verse 29 of the previous chapter where, you know, eternal, we're talking about eternal life here. We're not talking about what God provides here now, because certainly God provides more to some people than others.  
That's just how it goes.  
But when it comes to eternal life, when it comes to, there's no better than the whole thing and the whole thing is for anyone.

Jessica: That's all for today.  
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I'm your host and producer, Jessica Bordelow.  
Join us next week here at Lectionary Kickstart when Dr. David Schmitt and Dr. Peter Nafzger spark your thoughts for next Sunday.

David: You know, like the lone antelope that was weak and is left behind.  
Quick, get away.  
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